



**STEPHEN F. AUSTIN
STATE UNIVERSITY**
NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS



**THE TEXAS A&M
UNIVERSITY SYSTEM**

The Texas A&M University System Written Responses to Campus Group Questions of Stephen F. Austin University

On behalf of The Texas A&M University System, the Board of Regents, and Chancellor John Sharp, we appreciate the opportunity to discuss the possibility of Stephen F. Austin State University becoming a member of The Texas A&M University System. To assist you in preparation of your final report, we are providing the following written answers to your questions. Thank you for your interest in the A&M System.

Questions Submitted by the Deans Council

Acknowledging that there are unique concerns relative to specific units and a diverse set of questions to consider, our intention is to create a framework of inquiry regarding value added through system affiliation.

Legislative Support:

- 1. How do you utilize your position within the system to advocate for the specific needs of each of your system campuses, especially during legislative session? Please provide examples.**

Each A&M System member has a Government Relations (GR) representative that works on behalf of the institution and as part of the A&M System Government Relations team at the state level. The GR team develops broad legislative goals and policy initiatives for the system based on guidance from the Chancellor and the Board, and the GR team's role is to provide information to legislators and policymakers, while not advocating for or against specific legislation. Two important initiatives that developed as a result of the leadership and discussions of our board of regents are the Comprehensive Regional University initiative from the 87th legislature and the affordability initiative that we are working on for this session. The A&M System has been the catalyst for developing these two initiatives and getting other systems of higher education on board. Another policy issue where the A&M System took the lead was getting an increase for the Small Institution Supplement, within the General Academic Formulas during the 86th Legislature. With 11 campuses that are part of the group of comprehensive regional

institutions, our board, chancellor and GR team have worked hard and continue to work to garner additional resources for our regional institutions.

The GR team, including the institutional representatives, develops a coordinated plan to work on both broad system-wide policy initiatives and individual institutional initiatives. The GR team provides guidance on cross-cutting issues such as formula funding or other appropriations policy decisions impacting higher education, higher education policy issues, or general business policy issues impacting higher education. The GR team has experts in each of these areas that coordinate these cross-cutting issues on behalf of the entire system and in coordination with other systems of higher education. These subject matter experts work closely with all system members on these issues, including legislative tracking and reporting. For example, we work very closely with the institutions in training, preparation and review of each institution's Legislative Appropriations Request to ensure quality documents are submitted. We also have a former attorney on the GR team that coordinates with our Office of General Counsel on any potential legislation, whether broad or institution specific.

The GR representative is the institution's boots on the ground in Austin both during the session and the interim, providing regular feedback to the institution president and leadership. The GR team member for each institution works directly with the President and other leadership within the institution on institution specific legislative priorities for the institution. This would include exceptional item funding initiatives, potential Capital Construction Assistance Project Requests (formerly TRBs), institution specific legislation, or any other potential legislative issues. The GR representative works closely with the institution on developing the details of any proposals, testimony, handouts, legislative and staff visits, etc. The GR representative coordinates getting the President to Austin to make key legislative visits, works with key staff from the institution's legislative delegation on the institutional initiatives, and coordinates efforts with the GR team.

Resource Allocation:

2. How does the system determine resource allocation to member institutions?

Resources are appropriated by the State Legislature and collected by the institution (e.g., tuition and fees). Subsequent resource allocations are determined by SFA administration.

To what extent does the system influence allocation of resources within each university?

SFA Administrative decision.

3. What percentage of each system university's total budget is allocated to its academic affairs division?

SFA Administrative decision.

4. Provide examples of how you have invested in students, staff, and faculty.

Since Chancellor Sharp's arrival in 2011, the A&M System has led the way on many past and current initiatives that have successfully impacted our students, staff, and faculty including:

- **Comprehensive Regional University - Student Success Initiative** - The A&M System recently led the way in pursuit of legislative funding to assist the regional universities throughout the State of Texas, which includes SFA. The student success funding received will assist in enhancing and expanding the services provided to our "at-risk" students with the ultimate goal of improving enrollment, persistence and graduation rates, and subsequent employment. In addition, this initiative will help meet the state's workforce needs, and enhance the institution's regional economy.
- **Regents' Grant Initiative** - This 10-year, \$30 million commitment (effective FY 2019) helps A&M System students facing significant hardships to stay in school and graduate on time without incurring additional debt. The Regents' Grants provides resident undergraduates with an additional source of one-time grant funding that can help them overcome unforeseen financial hardships.
- **Regents' Scholarship Initiative** - This is a new 10-year, \$100 million commitment, effective with FY 2021. The goal of this scholarship program is to assist A&M System universities in attracting students to the university who are from low-income, first generation, and/or underrepresented populations.
- **Chancellor's Regional Research Initiative** – To enhance and expand the regional university's research opportunities, the Chancellor's Regional Research Initiative was created to provide \$10 million over 3 years to provide one-time funds to assist our regional universities in recruiting star researchers and other outstanding faculty who have a proven track record of success in developing and implementing large, multi-investigator, federally funded programs.
- **Doctoral Initiative** – This program encourages the professional and personal development of A&M System employees, assisting employees in furthering their knowledge, skills, and job effectiveness. For eligible employees (faculty and staff), this program will cover the cost of all tuition and mandatory fees for courses required for completion of the doctoral degree at an A&M System university.
- **RELLIS Initiative** – This initiative, already familiar to SFA, represents a new and unique opportunity to develop a cost effective model for higher education emphasizing collaboration among a broad base of partner institutions. The vision for the RELLIS Initiative is to create a

collaborative and transparent environment for students, faculty and industry to participate in education and conduct research across institutional boundaries at a single campus location. Students will enroll at one institution but will be able to seamlessly take courses and complete credentials from any of the partner institutions. Research can be collaboratively conducted by faculty from multiple institutions and industry at a single location. The A&M System owns the instructional facilities, allowing the space to be efficiently shared by the partners. We look forward to our continued partnership with SFA as a member of the RELIS Academic Alliance.

