

CHAIR'S ADDRESS TO THE BOARD OF REGENTS—OCTOBER 2013

President Pattillo, Chairman McCarty, university regents, esteemed ladies and gentlemen . . . good morning! To everyone here, thank you for yet another opportunity to visit with you on behalf of the SFA faculty. In my first address, I shared my perspective on higher education and provided some insight on the attractions and obstacles that faculty encounter at SFA and in Nacogdoches. Today, I would like to continue that conversation while offering some anecdotal and statistical information.

When I joined the university in 2007, some of the best and biggest names in the SFA business were senior members of the History department and served as pillars of my college and the university. Dr. John Dahmus brought an air of professionalism, expertise, and calm leadership for 43 years. To put this in perspective, Dr. Dahmus had tenure before I was born! His career defines the phrase *institutional knowledge*. Likewise, Dr. Allen Richman's passion for teaching and dedication to his students for forty-one years culminated in the establishment of the School of Honors. I was lucky enough to office next door to Dr. Richman for one year before his retirement and learned so much from him in a very brief time. Finally, Dr. Archie McDonald, whose dignified demeanor distinguished him as a true gentleman, scholar, and leader of the East Texas Historical Association, rounded out this impressive trio. To say that I was in awe as a first-year assistant would be an understatement. Nevertheless, I embraced the opportunity, however brief, to learn from these scholars and wondered at the number of SFA students these three faculty members influenced and inspired over their impressive careers, which collectively totaled 132 years.

I was hired as one of three historians in 2007, and from that cohort, I am the only one left. This led me to wonder if this level of retention was normal or abnormal. In the past decade, the history department has conducted some fifteen searches with varying degrees of success. A true national search is intense in its demands. A single ad may attract anywhere from 50-200 applicants, all of whom must be thoroughly vetted. Phone interviews are followed by on campus interviews, which includes teaching demonstrations, research presentations, campus and community tours before we ever get to the final meeting to discuss rankings. After an arduous and time-intensive process, we are faced with a dilemma. Do we offer the job to the best candidate, or do we offer the job to the person we think will stay?

We are not alone in posing these questions or in the number of searches performed in recent years. The amount of money spent on such searches is quite amazing. In travel expenses alone for prospective employees, SFA spent over \$33,000 in fiscal year 11, \$42,000 in fiscal year 12, and \$55,000 dollars in fiscal year 13—a total of over \$131,000. While these figures include faculty and staff searches, these expenditures do not include money spent on hotel accommodations, rental cars, or restaurant bills.

After such an investment of time and money, one would hope that the successful candidate would stay—forever. Such is not the case. Alarmingly, recent faculty retention reports were as low as 33%—so, what does this mean at the faculty level? Those searches will be repeated, eating into time that faculty should be using to prepare for class and working with students and funds that could be put to far better use.

As a member of the history department, I have participated in the hiring process numerous times and have arrived at some conclusions. But as Senate chair, I learned a great deal from the Faculty Perceptions Survey, which was distributed shortly after the semester began to inform, guide, and direct the efforts of the Senate for this year. We asked a host of questions—basic inquiries as to college affiliation, rank, course load, and levels of satisfaction regarding the academic trinity . . . teaching, research, and service.

Overall, respondents reported general levels of satisfaction with teaching assignments and workloads and meaningful engagement with students. Regarding research and scholarship, faculty expressed unease that they did not have adequate time to devote to this area. As research, scholarship, creative projects, and publications often determine tenure and promotion, this response is cause for concern. Regarding service, respondents on the main reported a neutral view or general level of satisfaction at the department, college, and university level and remarked on the wealth of opportunities to serve at all levels. For the most part, these responses came as no surprise. But answers to subsequent questions alarm me.

When asked about their satisfaction with their current salary, 60% of the respondents answered that they were dissatisfied. Additionally, over 58% indicated that they were also dissatisfied with summer compensation for courses. I was particularly struck at the raw data and candid comments. One particular response has stuck with me. When asked what they would do with a notable salary increase, a faculty member replied, “It’s simple. I’d stay.”

