

Faculty Senate Chair's Report
Jason Reese, Ph.D., Faculty Senate Chair 2018-19
Address to Board of Regents
October 29, 2018

Greetings Madam Chair, Board of Regents, Dr. Pattillo, Dr. Bullard, Colleagues, and Guests:

Opening

Thank you for allowing me to speak with you today on behalf of faculty. Today I would like to talk about three things: 1) follow up about the alignment of SFA Envisioned and faculty promotion and tenure guidelines, 2) the Faculty Senate activities over the past few months, and 3) highlight the accomplishments of our faculty.

Alignment of SFA Envisioned and Faculty Promotion and Tenure Guidelines

During my report to you all in July, I highlighted Dr. Dan Bruton, from the College of Sciences & Mathematics, and his efforts in positive student engagement. Following my report, Regent Alders mentioned the need to recognize faculty in their student engagement efforts. He then requested we contemplate how to integrate this engagement and other strategic plan goals into the promotion & tenure process so that we incentivize faculty. To accommodate his request, I asked the Strategic Planning committee of the Faculty Senate to evaluate promotion and tenure across multiple colleges.

The committee selected three different diverse academic units, and examined recently revised and adopted promotion and tenure guidelines from the College of Business, the Department of Elementary Education, and the College of Forestry and Agriculture. What they found was strong evidence that promotion and tenure guidelines at SFA are closely aligned across academic disciplines with all facets of SFA Envisioned, but particularly with providing transformative learning experiences for students. Faculty are both incentivized and rewarded for undertaking a host of activities that contribute directly to the recruitment and retention of SFA students. Examples of listed activities include mentoring undergraduate and graduate students in research, advising students academically, guiding student organizations, supervising internships, creating co-curricular learning experiences, tutoring students outside the classroom, and leading immersive field experiences for students, among many others. In fact, of the academic units that we examined, all of them directly stated that student recruitment and retention were activities that faculty are expected to engage in, and would be considered during promotion and tenure decisions. Our promotion and tenure guidelines are consistently dedicated to excelling in the types of interactions with students that lead to transformative learning experiences, and thus build a culture that values recruitment and retention of students by faculty.

Faculty Senate Activities

The Faculty Senate has been very active so far this academic year. I would like to highlight some of the activities and ongoing projects we are working on.

The Faculty Senate held our retreat on August 24th. The purpose of this retreat was to “set the tone for the year and gain a better understanding of the purpose of Faculty Senate at SFA.” We reviewed our Constitution and agreed that “formulating and recommending academic policy,” “considering all other matters of general welfare to the University,” and opening avenues of communication between faculty administration and regents is our call. In addition, we discussed our four goals for the academic year, and shared what these goals meant to us as a body. I presented these goals to you all in July. During our lunch, Dr. Bullard spoke to the Faculty Senators about leadership and organizational change. Finally, the Senators were able to breakout into their internal committees to discuss their tasks for the year.

Since our retreat in August, we’ve had two regularly scheduled meetings and we heard reports from internal and external committees. Briefly, here are some of those reports.

The Faculty Senate’s Academic Affairs committee has been in conversations with the Center for Teaching and Learning, trying to help the efforts of the Center to be “owned” by faculty. We would like to actively help them achieve their goals, and work to help with changes occurring in the Center.

The Ethics committee is developing two parallel initiatives: 1) a faculty mentorship program, and 2) a discussion of civility in academia. Their conversation with various campus groups are very fruitful and we are excited for the direction of their committee.

The Faculty Governance and Involvement committee has been working with Erma Brecht and her office discussing some of SFA’s Strategic Enrollment goals. One of particular interest is the discussion of what it means for SFA to be a Hispanic Serving Institution and how faculty can be involved in this goal.

The Professional Welfare committee was also very active the past two months. On October 3rd, the Faculty Senate, along with the Student Government Association, jointly hosted a Family Forum. The purpose of this forum was to discuss family welfare on SFA’s campus. Topics of discussion were focused on “Children in the Workplace,” resources for families with children, and resources for pregnant and nursing mothers. I would like to thank the Division of Finance and Administration, specifically Loretta Doty and Dr. Danny Gallant for being involved in this forum. This forum fell well in line with SFA’s vision statement. The 6th paragraph of the vision statement says, “Our campus will be open, collaborative, and engaged.” Later in the paragraph it says “People will feel valued as employees of the university and work hard to sustain the sense of community that distinguishes us.” We often hear people say, “the SFA Family”. The welfare of our campus family includes the welfare of our own personal families. We held this forum to discuss this sense of community and where families fit on this campus. Following this forum, I formed an ad hoc committee of Senators with the task of summarizing the dialogue in the forum, as well as the results of the follow up survey, and carry this conversation forward on behalf of the faculty at SFA. We hope to continue this discussion forward with the various stakeholder groups on this campus.