- **Deferred Maintenance Initiative** - The issue of deferred maintenance is an issue that has been around and growing over many years. Therefore, as a means of getting a better handle on the overall assessment of our deferred maintenance needs across the A&M System, we have contracted with a nationally recognized company – Sightlines (part of the Gordian Group). Sightlines is the leading provider of facilities benchmarking and analysis and deferred maintenance expertise to higher education institutions, having provided services to more than 450 campuses throughout the United States. The goal of this project is to get an overall comprehensive assessment of our deferred maintenance needs and to establish a system-wide strategic plan to address the problem.
- **System-wide Operational Support** – During times of financial uncertainties (such as a global pandemic), the A&M System has allocated resources to assist all members in areas such as:
 - software subscriptions,
 - modernization of our legacy financial system,
 - employer health insurance costs,
 - E&G property insurance costs, and
 - shared service operational costs.
- **Comprehensive Assessment Reviews** – Over the last 10 years, the Chancellor has initiated two comprehensive assessment reviews:
 - **Information Technology** - Contracted with Deloitte to conduct a comprehensive IT assessment to gain System-level insight into multiple facets of the IT environment across all A&M System member institutions and agencies, and to develop a System-level set of recommendations designed to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the System. The goal of this assessment was to lay a solid foundation upon which to develop, grow and innovate in the process of becoming a “world class” information technology organization. Core to this foundation are the principles of reducing risk, exercising fiduciary control, building trust and a sense of “System” among members, and developing strong leadership at both the System and system member levels.

- **Administrative Review** - Contracted with PwC to conduct a comprehensive review and analysis of administrative structures, services, processes, practices and costs at all members of the A&M System. The primary purpose of the review was to:
 - Make recommendations that would enhance administrative efficiency, effectiveness, and execution at all levels of our organizations. In particular, the review focused on identifying functions and services that may have been unnecessarily duplicated within and among A&M System members, as well as any organizational layers that created inefficiencies and complicated decision-making and positive organizational change.
 - Identify specific administrative cost savings that could be redirected into the System's core functions of teaching, research and service.
- **HR Classification-Compensation Standardization** - Contracted with PwC on a project to standardize title codes and create a System-wide standardized compensation plan for non-faculty positions. The ultimate goal of this project was to make sure A&M System can better recruit, develop, and maintain quality employees and do so in a way that makes sense across the entire System.

Curriculum:

5. Describe the curricular autonomy that exists between the system and its member institutions.

Curriculum is a local decision controlled by the faculty, deans, academic vice president, and president of the university.

6. Provide specific examples of how the system invests in academic excellence including program accreditation and accountability.

Through our "Communities of Practice" we regularly bring together liberal arts deans, engineering deans, financial aid directors, compliance officers, etc. to assist each other and to advance initiatives. For example, when the engineering program at one university seeks ABET accreditation, they have the support and expertise of the engineering faculty and leadership of the other already accredited universities. SACSCOC is another good example. The SACSCOC Community of Practice has written sections of the reaffirmation report stored in a shared drive accessible by each university's SACSCOC liaison. Responses common to all universities need not be replicated. Liaisons may also review other TAMUS university's responses on standards and adapt to their own university. The Community of Practice also serve as "readers" for each other's reports (both program accreditation and SACSCOC).

Identity:

7. Provide evidence of how the system ensures that its member institutions maintain their unique identities.

Each university in the A&M System maintains its own colors, mascot, school song, traditions, and logos. We have no desire to change SFA's historical name. In fact, Tarleton State University is a longtime member of the A&M System and it maintains its name to this day.

8. Describe the reasons you are interested in SFA. How do you see SFA adding value to the system?

The A&M System's mission is to serve the entire State of Texas and its citizens through research, education and service. SFA would add an important region of the state to our System, while allowing us to leverage our resources already in the region in such areas as forestry, agriculture and life sciences and emergency management.

SFA already has projects and programs with Texas A&M AgriLife Research, Texas A&M Agrilife Extension, and the Texas A&M Forest Service. In addition, SFA is a member of the RELLIS Academic Alliance at the System's RELLIS campus in Bryan. We could build on these collaborations by co-locating our Deep East Texas operations for all of these agencies plus the Texas Division of Emergency Management in Nacogdoches, providing real research and educational benefits for your students and giving us the benefit of establishing a closer strategic cooperation with a university of SFA's caliber.

The A&M System is interested in building and expanding SFA as a center for forestry management research and education, teacher preparation, the health care professions, engineering and other needed academic disciplines. We are interested in helping SFA create new programs in public health, nursing, engineering and cybersecurity to name a few. We also want to make SFA the home of our Healthy East Texas effort, which would be a collaboration between SFA, the Texas A&M Health Science Center and the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

We also admire many of your existing programs and believe they will become even better through a closer collaboration with our members who share similar missions and who will benefit from SFA's experience.

As will be discussed in more detail in a later question, SFA will gain many advantages, ranging from reduced borrowing costs to access to assorted A&M System services. We also offer system-wide grant and scholarship programs that could benefit your current and prospective students.

Affiliation would allow SFA to join our large, diverse group of institutions and agencies to advocate for our collective needs before the Legislature in Austin and in Washington, D.C. There is strength and enormous mutual benefit in numbers.

We also believe that SFA's values closely align with those of the A&M System and that our organizational structure with our ten regional universities is a good fit for SFA.

Questions Submitted by the Academic Department Chairs Forum

Compensation

- 1. How will adjustments (merit, raises, compression) to faculty & staff salaries be evaluated? Provide examples of how adjustments to salaries were incorporated as a result of previous affiliation with your system. How do the salary and workload expectations differ among affiliated universities, and how is that incorporated into salary?**

The A&M system-wide pay plan provides system members with the flexibility to recruit, hire and retain employees. The standardized pay plan provides the general framework for compensation in order to allow each member the ability to manage certain aspects of compensation administration (e.g., adjustments for geographical market differences, merit, promotions and other types of salary increases). A&M System Members have the ability to hire within a salary range based on, but not limited to, their procedures, internal equity, market pressure, scope, skills, knowledge, experience, and performance; if applicable.

System Member CEO's or designee's are authorized to approve an employee's salary that may exceed the maximum of the established pay grade. Many positions, including faculty, do not have established salary ranges. Flexibility is key, in that system members set and approve salaries, have the option to reclassify existing titles or request the creation of new ones. The plan also allows members to use equivalencies substituting experience with education or vice versa.

