

Stephen F. Austin State University
REPORT TO THE BOARD OF REGENTS 4/30/01
Faculty Senate
KANDY STAHL, CHAIR

Today's report represents my final address to the Board of Regents. The past year has represented a time of great growth and learning for me. I have learned much about the operations of the university, have met people I would never have met otherwise, and have learned much about myself and my abilities. I am proud of the work that has been done and would like to recap the year.

The Faculty Senate has accomplished a tremendous amount of important work this year. We are particularly pleased that the Administrative Evaluation and Cheating & Plagiarism policies have now been presented to the Board for adoption. These two policies represent great strides for both faculty and students at SFA. The Senate's work on the Cheating and Plagiarism issue, however, is not complete. At the March meeting, a resolution was passed to collaborate with administration and students on the investigation of instituting an honor code on campus. Based on research done by the Senate, indications are that on campuses that have such a code in place, the incidence of cheating drops by approximately 23%. Having such a code in place, and a system that is governed by the students can go a long way in teaching the young people with whom we have the privilege of coming into contact some valuable principles as they move into adulthood. Other resolutions which you may be asked to review in the near future include putting the university budget online as many other institutions have done, procedures for arrests made on campus, and making the admission requirements for graduate school more specific. Finally, a revised Intellectual Property Rights policy for distance education is being voted on at our May meeting.

Coming into this year, I had two goals. First, obviously, was to work with the Senate to make positive and substantive changes to policies that affect both students and faculty. I believe this was accomplished. Second, and most important to me, was to improve the level of communication between the faculty, administration, and Board of Regents. A small but significant step in this direction was made when Mr. Wilhite attended the March meeting of the Senate. The discussion that we had with him in executive session was very productive, and I believe that the Senators were afforded the opportunity to view Board members in a different light. I also believe that he left that meeting with a new perspective on faculty concerns and perhaps the gravity of their concerns. I would like to thank Mr. Wilhite personally for taking the time to meet with us.

It is my hope that meetings between Board members and the faculty or Faculty Senate will continue. Though the Chair of Faculty Senate addresses the Board four times each year, this is too infrequent and does not begin to convey the sentiments of faculty regarding policies, procedures, or circumstances that exist. This report comes only from one voice. The faculty at SFA have a deep and genuine concern for the future of the institution. This concern generally does not reach the level of the Board in a way that is truly productive. If each of you could arrange to meet with the Senate during the year, I believe you would come away with a different view of the issues and the knowledge that the faculty wishes to collaborate with the administration and the Board. My five minutes per quarter cannot begin to accomplish this.

Over the past year, I have had the opportunity to understand with much greater clarity the feelings and beliefs of faculty members. I don't know if that opportunity simply made me more aware, or whether faculty morale has worsened. Many faculty members do not believe that the administration or the Board of Regents cares about them or respects them for the work that they do. At the present time, recruitment and retention of faculty have reached a critical level. Every department that is working to recruit new faculty members is experiencing essentially the same problem. In my department alone, we have lost two incredibly intelligent, energetic, and gifted young faculty, and almost lost a third this semester. Both have or are leaving for positions that pay significantly more money. In our efforts to interview and hire replacements, we could not even

get applicants who made the final list to come for an interview. Our salaries are far from competitive, and the resources available to conduct and present research are close to nonexistent (this due to the fact that the department's travel budget must be used to bring in applicants for interviews, as well as the budget being so low to begin with). This is further complicated by the fact that Nacogdoches often does not offer much in the way of employment opportunities for spouses. What I perceive is a snowball effect occurring. Not only can we not hire and retain faculty members, but the burden on the remaining faculty members is increasing. We are being forced to teach heavier loads and are beginning to burn out. Departments are forced to hire qualified adjunct faculty to lessen this burden as much as possible, but students deserve to have a greater percentage of their courses taught by full-time, tenure-track faculty members. SFA prides itself on offering small classes, or, alternatively, having a low student:faculty ratio. I, personally, don't know what that is like. In the past 4 years, I have not had a class with an enrollment below 80. At the present time, my course enrollments are 116, 81, and 82. This is not small. In such a situation, faculty are forced to make a choice. Do we give exams that are strictly multiple choice because of the massive amount of work produced by giving essay exams in such large classes? The other option is to give essay exams and spend an extraordinary amount of time grading them, which then results in less time to prepare and update classes as well as to conduct research. We are in a vicious cycle.

In the handouts I have provided, you will find two things. First is a report from the Coordinating Board on salaries at state institutions in Texas for the past two years. You will see from this that SFA is near the bottom of the list. I realize that efforts have begun to improve this situation and that it is a multifaceted problem to resolve. However, this is something that must be addressed in the near future or SFA and its students will suffer. Second, you will find the results of a survey conducted by the Strategic Planning Committee of Faculty Senate. This survey was sent to all tenured and tenure-track faculty on campus and received a return rate of 43.39%. The return rate in itself is significant since faculty members often do not respond to such surveys. I believe that the lead question as to whether SFA should join a system is quite telling. 49.66% of respondents said yes or probably yes to this question. Essentially 50% of faculty believe that SFA would be better served by being in a system. This is a strong indicator of morale in my opinion.

It is my hope that each of you will examine these materials and that you will collectively begin taking the steps necessary to improve the situation. I know that you care about SFA and its future. I want to thank you for a truly incredible year and the opportunity to work with you on a variety of issues that affect the day to day life of this university. It has been a remarkable experience for me.