I realize that many a Senate chair has come to the Board of Regents and discussed faculty salaries. I am fully aware that such views have been presented in a variety of ways. My objective regarding this issue was to research the data and arrive at conclusions based on evidence, not emotions. This analysis excludes private universities and flagship institutions, this crunching of numbers was limited to SFA's true peer institutions—UT—Brownsville, University of Houston-Downtown, Tarleton State, Texas A&M—Commerce, Angelo State, Lamar, Sam Houston, and Midwestern, to name but a few.

In researching average SFA salaries based on discipline and rank, in which direct comparisons exist, SFA averages trailed in 44 out of 62 categories; hence, in available comparisons, SFA salaries trailed its peer institutions 70% of the time. This inequity exists across the university at every level—from the average SFA associate professor of agriculture making \$56,690 compared to the average peer of the same rank and discipline at \$69,181. The average full professor of biology at SFA makes \$74,318 whereas the average full professor at peer institutions makes \$84,048—roughly a \$10K difference. The average SFA full professor of health and physical education makes \$68,495 while the average full professor of the same discipline makes \$84,599, a difference of over \$16K. The average associate professor of marketing at SFA makes \$88,369 while a faculty member of the same rank and discipline makes \$96,266, a difference of nearly \$14,000. The average full professor of English at peer institutions who makes \$76,127 compared to the average full professor of English who makes . . . zero. Given the data and years incorporated into this study, SFA did not have a full professor of English. As the state of Texas requires six hours of English, this

statistic, and more importantly, absence of longevity, is particularly distressing. The average assistant professor of art at SFA makes \$47,970 while the average assistant professor of art at peer institutions makes \$50,232. While this difference is less than some of the others, I can say from experience that there is a marked difference—albeit psychological—in a salary that begins with a 4 versus a salary that begins with a 5.

These disparities are exacerbated by the realities of life as the average amount of student loan debt professors incur in earning a doctorate averages \$52,000. More and more of our faculty complete their degrees earlier in their lives, which means they have sacrificed a decade or more in some cases of income and potential savings to pursue a doctorate. Many of them come to SFA with a dream of starting a career and a family. They want the American dream as applied to academia—spouse and house, career and children. But many of our faculty cannot afford to buy a house until promotion affords them such a luxury and tenure provides the security to do so. More faculty—men and women—are beginning yet another phase of their lives—parenthood—even as they play the odds at the tenure-track game, student debt, mortgages, and day care tuition stresses incomes to the hilt, especially when average salaries simply do not add up. Currently, the cost for two children—an infant and a four-year-old—to attend day care exceeds the annual median rent payment in every state in the U.S. If we want to address salaries once and for all and recruiting and retention efforts at the faculty level, just as we are doing with and for our students, perhaps we should look no further than this statistic. We cannot effectively recruit and retain students without recruiting and retaining faculty.

Is SFA a nice place to work? Yes. Is Nac a nice place to live? Absolutely! But if people opt not to apply for jobs here based on salaries—which is a response I have been given when I tried to recruit someone to apply for a job here—if we have people who are offered jobs who do not accept and explain that they simply cannot afford to bring their families here—which happened this past hiring season—and we have people who don't stay here because they literally cannot afford to buy a home based on a single SFA salary—lest we forget the trailing spouse syndrome and the likelihood that a spouse or significant other may not find employment or are, at best, underemployed—we have a problem.

These are losses that affect SFA in multiple ways. We lose our investment in underwriting the expenses associated with a search. Students lose continuity and the opportunity to develop long-lived professional relationships with professors with whom they have made a special connection, and parents lose when their sons and daughters study under a rotating roster of itinerant teachers.