- 2. What policies and procedures govern employee benefits that would be applied to our campus? Are benefits applied equally throughout the system? If there any examples of differences in benefits among your affiliated institutions, then please provide examples.**

The A&M System falls under Texas Insurance Code Chapter 1601. The A&M System offers coverage for employees, retirees and their eligible dependents. All A&M System member institutions and agencies offer the same benefits to their employees.

Employee Health Benefits

Employees of the A&M System are offered the A&M Care Plan for healthcare coverage. The employee premiums for the A&M Care Plan are Employee only (E/O) = \$0.00, Employee & Spouse (E/S) = \$281.04, Employee and Children (E/C) = \$195.26, Employee and Family (E/F) = \$395.50. The A&M Care Plan has a \$400 deductible with a \$5,000 Out of pocket maximum with in network providers. The copays are \$20 for a Primary Care Physician and \$30 for a specialist. The coinsurance is 20% paid by the employee and 80% paid by the plan. Our third party plan administrator is Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas. A designated Primary Care Physician is not required by the A&M

Care Plan. The prescription benefits are a \$50 deductible with \$10 for generic and \$35 for preferred brand. Express Scripts administers the prescription benefit.

The A&M System offers dental through Delta Dental. The Dental PPO premiums are E/O \$30, E/S \$60, E/C \$63, E/F \$96. The Dental HMO premiums are E/O \$21.08, E/S \$37.48, E/C \$37.76, E/F \$58.66. Vision coverage is offered through Superior Vision. The premiums are E/O \$7.60, E/S \$16.12, E/C \$12.46, E/F \$22.22. The vision plan covers anti-reflective coating, scratch resistant coating, and polycarbonate at 100%.

The A&M System pays for Basic Life coverage of \$7,500 and Accidental Death & Dismemberment coverage of \$5,000 for all benefits-eligible employees. Optional life is offered up to six times salary or \$1,000,000 maximum. Three times salary is offered to new employees without evidence of insurability. Spouse coverage is offered up to \$200,000. Child coverage is offered up to \$10,000. Accidental Death & Dismemberment coverage is offered up to \$800,000.

The A&M System also offers Long Term Disability, Health Care Flexible Spending Accounts, Daycare Flexible Spending accounts, and an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP offers 5 in-person sessions per incident, unlimited telephonic counseling, and work/life solutions including training sessions, estate planning, legal counseling, financial education, travel planning, etc. The EAP program is 100% paid by System Benefits Administration and is not charged to the member locations.

Each A&M System member has their own wellness program led by their wellness champion. Each member can decide what programming, education, resources, events, and challenges they find best suited for the culture of their institution or agency. Each wellness program can apply for grant funds from System Benefits Administration to help fund their program.

Employee Retirement Programs

The A&M System is under Texas Government Code Chapter 821 Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS) for their mandatory retirement programs. All benefits-eligible employees are required to participate in TRS with some positions offered a one-time irrevocable decision to participate in the Optional Retirement Program (ORP). This is the same code that SFA currently falls under.

As set by the State of Texas, TRS participants currently contribute 8.0%, and the employer contributes 8.0%. Currently, all ORP participants contribute 6.65%. ORP participants that started in Texas ORP on or after 9/1/1995 receive a 6.6% employer contribution. Those who started in Texas ORP before 9/1/1995, receive an employer contribution of 8.5%. The ORP has 6 authorized vendors to provide investment options, Fidelity, Lincoln, Voya, TIAA, Pentegra, and AIG Retirement (VALIC).

The A&M System offers a voluntary Tax Deferred Account (TDA) 403(b) and the TexaSaver 457 Deferred Compensation Plan (DCP). Both options offer Roth contributions, loans, and hardship withdrawals. The TDA has 6 authorized vendors to provide investment options, Fidelity, Lincoln, Voya, TIAA, Pentegra, and AIG Retirement (VALIC). The vendor for TexaSaver is Empower Retirement.

Retiree Benefits

Under current state law, to qualify for A&M System benefits at retirement:

- You must be at least age 65 and have at least 10 years of TRS, ERS or ORP service credit, or your age plus years of service equal at least 80 and you have 10 years of service credit, and,
- 10 of those years of service are with the A&M System, or you have a combined total of 10 or more years of service with the A&M System, UT System, and ERS and the A&M System has the most years of service, and,
- you have an intact TRS or ORP account.

If SFA were to join the A&M System, time worked at SFA would count as A&M System time for retirement eligibility. This would be consistent with past affiliations.

If you qualify for A&M System benefits at retirement, all retirees receive the same employer contribution whether they were full or part time during their employment. There are no tiered amounts. Vision, dental, life insurance, and AD&D coverage are also offered to retirees at the same rate that employees pay. Life insurance is capped at \$100,000 at retirement and tiers down at 70 and 80 years old. An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is also offered to retirees with unlimited telephonic counseling and additional services like estate planning, legal counseling, financial education, travel planning, etc.

There are two retiree options for healthcare coverage. The A&M Care plan for retirees and their covered dependents that are not Medicare eligible, and the 65 Plus plan for retirees and covered dependents that are all Medicare eligible. The retiree premiums for FY2023 are: A&M Care Plan Employee only = \$0.00, Employee & Spouse = \$281.04, Employee and Children = \$195.26, Employee and Family = \$395.50; 65 Plus Employee Only = \$0.00, Employee & Spouse = \$134.90, Employee & Children \$67.54, Employee & Family \$224.81.

The 65 Plus is for Medicare primary retirees and covered dependents. The 65 Plus Plan has a \$400 deductible with a \$1000 out of pocket maximum for medical and \$400 out of pocket maximum for prescription drugs. The 65 Plus plan pays secondary to Medicare.

Retirees that have certified other healthcare coverage can use ½ of the employer contribution for employee only coverage, \$410 for FY2023, to pay for vision, dental, life insurance, and AD&D premiums.

