

CHAIR'S ADDRESS TO THE BOARD OF REGENTS—APRIL 2014

President Pattillo, Chairman McCarty, university regents, esteemed ladies and gentlemen. . . . good morning! To everyone here, thank you for one last opportunity to visit with you on behalf of the faculty at Stephen F. Austin State University. As the chair of the Faculty Senate over the last year, I have had the opportunity to serve as the liaison for approximately 600 faculty members of this fine institution. To say that this has been an adventure would be quite an understatement. I could have never imagined what this year would have entailed, and I am so thankful for the experience and for the chance to learn about and see our university from yet another perspective.

In my first address to you, I said that it takes a village to raise a child and a university to graduate a student. Since that time, I have had the good fortune of meeting so many people across the entire university who are active in realizing that goal. Without exception, all of them are hard at work—in every building, at every rank, in every conceivable way, every single day—on behalf of our students. Based on all that I have observed and learned this year, I have come to the conclusion that it takes a village to run a university! To quote Winston Churchill, “Never was so much owed by so many to so few.”

So many and so few seemed to be a theme for the Senate this year. If we consider the roughly 600 faculty members at SFA and the 28 senators going to bat for them each year, that means less than 5% of the faculty have been charged with acting, according to our constitution, as a “community of scholars engaged in the free discussion, research, and dissemination of ideas and knowledge” in pursuit of the “full freedom of discussion, participation, and examination of ideas by faculty,

students, and administrators.” To that end, I’d like to share with you how we served our fellow faculty members and university over the past year.

First, our peer comparison project subcommittee performed extensive research on this issue, which acted as the foundation of my remarks to you in October, and that work continues into the next year. The survey subcommittee worked diligently to create a thorough line of questioning of professors so that the Senate would be fully aware of the viewpoints and concerns of our faculty. Their individual and collective feedback shaped much of the direction and many of our goals for this year. Prior to every monthly meeting, the agenda was shared with all faculty along with an open invitation for all faculty to attend. After each gathering, a summary of the minutes was distributed to all faculty. These proceedings may sound trivial, but they are important steps in maintaining clear communication and transparency across the university. At every meeting this year, we have invited significant guests to promote an important dialogue across the university, city, and state. From the mayor and city manager, state representative and senator, from the local superintendent to a national higher education research expert, the Senate has hosted many a guest and thus served an important conduit of communication for the university. I want people on and off campus to look to the senators to be the ones to go to get something done—that this is the place where you go when you want to be heard—and identify these faculty as the movers and shakers for SFA. If we aren’t there yet, we’re moving in that direction. Last summer, I ordered two boxes for a total of 500 Kudos Kards, so faculty and staff could receive a copy of newspaper articles extolling their exceptional work along with an encouraging note to serve as a figurative pat on the back and for a job well done. Today, I am pleased

to say that we are out of cards! We have requested, and are in the process of securing, reserved parking for students, faculty, and staff to utilize during the third trimester of pregnancy as well as privacy rooms for mothers upon their return to work. In cooperation with Human Resources, we have drafted an informative pamphlet with pre and postpartum options for faculty and staff who want to be as dedicated to their jobs as they are to their families. During the spring semester, we created a new position within the Senate, a relocation assistance officer, and Dr. Leslie Cecil kindly volunteered to serve in that capacity. In cooperation with deans and department chairs, we sent a welcome letter to job candidates when an offer was made along with relocation packets, including information about the city from the Chamber of Commerce and *The Daily Sentinel* as well as overview of some of the perks of working at SFA. As we made contact and personal connections with future faculty, we encouraged them to “Teach outside the city” and “Teach among our skyscrapers.” The communications subcommittee planned and hosted a superb distance learning conference for online directors, a means of instruction delivery that is, and will become increasingly, critical to our students and for the future growth of the university. Along those lines, the Provost asked that the Senate investigate MOOCs, massively open online courses. Following a comprehensive and thorough research period, the subcommittee presented Dr. Berry with a final report, including their recommendations for future of MOOCs and what they mean for SFA.

