

July 9, 2007

**Presentation to the Academic and Student Affairs Committee
of the SFA Board of Regents
Delivered by Marc Guidry,
Associate Professor of English and Faculty Senate Chair**

On behalf of SFA's faculty, I would like to thank Mr. Richard Boyer and the members of the Academic and Student Affairs Committee for allowing me a place at the table today. I would also like to thank the BOR chair, Ms. Valerie Ertz, and all the BOR members for the contribution of their time, talents, and energy to SFA and to student education. Today, I would like to discuss SFA faculty accomplishments, the role of the faculty in student retention, and, finally, the pressing need for higher faculty salaries.

But first, I would like to commend the BOR and the administration on your recent accomplishments. I note that in securing \$13 million to build a new campus nursing facility, SFA was able to procure the only tuition revenue bond granted by the 80th session of the legislature for all public universities across the state. This was quite a coup for Dr. Pattillo and the BOR. I also note that several members of this BOR, anticipating the regional need for more nurses, have been part of an effort to grow SFA's nursing program. I commend you on your foresight, as well as your commitment to the academic mission of the University. The TRB for the nursing building was awarded on top of a \$25 million appropriation to fund the SFA East Texas Early Childhood Research and Development Center, which will house the Department of Elementary Education as well as a new NISD/SFA Charter School and Early Childhood Lab. It has been an extraordinary legislative session for SFA thanks in no small part to your hard work. You have also helped make possible a new student center, brought to fruition two new dorms, doubled the scholarship for Honors students from \$2,000 to \$4,000 a year, and approved a midyear adjustment for SFA faculty that increased last year's merit pool by 2.5%. Moreover, I understand that you have approved a 3% salary pool for the upcoming year, doubled faculty development funds, and increased operation and maintenance funds for faculty areas. I want to share with you the fact that before I became an English professor, I was an admissions counselor for my undergraduate alma mater, Loyola University New Orleans, and I frequently took prospective students on walking tours of the campus. I know from firsthand experience how crucial student facilities such as a state of the art university center and dorms are to college recruitment. I am confident that your vision for SFA will not only result in higher enrollment, but will also enhance our opportunity to attract more of the region's best and brightest young minds.

Speaking of the best and brightest, I would like now to present you with a few snapshots of SFA faculty achievements over the past year. What follows are by no means all of the faculty's accomplishments during this period, but a cross-section that will give you an idea of how much the faculty does both inside and outside of the classroom to maintain and develop quality educational programs, hone their research skills, and promote SFA's stature in the professional world:

- Last year, Chemistry faculty published 2 books and 3 papers and obtained nearly \$200,000 in grants.
- Dr. Michael Tkacik, director of the International Studies Program, coauthored a book on democracy and arms control in Central Asia and has two articles forthcoming on nuclear proliferation and human rights.
- Music gained approval for a new opera track under the Master of Music in Performance degree program that includes an internship program for graduate voice majors with Opera East Texas.
- Computer Science developed requirements for a new degree program--a Bachelor of Arts Degree with a major in Information Technology.
- Charles Jones, Regents Professor of Art whom many of you met last year when he gave a presentation to the BOR on a book project featuring prints of Vietnam, is being honored with exhibitions this summer in Paris, France and Russia.
- The Latin American Studies program received a \$100,000 grant from the US Dept. of Education to enhance and build the LAS program at SFA.
- In Kinesiology, Dr. Mel Finkenberg completed a term as President of the National Association of Kinesiology and Physical Education in Higher Education (NAKPEHE), and the Department of Kinesiology and Health Sciences has been selected as the host of the 2008 Regional American College Dance Festival.
- In Agriculture, Dr. Erin Brown just returned from India, where she visited several agricultural production sites; Dr. David Creech returned from a consultation visit in China, where he worked with Chinese scientists developing their blueberry industry; and Dr. Leon Young conducted a workshop in Tanzania designed to help local farmers increase their crop yields.
- Human Sciences has created a new major, Interior Merchandising, and Interior Design professor Sally Ann Swearingen (Faculty Senate Chair-Elect) has completed a trip to Thailand with several of her students, where they have been invited by Mahidol University to partner in future exchanges.
- In History, Dr. Steve Taaffe won the Army Historical Foundation's 2006 Distinguished Writing Award for U.S. Army History, 1775-1898, for his book *Commanding the Army of the Potomac* (U. of Kansas Press, 2005).
- The Creative Writing Program in the Department of English held a reading series last year that brought several cutting-edge fiction writers to campus, including acclaimed novelist and short fiction writer Melanie Rae Thon.
- The Philosophy program expanded to offer a major in philosophy and partnered with the English program to create a minor in classical literary studies.