The Professional Welfare committee is also actively involved in moving forward our proposal for a Career Ladder for Non-Tenure Track faculty. I am pleased to inform you that we have had positive feedback on the idea and are actively working of finding the right model for SFA. While our original proposal may not be the ultimate model, we are encouraged that a subcommittee has been formed to find the best model. This subcommittee includes a representative from Deans, Associate Deans, Chair's Forum, and Faculty Senate.

Faculty Senate was also involved in the visit of Dr. Paredes, Commissioner of Higher Education in Texas, to SFA's campus. Dr. Paredes met with a group of 12 faculty with the purpose of informing and having an open conversation leading into the legislative session. The primary topics of conversation included the goals of the 60x30TX and transfers. Dr. Paredes heard that one of our strategic enrollment goals is to become a Hispanic Serving Institution and cautioned the faculty to make sure we truly serve this population and not just seek to achieve an enrollment number. This is one of the reasons the Faculty Senate is working with enrollment management to see what this should look like at SFA. In addition, Dr. Paredes also said one of the biggest problems facing Texas Higher Education is a problem with "Transfers." Meaning, too many students are losing credits when transferring between institutions of public higher education in Texas. Finally, a discussion about student debt in Texas occurred. Dr. Paredes mentioned this was one of the most difficult goals to reach within 60x30TX. He encouraged that we think outside of new state appropriations, and more about repurposing our funding to focus on student success. He said that the by increasing student success, we will increase retention, and in turn funding.

Faculty Accomplishments

I would like to highlight some of the accomplishments of our Faculty. In your packets you will find a list of Outstanding Faculty Accomplishments since your last meeting in July. Please look through these and see how productive our faculty in each college have been just in the past three months.

In addition, I would like to continue to highlight a faculty member from each college that represents the positive student engagement that happens all over our campus, every day. Each of these faculty have shown their passion for the recruitment and retention of our students. Today, I would like to introduce you to two faculty members, Dr. Charles Gavin from the College of Fine Arts, and Dr. Sam Copeland from the College of Liberal & Applied Arts.

Dr. Charles Gavin is a Professor of Music in the College of Fine Arts. He joined the faculty of the School of Music in 1985. He has a Bachelor's degree from the University of Southern Mississippi and the graduate degrees in Horn Performance and Pedagogy for the University of Iowa. His teaching has been recognized with the College of Fine Arts Teaching Excellence award and the Dean's Faculty Award; in 2016, he was named the first Dean's Circle Endowed Professor.

Dr. Gavin believes that student engagement and success is very much imbedded in the culture of the School of Music. He believes this starts with the early relationships he and his colleagues establish with each of their students. By engaging students before they even enroll, they are very successful in recruiting.

Through the recruiting and audition process, Dr. Gavin and his colleagues know most of the students on a personal level before their first semester. This tends to mature into a true mentorship between applied professors, ensemble conductors, classroom teachers and students. This results in several layers of engagement and concern for student success. For instance, if a student is struggling in a classroom subject, the professor of that class will always inform the student's applied instructor (and advisor) and a course of action will be put in place.

Dr. Gavin and his colleagues have designed various ways to engage students, which has led to high levels of retention. For example, they have assigned students to practice groups and assigned upper level students to guide freshman through theory classes and within their studios.

Dr. Gavin and his colleagues should be commended for their personal attention and concern for the individual's success, as it is a vital component of their success as a School.

Dr. Sam Copeland is Professor and Director of the Bachelors of Social Work (BSW) program. The BSW program has three locations, Stephen F. Austin State University campus, Tyler Junior College (TJC), and Lone Star College (LSC) in the Woodlands.

To Dr. Copeland, positive engagement of students means treating students in the same manner that you want educators at other universities to treat your children. He makes an effort to know the names of the students in the BSW program, he says hello when he sees them and checks on how their day is going. He really wants students to know that he cares about their well-being and their educational success.

As a professional School of Social Work, students learn leadership development, accept appointment to faculty committees, join student organizations, participate at social work conferences, attend student day at the legislature, and achieve 600 hours of internship, all of which translates in to marketable job skills.

Dr. Copeland and his colleagues have developed relationships with advisors and educators at high schools and have articulation agreements with both Tyler Junior College and Lone Star College. Dr. Copeland travels to these off-site programs every semester with the Introduction to Social Work classes at the community colleges each semester to discuss transitioning to the SFA four year BSW program. Students leave our BSW prepared to begin careers as professional helpers.

It is without a doubt that faculty like Drs. Gavin and Copeland represent the student centered activities occurring on this campus every day. Faculty like Drs. Gavin and Copeland should be commended for their hard work in recruiting and retaining our students.

Conclusion

It is my hope that you see how productive our faculty are, how engaged we are with our students, and how much we care about the success of this university.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.