MOOCs are but one example of the rapidly changing world of higher education. If we consider for a moment the unbelievable transformations that have taken place within academia in just the last ten years, it really is quite shocking. We’ve gone from essentially business as usual with the occasional presentation

about the perks of study abroad or community service and a random online class here and there to the high stakes world of competing for every potential student in every conceivable location at home and overseas, while expanding our curriculum and delivery methods faster than perhaps humanly, but still technologically possible. In essence, we are in the midst of modernizing one of the world's oldest and most entrenched organizations.

In the face of such challenges and obstacles, we have to be all things to all people. Or, more specifically, 12,000 things to 12,000 people! In my mind, we must continue to serve the average eighteen-year-old student seeking a traditional university experience balanced between biology and basketball, geography and Greek life. We can do that! We *must* do that. We must find ways to identify and assist non-traditional students who are full-time workers, full-time parents, and fully aware of the need to either start or finish their degree in order to better their own lives and their families at the very same time. We can do that! We *must* do that. We need to create a world of higher education in which *first gen* is code for nothing less than “look how far they have come and imagine how far they can go.” We can do that! We *must* do that.

At this very moment, we are doing all that we can to maintain our identity as an exceptional regional university while rebranding ourselves as a powerhouse in higher education. We are striving to market ourselves to a new breed of students—old and new, here and overseas— even as we seek options to anticipate and provide what future employers and a global society will demand in world that does not yet exist. As overwhelming as this might be, we must see these obstacles as opportunities and every challenge as a chance to achieve greatness.

In this moment full of possibilities, let me introduce you to the next chair of the Faculty Senate. Dr. Jannah Nerren is a native of East Texas and earned her bachelor's and master's degrees from SFA. She is an associate professor of elementary education and specializes in early childhood education. This year, she was selected for the Teaching Excellence Award by the College of Education and will be officially presented with that honor tomorrow. She is the proud mother of three children, two of whom are in college and one at Huntington High School. She is also a CASA volunteer in Angelina County. In her spare time, I think she might sleep from 2-4am. She has been instrumental within the Senate this year, and I cannot thank her enough for all that she has done. But I must tell you that Jannah will not be a good Senate chair. She will be extraordinary.

Speaking of extraordinary, I submit to you my final report, which you have in front of you, spotlighting the exceptional activities and accomplishments of our faculty. If I may highlight just a few . . . in the college of business, Dr. Charlotte Allen was recognized as one of the "Top 100 Marketing Professors on Twitter" by *Social Media Marketing* magazine. In the college of education, the speech-language pathology program recently earned re-accreditation for another eight years. And we wish the college every success as they continue to prepare for their NCATE accreditation visit later this month. In the college of fine arts, Jack Heifner was recently inducted into the Texas Playwriting Hall of Fame. The college of forestry and agriculture recently held their semi-annual plant sale, bringing in a new record for sales in one day—over \$50,000. I am so glad that my amazing ability to kill plants is helping someone. In the college of liberal and applied arts, Dr. Andrew Brininstool received a \$25,000 creative writing fellowship from the National

Endowment for the Arts, making him but one of 38 writers across the country to win this fellowship. Finally in the college of sciences and mathematics, Dr. Dan Bruton, authored the engineering physics program proposal, which has passed through all approvals prior to the upcoming THECB meeting on April 24, when it will be reviewed by the full board for final approval.

In conclusion, I cannot express my gratitude enough for this year. I am so thankful to have served in this capacity and to have had this experience against the backdrop of the 90th birthday of SFA. I feel very lucky to have seen the development and evolution of the marketing campaign from day one until now. I'm so appreciative to have gained a bird's eye view of SFA at such an important time in its history and as we prepare for the future. The experience has been beyond words. Every day has been an honor. Thank you.