**Comparison of Texas A&M University System Benefits
with Stephen F. Austin State University Benefits**

A&M Care			Total Premium	Employer Contribution	Employee Contribution
		E/O	815.28	815.28	\$0.00
		E/S	1,377.36	1,096.32	\$281.04
		E/C	1,205.80	1,010.54	\$195.26
		E/F	1,606.28	1,210.78	\$395.50
ERS HealthSelect					
		E/O	\$622.60	\$622.60	\$0.00
		E/S	\$1,338.60	\$980.60	\$358.00
		E/C	\$1,102.00	\$862.30	\$239.70
		E/F	\$1,818.00	\$1,220.30	\$597.70
Consumer Directed HealthSelect (High Deductible Plan)					
		E/O	\$622.60	\$622.60	\$0.00
		E/S	\$1,302.80	\$980.60	\$322.20
		E/C	\$1,078.02	\$862.30	\$215.72
		E/F	\$1,758.22	\$1,220.30	\$537.92
Difference in Employee Premium		ERS HealthSelect	Consumer Directed HealthSelect		
	E/O	Same	Same		
	E/S	\$(76.96)	\$(41.16)		
	E/C	\$(44.44)	\$(20.46)		
	E/F	\$(202.20)	\$(142.42)		

Policies and Procedures

- Will the system guarantee faculty the academic freedom to discuss and opine on controversial topics relevant to the course, even if this offends some students and administrators? Please provide examples of how your system has supported academic freedom among your affiliates.**

It is a disservice to our students if we do not discuss, analyze, and debate controversial issues in relevant courses. In the A&M System we have reaffirmed this principal on many occasions when the discussion is relevant to the course curriculum. Controversial discussions during class time that are not relevant to the course curriculum are discouraged. Similarly, faculty research is often controversial; scholars must not avoid controversy when the research leads them to difficult matters. Finally, faculty may espouse controversial positions in their private lives. The A&M System Office of General Counsel has clearly differentiated professional and private duties and faculty may opine as they please in their private spaces, as allowed by law.

Please see System Policy [12.01](#) for additional guidance.

4. When other universities have joined your system, which of these policies and procedures remained local or which ones were merged to the system: hiring process, general counsel, dual-credit, audit services, contracting/purchasing, information technology services, grant and support programs, curriculum & program management, assessment, tenure & promotion process, office of the registrar (academic probation & suspension, audits, graduation, plan of study, program fees and differential tuition).

Most of these functions would be based on SFA's administrative discretion unless indicated otherwise below. We do have system-wide policies and regulations, but A&M System members also set their own policies and rules, consistent with the broad outline of A&M System policy.

Registrar, graduation, plan of study, curriculum and program development, and similar decisions are made by individual members, although members do collaborate regularly on best practices and other common issues. Tenure recommendations are made locally and submitted to the Board for approval.

In terms of education standards, Texas A&M University System universities have developed and embraced a common set of student learning outcomes, and are dedicated to documenting, advocating, and facilitating the systematic use of learning outcomes assessment to improve student learning. The System maintains an online resource, EmpowerU, which consolidates common educational analytics for all of our institutions. These metrics are open for review by anyone and are reviewed regularly by the Board of Regents' Committee on Academic and Student Affairs. (<https://empoweru.tamus.edu/>)

The A&M System puts an emphasis on research and inter-system collaboration. The A&M System Offices offer assistance to member institutions on grant information, grant development and related services. We facilitate connections between members when it is beneficial, but the actual process of seeking and securing grants is a local decision.

In the administrative area, the A&M System has a centralized General Counsel, Internal Audit function and facilities planning and construction management, although they all work directly with users in each institution or agency. Construction projects are only undertaken based on local plans included in a consolidated five-year Capital Plan which is updated annually.

We also offer investment and debt management services. While institutional funds are managed on a consolidated basis, they are not commingled. Our results have been consistently at or above investment targets and are reviewed by the Board of Regents in open session annually. We currently provide some investment services to SFA.

A&M System members retain their own Government Relations representatives, but they work in collaboration with A&M System governmental relations staff for the other institutions and agencies on a routine basis. They office together when in Austin.

We have a system-wide Security Operations Center which provides information technology security and expertise to members. Some information technology purchases, such as WorkDay, a human resource management system, are made available system-

wide to reduce costs, but software is implemented and maintained locally with A&M System assistance if necessary. Members share the operating costs of system-wide applications based on use. We use a common financial management platform, FAMIS.

The A&M System has a common position classification structure with pay ranges, mainly to provide a consistent job structure among our members. Decisions on when and who to hire and at what salary are a local administrative decision, as is termination of employment. The A&M System provides guidance on major issues affecting all members. Recent examples include our response to the COVID pandemic and remote work policies.

The Board of Regents sets the maximum tuition increase, generally on a two-year cycle to coincide with the state's budget cycle. Merit plans are locally determined based on local budget considerations. Our finance staff meets telephonically with all system members annually for "pulse checks" to review financial status and see if there are any issues that need to be addressed by the System.

On an operational basis, we follow state law related to procurement, contracting, personnel and other common administrative functions, just as SFA currently does.

Each member has its own budget pattern in the General Appropriations Act, and the Regents' Committees on Finance and Buildings and Physical Plant conduct an annual Programmatic Budget Review before operating budgets and Capital Plans for the entire System are approved by the Board.

State funding is determined for each institution by statewide formula funding and line-item appropriations, which are determined by the Legislature. The System advocates for its members during the legislative session and in the legislative interim. We also maintain an office in Washington D.C.

Any transition to the A&M System would be carefully planned and agreed to and likely would take place in stages over a set period of time. It would not be immediate. Our priority would be to make the transition as seamless and stress-free as possible. Our goal is to enhance Stephen F. Austin as an A&M System member; not to remake it.

5. What system integrations would be required for operational infrastructure? Please provide a list of internal and external software packages related to academic affairs that are used system-wide.

The A&M System has implemented a strong suite of enterprise-wide applications: purchasing (Aggiebuy), travel (Concur), financials (FAMIS/Canopy), position budgeting, grants management (Maestro), time and effort, and HR/Payroll (Workday). All members of the A&M System utilize these enterprise-wide applications. The A&M System would work with Stephen F. Austin to migrate purchasing, travel, financials, position budgeting, grants management, time and effort, and HR/Payroll to the system enterprise-wide applications in a manner and in a timeframe that does not harm Stephen F. Austin's ability to complete research, educate students, or report to the State.

- 6. Will we be able to choose our preferred learning management system? Or is this chosen system-wide? SFA currently uses Brightspace.**

In contrast to the above mentioned enterprise-wide applications, each institution in the A&M System can select their own Learning Management System, Student Information System, academic technology, marketing, cybersecurity, e-Signature, HR, virtual conferencing, business services and other applications. The A&M System has a pool of 54 system-wide agreements that can be leveraged by its members. Brightspace/D2L is one of the 54 system-wide agreements.