I am not naïve. I could not and would not pretend that we can hire everyone from Harvard—nor would we want to—nor will we retain 100% of new faculty in any given year. Not every faculty member will be a good fit for a small, rural community or will adjust to the realities of a teaching university. But what are our salaries telling the people who spend their days, nights, and many a weekend with students? How are recognizing, or failing to do so, the very individuals who have the most contact with our students, especially our freshman, on a daily basis?

Faculty malaise, departmental turnover, internal instability, and constant searches stress the university. When we should be focused on our students, we

are (yet again) reviewing applicants. Searches year after year and, heaven help us, multiple searches in a year take a serious toll on the university. The costs are high—figuratively and literally.

The number of searches conducted in recent years are of concern, but a related issue is rarely, if ever, considered. If some of the best and brightest come to SFA only to leave a few years later, then we may very well be losing future visionaries, creative problem solvers, and the next generation of leaders of departments, colleges, and the university as a whole.

So, what if we drew a line in the sand and put some real numbers on a very real problem and see what we came up with. What if the university made a collective decision that no assistant professor would be offered a job at less than \$55,000 per year? What if the people at this table agreed to crunch the numbers and see what it would take to pay every associate professor no less than \$65,000 a year? Who could we attract, and better yet, retain, if he or she knew that as a full professor they would make no less than \$75,000 per year? What an affirmation such a step would be for our faculty and positive investment in our present and future faculty! I can only imagine the positive ripple effect it would have at the department, college, and ultimately, university level. Most importantly, it would create a degree of stability for our faculty that I have no doubt would result in the retention of students year after year.

Now, I am not foolish enough to think that we will ever achieve 100% retention of students or faculty. But we should be doing all that we can to recruit and retain the very best faculty in order to recruit and retain the very best

students. So that in the event that a student or a faculty member leaves, we can say beyond a shadow of a doubt that it was not for a lack of effort on our part.

To highlight the efforts the Senate has undertaken in this regard, we are pursuing a number of small but important tasks. For the first time in many years, the Senate has an office, which provides a space for subcommittees to meet as well as a place for faculty across campus to come together on Fridays for coffee and donuts. There's nothing like a little sugar and starch to brighten someone's day . . . At recent Senate meetings, we have hosted State Representative Travis Clardy and Dr. Stacey Silverman of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. As higher education is increasingly political, we cannot overestimate the perspective of Nacogdoches from Austin, Austin from Nac, and the connections between. Next month Senator Robert Nichols will attend the meeting, and City Mayor Roger Van Horn and City Manager Jim Jeffers will round out the fall semester. We are working with the Campus Recreation to offer more Parents' Night Out dates this semester. In an effort to boost morale and to offer a pat on the back, faculty and staff who appear in publications—the *Daily Sentinel*, *The Pine Log* or the alumni magazine—receive a copy of the story with a “Kudos Kard” from the Senate. A small but meaningful gesture . . . Finally, a proposal has been made to provide reserved parking for SFA faculty *and* staff who are expectant mothers; the acquisition of privacy rooms to provide a hygienic space for lactating mothers to utilize upon their return to work, but a space that could also be used for a variety of purposes—from the refrigeration of medicine to a hygienic place to inject insulin shots. A small group is drafting an educational and communicative pamphlet to offer pre and postpartum options for Dr. Moms and

Dads. These are goals I have set to complete by the fall, and I have more ideas for the spring. My first six months as Senate chair is has been fast and furious; thus, time is of the essence before I return full-time to my duties as a historian.

Which brings me full circle to the amazing department I joined six years ago and am so proud to be a part of. I was so fortunate to meet, learn from, and work with truly excellent professors in my first years at SFA. May we keep the John Dahmus's, the Allen Richman's, and the Archie McDonald's of every department and college at the forefront of our minds as we make critical decisions about the faculty we hire today with the hope and intention that they will be the faculty of tomorrow.

For the faculty of today, I wish to highlight some of the amazing activities and achievements they have attained of late. [Faculty Activities and Accomplishments Report—October]

As always, I thank you for the opportunity to represent the SFA faculty and community with you on their behalf.