The University of Illinois Faculty Senate has reached out to Texas State's Faculty Senate after an incoming member's employment was revoked due to hate speech on Twitter.

Steven Salaita applied for a teaching position at the University of Illinois for the fall 2014 semester and was hired as a professor of indigenous studies.

Salaita had to wait for the university's board of trustees to approve his application before officially being employed. The job offer was withdrawn Sept. 15, 2014 after the university saw anti-Semitic tweets on Salaita's Twitter account.

The UI faculty senate was not included in the decision to revoke Salaita's job offer, said Michel Conroy, Texas State Faculty Senate chair.

Faculty senators are traditionally included in decision-making processes in cases like Salaita's.

Texas State Faculty Senate members were approached last month to sign a petition stating they "support the shared governance of the (University of Illinois) Faculty Senate in requesting the chancellor to rescind his order to revoke Salaita's employment," according to a document read by Sue Weill, faculty senate secretary.

Salaita is half Palestinian and half Native American, according to his Twitter account. He teaches indigenous studies on both of his cultures. Many of Salaita's tweets documented his reactions to Israel's June 2014 bombing of Gaza.

"If you're demented, amoral, dimwitted, and have sociopathic tendencies, might I suggest applying for a job in the @IsraelMFA ?" Salaita tweeted Aug. 9.

Salaita tweeted anti-Semitic remarks July 29, saying Israel saw Palestinian toddlers as "fit to kill." He tweeted July 10 that "every little Jewish boy and girl can grown up to be the leader of a murderous colonial regime."

According to the document sent from the UI Faculty Senate, Salaita commonly referred to Israelis as modern-day Nazis who are "slaughtering Palestinians like the Jews." He asked if Americans who support Israel "also get a hard-on when they look at pictures of dead babies."

Weill said she could not share documents from the UI Faculty Senate with the University Star.

Senator votes were split.

Shirley Ogletree, psychology senator, said the senate should support the petition.

Barbara Covington, nursing senator, said the group needed to uphold "due diligence" and understand where the situation could lead if the petition were signed.

"How would we feel if this were happening here? We would want someone to stand up for our right to shared governance," Ogletree said.
The UI board of trustees posted a statement on its website Jan. 15 stating some might be misguided about the decision.

"Recent media accounts about a report issued by the Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure may have given the mistaken impression that the decision regarding Dr. Salaita might be reconsidered. It will not," according to the trustees' statement.

Augustine Agwuele, anthropology senator, believes the UI faculty senate should have been consulted regardless of the case against Salaita.

"What (Salaita) did doesn't negate the fact that the chancellor bypassed faculty's right to have input," Agwuele said. "They're not asking that he be employed. They just want to be able to make the decision themselves. I believe (Salaita) will still face consequences."

Covington said standing on principle is not enough.

"But that's not how the document reads," Covington said. "It doesn't say they want a different process. It says they just want the chancellor to revoke the decision he made. We don't have any assurance they won't just overlook the tweets."

Alex White, mathematics senator, said if the petition is supported, Texas State might be perceived as supporting the anti-Semitic hate speech Salaita posted.

"I think we should send them a statement saying we support shared governance but we don't support this case," Weill said.

A statement of support could be an option for the senate, said Michel Conroy, senate chair.

Conroy did not want to lead the conversation since she is not a voting member. However, she urged senators to consider the UI Faculty Senate's position.

"We have to look out for our own, for educators," Conroy said. "It takes a certain amount of trust. This is about two issues, really--freedom of speech and shared governance--and at the root, we think faculty have a right to both."

Salaita posted on his Twitter account Jan. 29 saying he filed a lawsuit against the University of Illinois and its donors for "1st and 14th amendment violation and tortious interference."

Salaita does not believe he will be able to get another tenured faculty job until UI puts the offer back on the table, according to various tweets posted last month.

Texas State's Faculty Senate chose to table the conversation and "see how things play out" at the University of Illinois before making a decision.