Structure and Hierarchy

- 7. Please describe the relationship between marketing, advertising, and enrollment management across system universities and how do they mutually support each other?**

Marketing, advertising, and enrollment management are controlled by the universities. How much each university coordinates their marketing, advertising and enrollment management is each university's decision. However, the System offices provide opportunities for coordination across marketing/advertising. In addition, enrollment management vice presidents meet each Friday in a Community of Practice to support each other and collaborate on efforts.

- 8. Please provide examples of system wide collaboration between undergraduate and/or graduate programs and mentorship of graduate students.**

The A&M System's "Pathways to the Doctorate" program has been in place for some 20 years. Pathways is a system-wide student research symposium with presentations and poster sessions where students and faculty from different A&M System universities make connections for the purpose of recruiting students into doctoral programs. This has resulted in the launch of hundreds—if not thousands—of graduate careers. (Though the end goal is increasing doctoral pursuit, the symposium/program is evenly split between undergraduate students going into master's programs, and undergraduate/master's students seeking doctoral programs.) While Pathways is the largest of these symposiums, Universities and programs offer similar programs targeting the connections.

Beyond the Pathways program, we have several joint and collaborative degree programs, mostly at the graduate level, allowing smaller institutions to develop their doctoral capacity.

- 9. What autonomy does SFA retain regarding staffing, faculty, and future programmatic decisions? Please provide examples of any restructuring or changes to programs that have occurred when institutions have joined your system.**

SFA administrative decision.

Questions Submitted by the Faculty Senate

General System-Interest questions (possible category):

- 1. Why is your institution interested in the potential addition of SFA to your system? What do you see as the joint advantages of such a move? For instance, what are the three most significant ways you believe that SFA would benefit from joining your specific system—and you from SFA's participation in your system? [Feel free to discuss any specific programs, initiatives, general infrastructure, or human capital particularly informing this response.]**

The A&M System's mission is to serve the entire State of Texas and its citizens through research, education and service. SFA would add an important region of the state to our System, while allowing us to leverage our resources already in the region in such areas as forestry, agriculture and life sciences and emergency management.

SFA already has projects and programs with Texas A&M AgriLife Research, Texas A&M Agrilife Extension, and the Texas A&M Forest Service. In addition, SFA is a member of the RELLIS Academic Alliance at the System's RELLIS campus in Bryan. We could build on these collaborations by co-locating our Deep East Texas operations for all of these agencies plus the Texas Division of Emergency Management in Nacogdoches, providing real research and educational benefits for your students and giving us the benefit of establishing a closer strategic cooperation with a university of SFA's caliber.

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We also admire many of your existing programs and believe they will become even better through a closer collaboration with our members who share similar missions and who will benefit from SFA's experience.

As indicated in the answer to an earlier question, SFA will gain many advantages, ranging from reduced borrowing costs to access to assorted A&M System services. We also offer system-wide grant and scholarship programs that could benefit your current and prospective students.

Affiliation would allow SFA to join our large, diverse group of institutions and agencies to advocate for our collective needs before the Legislature in Austin and in Washington, D.C. There is strength and enormous mutual benefit in numbers.

We also believe that SFA's values closely align with those of the A&M System and that our organizational structure with our ten regional universities is a good fit for SFA.

2. How do the programs at SFA fit into your strategy for serving the population of Texas?

It is important to remember that the A&M System has one very large R1 research university, but it also has ten regional universities, many with origins and development in their regions similar to SFA's own development and growth. Our mission is to serve the entire state, and SFA, already a high-quality university, fits well into that mission. As noted above, it also provides a nexus for consolidating and coordinating our operations already taking place in the Deep East Texas region. We believe that linking our agricultural, forestry, extension and emergency management operations in the region with SFA would benefit not only the A&M System but also the people of East Texas.

3. In which programs or initiatives at SFA do you anticipate additional investment (either in terms of personnel and/or non-human infrastructure)?

The example that comes immediately to mind is forestry. The Texas A&M Forest Service and the University already cooperate in several areas. We would envision building on that collaboration to create the world's best forestry management and research program. But the opportunities don't stop there. We want to help build areas such as teacher preparation, nursing, allied health services and other disciplines.

We also want to learn from and build on your existing programs in other areas such as Agriculture and the Fine Arts. We would welcome an expansion of the University's presence at our RELIS campus in Bryan, and would like to build the SFA's research portfolio with the goal of reaching the R2 national ranking.

SFA is doing many things right. We never want to tamper with success. We want to provide a larger, more robust platform for you to build on in the future.

4. How would an affiliation between our universities likely impact SFA enrollment, in your view, if any? What is the reasoning for that conclusion (for instance, based on prior affiliation experience)?

Colleges and universities nationwide are only now emerging from a challenging period in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the challenges to higher education in our state and nation have not lessened. The A&M System's goal is for enrollment at our universities to increase over time. We know the need is there—the prospective students are there—it is a matter of reaching them and showing them the value of a quality education that institutions like SFA offer. We can help in that area. Our System has spent the last eight months closely studying the twin issues of affordability and access for Texans. Our Board is studying ways to make a university not only affordable but prized. We also provide a large, diverse community of universities which regularly share best practices and access to system-wide resources for recruitment and retention. Our goal would be to see SFA reach 15,000 students in the near future. We believe we can help make that happen, and that SFA has the programs—and just as importantly, the energy and enthusiasm—to make that possible.

5. Which institution in your system seems closest in mission, scope, strengths, and weaknesses to SFA? Why do you say that?

We perceive Tarleton State University and A&M Commerce to be most similar to SFA. Both institutions have deep histories in teacher preparation and are similar in size. Both support large residential campus cultures. Agriculture is important in their program mixes and they are both relatively early in the development of engineering disciplines. And now they are both now playing Division I sports.

6. What programs at SFA do you view as differentiators relative to other regional state universities in your system? Why?

At the risk of repetition, forestry. Texas A&M University offers a forestry degree, but it has nothing to compare with SFA's location in the Piney Woods, which offers unparalleled opportunities for research and education. SFA for all intents and purposes is a living laboratory for the study and use of our forests as a vital natural resource. No other campus in the A&M System offers a similar setting.