These were specific, in many cases individual, faculty accomplishments from last year. I would also like to point out how integral the work of the faculty as a whole is to student satisfaction at SFA. The Spring 2006 Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey, completed by 905 students at SFA, lists 18 "strengths" of the University. No less than 11 out of 18 of these strengths are based directly on close faculty involvement with students. Among the University's strengths, *according to students*, are academic advising in students' majors, the knowledge faculty possess in their respective fields, the quality of classroom instruction, the critical thinking skills developed by coursework, the level of academic challenges in the classroom, the variety of courses at SFA, and the intellectual growth

students experience here. According to the students themselves, SFA faculty members are a major resource for student satisfaction and retention--a major reason why they are attracted to, persist at, and matriculate from SFA.

The overlapping spheres of student and faculty interests are acknowledged in the University's "Core Values" statement in the *2007-08 General Bulletin* (p. 24). The first 2 values listed are "the individual student" and "teaching and learning." In short, we cannot serve the individual student learner without ensuring that we have a highly qualified, motivated, and stable faculty. To assume that we can serve students without attending to faculty needs is a false dilemma. To attract and retain good students, we need to be able to attract and retain qualified faculty.

This brings me to the urgent problem of low faculty salaries. According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, SFA ranked 34th out of 35 public universities in the state in average faculty salary for all ranks in 2006, a drop of 4 places since 2005, even though we ranked 13th in overall student headcount with 11,633 students. In April, 2006, the BOR put out a report entitled, "Faculty Compensation Study Summary," which was designed to address the issue of SFA's low salaries. The report cited 2 main reasons for SFA's low salaries: enrollment (i.e. class size) and program mix. Because SFA has a preponderance of majors in lower funded programs, such as Liberal Arts and Teacher education, and lacks certain higher funded programs, such as Engineering and Pharmacy, we were only 29th in appropriated funds per full-time-equivalent (FTE) faculty at the time the BOR made its report. We have since dropped to 31st in appropriations per FTE faculty. We were 19th out of 35 in student faculty ratio at the time of the report, with a ratio of 18 students for every faculty member. Our student-faculty ratio remains at 18:1 today. In general, it is true that SFA's relatively low class size and program mix have contributed to low faculty salaries.

An example of program mix resulting in a higher average faculty salary for all ranks is UT Tyler, which was 20th in average salary last year (\$63,962). Their student-faculty ratio is slightly lower than ours at 17:1, but they have a College of Engineering and, as a result, higher appropriations per FTE faculty (at \$60,116 for FY2006, as opposed to \$51,919 for SFA—a difference of \$8,000). (The numbers for appropriations per FTE faculty are all taken from the Coordinating Board's Website.)

An example of enrollment resulting in a higher average salary is Sam Houston State, which was 24th in average salary last year (\$62,651). Their appropriations per FTE faculty for 2006 were about \$3,000 lower than ours (at \$49,119). They do not have Engineering or Pharmacy and appear to have a similar program mix to SFA. But their student-faculty ratio was 21:1, and their average class size for all levels was 31, as compared to 26 for SFA (according to our online factbook and their online factbook).

