Dean Brian Murphy introduced the meeting with a discussion of the university’s focus on improving enrollment numbers. The Board of Regents has made this topic the institution’s priority and all academic units are encouraged to explore innovative strategies to promote both enrollment and retention. The Office of Academic Affairs has targeted three initiatives for immediate action: dual credit, transfer students, and online programs. The College of Liberal and Applied Arts has already taken steps in each of these areas. While success is visible in the enrollment of first-time, full-time students, the college’s retention rate is a matter of concern. From Fall 2016 to Fall 2017, the college experienced an overall decline of 77 students despite the gain in freshmen numbers.

According to Dean Murphy, transfer arrangements offer prime opportunities for enrollment growth. The university is currently in discussions with five community college systems that account for over 200,000 students. Three options exist in building matriculation pipelines from community colleges: direct transfer to SFA, off-campus sites near population centers, and online completer programs. The college, like the university, will pursue all three of these avenues.

As noted earlier in the meeting, retention is the current dilemma confronting the college. In Spring 2017, a strategic planning committee developed a roadmap on how to address attrition. Several ad hoc committees have been working to develop implementation strategies for the proposals recommended in the roadmap. Dean Murphy circulated the reports of the committees on learning communities and undergraduate certificates. Dr. Mark Barringer discussed the progress of his committee on a community service project. It is important to emphasize that research has demonstrated the effectiveness of each of these approaches in enhancing retention.

Dean Murphy informed the chairs that the college will be re-acquiring advising responsibilities for students with undeclared majors but who are leaning toward one of our programs. Our college was the only one at SFA that did not have access to such students. This step will hopefully be another piece of the effort to improve retention since the college’s enrollment numbers always included these students despite not having access to them.

Dean Murphy requested the chairs to review the revised College Day format and to forward comments directly to him. He will call upon a couple of faculty to develop the program in detail for presentation at the next meeting of the chairs.

Dean Murphy presented a problem that has emerged due to a recent change in promotion standards. Under policy, faculty members can apply for early promotion with the permission of the dean and provost if they can demonstrate “exceptional” circumstances. While this requirement is not new, the revised policy lengthened the timeline between promotion from associate to full professor. This change unexpectedly delays many faculty in achieving promotion. To provide clarity, Dean Murphy proposed defining the term “exceptional” so that the dean is not compelled to make arbitrary decisions on who is eligible for early promotion. Finally, Dean Murphy requested each chair to confer with their faculty on five topics (online programs, niche degrees, learning communities, certificates, and service learning) and forward an email outlining departmental sentiment by November 31st.

The meeting concluded with a series of announcements and adjourned at 4:20 pm.