Another advantage you have is location. SFA serves an area of the state where the A&M System has many resources and operations but no university to meet the regional educational needs. Our mission is to serve the state as a whole, and SFA would provide an important link in that effort.

Institutional Identity questions (possible category):

7. Would an affiliation between our institutions require an institutional name change?

No.

If so, why?

8. What changes might you envision concerning the manner in which SFA is marketed and recruits its students in the event that SFA were to become a member of your system?

Marketing, advertising, and enrollment management are controlled by the universities. How much each university coordinates their marketing, advertising and enrollment management is each university's decision. However, the System offices provide opportunities for coordination across marketing/advertising. In addition, enrollment management vice presidents meet each Friday in a Community of Practice to support each other and collaborate on efforts.

There also is a statewide TV show, *Around Texas with Chancellor John Sharp*, in which the A&M System promotes all members.

- 9. If SFA were to become part of your system, would its mission change to become more focused on research (instead of teaching) than it currently is?**

No, this would be an SFA administrative decision.

System v. Affiliate Operations & Governance questions (possible category):

- 10. In your system, what is the management and governance structure put in place to oversee an individual affiliate?**

See [System Policy and Regulation Library](#) for discussion about decisions delegated to campus administration.

- 11. Will there be an external or internal post-affiliation review process of current programs with regards to performance and/or need after the affiliation? Who would conduct that review process, if one would be required?**

We rely on existing programmatic review processes for program improvement as required by SACSCOC and THECB. No additional review process is anticipated.

- 12. What would be the status of any open lines and/or personnel searches in progress if our universities were to merge?**

SFA administrative decision.

- 13. How much autonomy do universities in the system have regarding establishing their own administrative hierarchies and setting university policies?**

See [System Policy and Regulation Library](#) for discussion about decisions delegated to campus administration.

- 14. In general, what operational areas are impacted by system-wide policies, as opposed to affiliate-specific policies?**

See [System Policy and Regulation Library](#) for discussion about decisions delegated to campus administration.

- 15. If SFA were to join your system, what process would be followed to search for and select the new president?**

The presidential search process is outlined by Board policy. Two regents of the A&M System serve on each presidential search advisory committee. The balance of the committee consists of faculty, students, staff, alums, etc. The composition varies by the needs, history, and culture of the university. Board policy dictates that the committee is advisory. The advisory committee conducts a national search, aided by a recognized search firm and facilitated by the A&M System Academic Affairs Office. Ultimately, the

advisory committee recommends no fewer than three names to the Chancellor who then brings one name to the Board of Regents as sole finalist. This process typically takes six to eight months before the new president would be onboard. SFA would have an interim president until such time a permanent president would be named.

16. What role would the Faculty Senate have in expressing the needs/concerns of faculty within the system?

Faculty Senates are an integral part of the governance structures of A&M System universities. The Chancellor and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs meet regularly with the executive committees of faculty senates and the vice chancellor brings together the Faculty Senate Presidents/Speakers two-three times each year for open discussion of common issues and opportunities. The A&M System is in the process of standing up a Faculty Senates Council. We hosted the Senate Speakers/Presidents at a meeting in College Station in August and they will be meeting again in San Antonio in association with Texas Council of Faculty Senates. Participation in these activities is the choice of the Faculty Senate leadership at SFASU, although we would assume SFA's senate would wish to participate.

17. What similar role would the Staff Council be able to occupy, if any?

SFA administrative decision.

Employment stability, compensation, and benefit-related questions (possible category):

18. Will you commit to keeping intact all current SFA academic programs (and their personnel) for at least three years? For five years? [Understanding that programs could be reduced or eliminated during that period by SFA's management team itself.] Why or why not would you agree to these timeframes?

SFA administrative decision.

19. Does the system perform a regular review (and potential right-sizing) of administrative and staff positions? If so, please describe that process.

No. SFA administrative decision. Our System finance staff does conduct routine budget reviews with all System members and is happy to help with any budgetary issues that may arise.

20. Can faculty (or staff) move between universities within the system, as and when employment needs change?

Yes, based on mutual agreement.

21. If SFA were to become a part of your system, would existing faculty and/or salaries be adjusted to become compatible with other campuses in your system?

SFA administrative decision.

22. Would system-wide salary guidelines be put in place for new hires at SFA (post-affiliation)?

SFA administrative decision with adherence to A&M System Policies and Regulations.

23. If there are positions where an SFA employee's pay is currently higher than, say, a system-wide standard for that equivalent position, is there a possibility of affected employees facing a salary decrease?

No.

24. Will employee benefit programs like LEAP remain in place in the event of an affiliation, or are benefit programs standardized across all affiliates?

SFA administrative decision.

25. Are job titles and descriptions required to be standardized across members of the system?

The system-wide pay plan provides for standardized job titles and job descriptions for staff positions and are maintained by the Pay Plan Administrator at the A&M System level. The job descriptions are intended to serve as a general guideline for A&M System member use and to facilitate classification needs. Each member may develop position descriptions that are more specific to the work of the system member employees. This includes position descriptions for staff positions and faculty positions. The A&M System is committed to ensure the pay plan is flexible for all system members.

26. Is there a standard telecommuting policy that would be enforced within the system, and if so, what is that policy?

SFA administrative decision, although the System is developing system-wide guidelines for remote work as the situation in the post-pandemic landscape becomes clearer. The System currently has an alternative work policy that is administered locally.

27. What is your process for establishing salary consistency across faculty and staff serving within different system affiliates?

The A&M System standardized compensation administration for all A&M System members, including development of a standardized pay plan. The standardized pay plan would provide the general framework for compensation and ensures flexibility is retained to allow each member the ability to operationally manage certain aspects of compensation administration (e.g., adjustments for geographical market differences, merit increases, differences in funding streams, etc.).

The A&M System utilizes CompAnalyst, a comprehensive compensation management solution, that helps system members analyze compensation pay practices including pricing jobs.

28. What is your process for determining merit increases for faculty and staff serving within different affiliates?

SFA administrative decision.

29. What is your process for determining annual salary increases for faculty and staff serving within different affiliates?

SFA administrative decision.

Ongoing Academics operations questions (possible category):

30. What evaluation criteria are used (on an ongoing basis) to determine the viability/retainability of academic programs? How does this assessment process affect annual funding levels for those programs?

