

Tom Williams Helps Fill News Industry Need For Media Law Training

By Thomas J. Williams | April 20, 2018

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Can a public body, say, the University of Texas System Board of Regents, meet across the border in Mexico?

How's a city council supposed to comply with rules for posting notice about an emergency meeting when, say, Hurricane Harvey inundates roads and hammers the electrical grid?

What's a walking quorum anyway?

Haynes Boone Partner [Tom Williams](#) tackled these sorts of issues on April 17 at the Freedom of Information Foundation's Open Government Seminar at the University of Texas at Arlington. Addressing an audience of Texas government employees, lawyers, journalists and students, Williams offered details on the most recent legislative amendments to the Texas Open Meetings Act, addressed changes lawmakers might consider next year and reviewed significant legal opinions by four of the last five state Attorneys General.

Williams would know the material, historical as well as current: he's been practicing media law as a litigator and teaching about the First Amendment and open government for more than 30 years.

As a board member for the nonprofit FOI Foundation, Williams has long been involved in giving journalists and students primers on open meetings, open records and the First Amendment. He also helps provide required training for state lawyers and public officials on the Texas Open Meetings Act and Texas Public Information Act.

He's worked with the foundation to restructure its training for journalists to help fill an industry need for affordable, accessible instruction on media law basics.

Williams led key parts of the April 17 event. After a session on open meetings, he jointly covered a range of current issues with Dan Malone, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and assistant professor of journalism and broadcast at Tarleton State University. For an audience of working journalists and staffers from UT Arlington's Shorthorn student newspaper, the pair gave legal and practical perspectives on access to courts and records, trespass, wiretapping, fact-checking, promises made to confidential sources, subpoenas, copyright and other areas relevant to news media.

Kelley Shannon, a former longtime journalist who's now the foundation's executive director, commended Williams' ability to convey the intricacies of Texas's open government laws and First Amendment rights.

"He's got a ton of experience and understands what journalists need in order to do their job," she said.

At Haynes Boone, Williams handles a broad spectrum of litigation: libel, invasion of privacy and other First Amendment issues; copyright and trademark infringement; professional responsibility and professional liability claims; oil and gas disputes; employment disputes; and commercial, corporate and business disputes. He has represented a number of media clients, including *D Magazine*, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* and North Texas television stations.

He also taught for a decade as an adjunct professor at Texas Christian University.

“Tom is one of the smartest, most respected media lawyers in the state,” Malone said. “He’s so current on the law and able to communicate clearly the nuances.”