However, SFA's enrollment and program mix are not sufficient to explain its place at next to last in average faculty salaries for Texas public universities. I would like to direct attention to another independent public university in Texas, Midwestern State. Their appropriations per FTE faculty for 2006 were only \$48,195—almost \$4,000 below SFA.

Their student-faculty ratio was almost identical to ours at 19:1, and their average class size for all levels actually dropped from 31 in 1994 to 20 in 2004 (the most recent year for which their factbook publishes a figure). Thus, their classes have tended to be smaller than ours. Their tuition and fees were also about \$500 less than ours, at \$4,740 for 2006 (according to the Coordinating Board Website). (SFA's tuition and fees last year were \$5,232.) Yet, MSU was 17th out of 35 for average faculty salaries for all ranks in 2006 at \$65,459—a difference of over \$8,500 more than SFA. MSU does have a manufacturing engineering technology major through its College of Science and Math, but it does not have a College of Engineering. It may have a higher percentage of health science majors than SFA since it has a College of Health Sciences. As health sciences are one of the highest funded areas in the Coordinating Board's funding formula, this may help to explain MSU's higher salaries. But even though SFA does not have a College of Health Sciences, we had 753 Nursing majors in 2006, making Nursing our second most popular major behind only Interdisciplinary Studies. And the MSU "Quick Facts" lists the humanities and social sciences among its largest academic programs, just as they are at SFA. Furthermore, we have more graduate programs than MSU, which are funded at a higher level than undergraduate programs. If MSU can charge lower tuition, receive a lower level of appropriations per FTE faculty, hold smaller classes than SFA, and maintain fewer graduate programs than SFA while giving significantly higher salaries to faculty, then there must be more to determining faculty salaries than enrollment and program mix.

The BOR's report on faculty salary compensation mentions that the University's Faculty Compensation Plan (approved February, 2005) stipulates that faculty salaries should fall within a range of 50%-150% of the national average salary for each respective discipline and rank as determined by College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPAHR) data. It also states that the administration should consider adjusting the range to 75%-150%. This would be moving in the right direction, yet the BOR's report offers no systematic plan for doing so. It is now time to do so. I urge the BOR to pursue a step-by-step plan to raise faculty salaries at SFA, providing annual benchmarks based on moving each discipline that falls below 100% of the national average closer to 100%. There is an opportunity to undertake such an initiative through the Strategic Planning Committee that Dr. Pattillo has put together, on which the BOR chair, Ms. Valerie Ertz, has been included as a member.

I realize that Dr. Pattillo has moved up the funding of the merit pool to the beginning of the budget process instead of leaving it at the end, where it had been mired, for which he deserves credit. But we are still taking a short-term, provisional, pay-as-we-go approach to budgeting faculty salaries. We need a long-term faculty salary equity plan that will address salaries by discipline and by rank within each discipline, ensuring that each discipline will be brought up incrementally. There are reasons for addressing faculty salaries by discipline and rank. CUPAHR data reveal that while we are below the average salary for Texas public universities in nearly every discipline, we are perilously below the average in certain disciplines, such as the sciences, negatively impacting faculty recruitment in those disciplines. There is also the problem of salary compression whereby in some departments assistant professors make almost as much as associate professors

due to the need to bump up entry-level salaries to attract new hires. What kind of message do stagnant salaries send to faculty members who have done the hard work to achieve tenure and who wish to remain at SFA? That dedication doesn't pay off? And should the ultimate goal for each discipline and rank really only be 75% of the national average? Is that enough to keep us competitive? Can we raise it higher without increasing class size or tuition to unsustainable levels? Finally, we need to balance faculty salary needs with the salary needs of the staff, who on the whole are also seriously underpaid.

On behalf of the faculty, I want to express my deep appreciation to the BOR for approving the 2.5% midyear adjustment to the salary pool last year, as well as the 3% salary pool for the upcoming year. But more needs to be done. The BOR foresaw that building an above-average student center would revitalize SFA's campus. The same vision and level of commitment now need to be focused on the salary problem.