The evaluation of academic programs is a local process. The A&M System Office of Academic Affairs provides a level of coordination for evaluation in accreditation processes, but delegates this to the local university. By statute, the Board of Regents/System offices monitor “Low Producing Programs,” which does require assessment and decisions on retention of programs meeting this criteria. The Office of Academic Affairs annually works with our campuses on strategies for building such programs or closing such programs. It is a joint process with our campuses. Ultimately, allocation of resources is a local decision.

31. Does the system actively monitor duplicate programs and seek, if possible, to minimize system-wide duplications? If so, how does that process work?

The System does not seek to minimize duplicate programs across the System. The program offerings at each university should be determined by the needs of your service area and the expertise/capacity of the faculty at that university. The existence or absence of a program at another A&M System university is not a factor.

32. What is the process for proposing/creating new programs?

New programs most often come as the result of faculty recognizing a gap in their programmatic offerings, a new opportunity emerging in the region, and/or new faculty bringing new expertise making new degree programs possible. Regardless, new programs emerge through existing university curriculum processes. After they have done so, a degree program is submitted for review to the TAMUS Office of Academic Affairs where it is reviewed for compliance with THECB requirements. New degree programs must be approved by the Board of Regents, per TAMUS policy.

- 33. What system-level funding sources would be available for pilot programs, if any, in the event that a promising pilot could not cover its initial costs?**

Many new programs have been assisted by legislative appropriations allocated for the development of that program to serve the needs of that region. Programs that do not receive special legislative appropriations must be funded by internal appropriations.

- 34. What is the system's standard level of funding for research and graduate studies at its affiliates, or is this budget amount determined by each affiliate?**

SFA administrative decision.

- 35. Are librarians an integral part of the learning infrastructure in your system? To what extent, and in what roles?**

SFA administrative decision.

- 36. The number of librarians at SFA has been drastically reduced in the last 10 years as open positions were not filled, thereby resulting in fewer research/subject librarians to assist students, instruct classes, perform collection development, etc. Is this something that might change if we were to join your system, or would each affiliate determine those needs?**

SFA administrative decision.

- 37. Do faculty who teach online receive a stipend? If so, at what rate?**

SFA administrative decision.

- 38. At what stipend rate is development or redevelopment (total revision) of online courses compensated?**

SFA administrative decision.

- 39. What centralized technological support is provided for faculty who teach courses at night, or is this determined by each affiliate?**

SFA administrative decision.

Curricular- and Accreditation issue questions (possible category):

- 40. How does your system deal with the issue of standardized curriculum within duplicative programs across campuses? Must the programs, for instance, feature identical curriculums?**

SFA administrative decision.

41. How about system-wide accreditation: For instance, is it necessary that external accreditation be performed on all similar programs at once across the system? If accreditation is performed individually, to what extent is the system involved in an affiliate's accreditation exercise regarding a common program?

Accreditation is not centralized. Similar programs are not accredited at the same time, and no two programs are identical, nor should they be. Instead, the programs at SFA should meet the needs of the students and region resulting in unique components within each degree program. However, through our "Communities of Practice" we regularly bring together liberal arts deans, engineering deans, financial aid directors, compliance officers, etc. to assist each other and to advance initiatives, including assistant in accreditation. For example, when the engineering program at one university seeks ABET accreditation, they have the support and expertise of the engineering faculty and leadership of the other already accredited universities. SACSCOC is another good example. The SACSCOC Community of Practice has written sections of the reaffirmation report stored in a shared drive accessible by each university's SACSCOC liaison. Responses common to all universities need not be replicated. Liaisons may also review other TAMUS university responses on standards and adapt to their university. The Community of Practice also serve as "readers" for each other's reports (both program accreditation and SACSCOC).

42. For programs facing discipline-specific accreditation, what type of support (administrative and/or financial) will be provided for them to retain accreditation?

Through our "Communities of Practice" we regularly bring together liberal arts deans, engineering deans, financial aid directors, compliance officers, etc. to assist each other and to advance initiatives. For example, when the engineering program at one university seeks ABET accreditation, they have the support and expertise of the engineering faculty and leadership of the other already accredited universities. SACSCOC is another good example. The SACSCOC Community of Practice has written sections of the reaffirmation report stored in a shared drive accessible by each university's SACSCOC liaison. Responses common to all universities need not be replicated. Liaisons may also review other TAMUS university responses on standards and adapt to their university. The Community of Practice also serve as "readers" for each other's reports (both program accreditation and SACSCOC).

43. What additional financial support (if any) is provided to program coordinators for accreditation or other needs?

SFA administrative decision.

44. Are there system-wide meetings (either at the program, college, or university level) to share pedagogical best practices and/or subject knowledge?

The A&M System facilitates many "Communities of Practice" where faculty across the universities come together to share best practices. The Teacher Preparation Programs meet frequently, as do the Engineering faculty and administrators. Liberal Arts deans and faculty came together this past year and received a grant from the Teagle Foundation. As a result they are working across institutions writing modules that advance the liberal arts

curriculum. There are innumerable examples through our Communities of Practice program and in each case the choice to take action is a local decision. In another area, our System research vice presidents are meeting in Washington, D.C. this month to meet with granting agencies at the federal level and also meet regularly.

45. Are the system-affiliate's students offered preferential admissions at flagship or other system-affiliates' graduate programs?

No.

Resource Allocations & Resource Sharing questions (possible category):

46. How does the system determine how to allocate state funds (example: PUF or HEF funds) across affiliates in the system? Or are these applied for by each institution...and awarded individually?

HEF allocations to eligible institutions are determined by the State and provided directly to the eligible institutions. Requests for PUF can be made by eligible institutions as needs are identified. PUF funding is allocated to priority projects for eligible institutions as determined by the Chancellor and the Board. An institution not specifically identified by the state as eligible for PUF funding receives a HEF allocation. The System has a mix of HEF and PUF institutions.

47. What is the process for affiliates to lobby for funding in Austin? Is this permitted? Discouraged? Performed at the system level?

Each A&M System member has a Government Relations (GR) representative that works on behalf of the institution and as part of the A&M System Government Relations team at the state level. The GR team develops broad legislative goals and policy initiatives for the system based on guidance from the Chancellor and the Board, and the GR team's role is to provide information to legislators and policymakers, while not advocating for or against specific legislation. Two important initiatives that developed as a result of the leadership and discussions of our board of regents are the Comprehensive Regional University initiative from the 87th legislature and the affordability initiative that we are working on for this session. The A&M System has been the catalyst for developing these two initiatives and getting other systems of higher education on board. Another policy issue where the A&M System took the lead was getting an increase for the Small Institution Supplement, within the General Academic Formulas during the 86th Legislature. With 11 campuses that are part of the group of comprehensive regional institutions, our board, chancellor and GR team have worked hard and continue to work to garner additional resources for our regional institutions.

The GR team, including the institutional representatives, develops a coordinated plan to work on both broad system-wide policy initiatives and individual institutional initiatives. The GR team provides guidance on cross cutting issues such as formula funding or other appropriations policy decisions impacting higher education, higher education policy issues, or general business policy issues impacting higher education. The GR team has experts in each of these areas that coordinate these cross cutting issues on behalf of the

entire system and in coordination with other systems of higher education. These subject matter experts work closely with all system members on these issues, including legislative tracking and reporting. For example, we work very closely with the institutions in training, preparation and review of each institution's Legislative Appropriations Request to ensure quality documents are submitted. We also have a former attorney on the GR team that coordinates with our Office of General Counsel on any potential legislation, whether broad or institution specific.

The GR representative is the institution's boots on the ground in Austin both during the session and the interim, providing regular feedback to the institution president and leadership. The GR team member for each institution works directly with the President and other leadership within the institution on institution specific legislative priorities for the institution. This would include exceptional item funding initiatives, potential Capital Construction Assistance Project Requests (formerly TRBs), institution specific legislation, or any other potential legislative issues. The GR representative works closely with the institution on developing the details of any proposals, testimony, handouts, legislative and staff visits, etc. The GR representative coordinates getting the President to Austin to make key legislative visits, works with key staff from the institution's legislative delegation on the institutional initiatives, and coordinates efforts with the GR team.

48. What would be the disposition of SFA's endowment funds and its fund reserve balance in the event of an affiliation with your system? Where would those funds be located and managed?

In the event of an affiliation, the endowment funds for SFA would continue to be invested in the A&M System Endowment Fund. Upon affiliation, the A&M System would add the endowments to our endowment reporting system which tracks individual gifts, distributions, etc.

A portion of SFA's reserve balances are currently invested in the A&M System Cash Concentration Pool and those funds would remain in that vehicle in the event of an affiliation. All cash funds would be moved in the Cash Concentration Pool to be held for immediate operating needs or invested to generate additional income. The A&M System manages each members daily cash needs to ensure sufficient funding is available while investing those funds that are not needed in short-term funds. SFA would enjoy the added benefit of daily cash management upon affiliation. There is no additional direct cost to System members for these services.

49. Do all affiliates in your system share the same bond rating, or are they measured individually?

All members of the A&M System are participants in the Revenue Financing System and have access to borrow for capital projects on a short or long-term basis. The Revenue Financing System borrowing programs carry the highest ratings which extends to and benefits all of the A&M System members. There are no individual ratings for A&M System members.

50. What mid- to back-office support services or infrastructural elements (ex: library and research resources; legal; human resources; accounting; IT; and so on) are shared across system members?

The A&M System has deliberately consolidated certain essential services and functions at the System Offices to take advantage of economies of scale and to provide value-added expertise that would otherwise be too expensive to acquire and maintain by the members independently, including cash, debt and investment management; health benefits, risk, and property insurance programs; facilities planning and construction; audit and legal services; real estate management; and information technology services.

The A&M System and SFA would work collaboratively over time to determine which operations could be most effectively performed at the campus, at the A&M System Office through a shared service, or some combination.

51. To what extent are research resources, particularly academic and research databases, made available to all system members (if at all)? Or do these remain the responsibility of each affiliate to arrange for?

- **Academic Databases:** Texas A&M University libraries manage access to academic databases and subscriptions to print and eJournals. Licensing agreements for access are available to affiliate System member campuses.
- **Research Information Databases:** The A&M System maintains an in-house developed software database product called Maestro. Maestro is the integrated interface for managing sponsored research, submissions, as well queries of funding opportunity databases. Maestro is used by all affiliate System members for sponsored research.
- **Sponsored Research Services:** Sponsored Research Services (SRS) provides research administration services (pre-award, negotiation, and post-award) to any member of the System who chooses to utilize these services. It is not required for an affiliate System member to use SRS. Currently, approximately half of the system member universities use SRS, while the others use their own research administration services.

52. Is grant funding regularly sought at the system level (and then allocated to affiliates), or does grant funding remain an affiliate-driven initiative? Or do both types of initiatives occur in your system?

Both have been achieved successfully, contributing to over \$1.2B in System-wide annual research expenditures. Primarily, grant funding is affiliate-driven, and grant funding is at the affiliate member. For larger initiatives, the A&M System provides a wide range of research support that is important to highlight (primarily even for larger initiatives, the grant funding is not allocated by the System to affiliates but rather is received directly by the affiliate).

System Office of Research: The following is a list of services and programs that support and incubate the research enterprise across The A&M System.

- **System Research Development Office:** The office houses an established team serving investigators by developing and implementing proactive and responsive strategies for scalable research and proposal development. The System Research Development Office provides the following services to all affiliate System members:
 - Proposal development support for large strategic multi-System member proposals
 - Develop and provide templates and support materials for standard funding opportunities applicable to all System members
 - Identify teams that leverage multi-System member expertise
 - Assist in the development of white papers and technical reports for high-priority research areas
 - Organizing focus groups and workshops that benefit research activity across the System
 - On-demand proposal development consulting sessions
 - Virtual office hours
 - Graphics support for white papers, proposals, and technical reports
 - Funding opportunity database available to all system members
 - Research development newsletter distributed monthly to all system members that covers funding opportunities, resources, and system research updates

- **System Research Security Office:** The System Research Security Office (RSO) manages and supervises all System classified, controlled unclassified, and export-controlled research and information. The RSO is also the focal point for the A&M System's security relationships with the Department of Defense, the Department of Energy, and the Intelligence Community.
 - The System has participated in the National Industrial Security Program since 1974 and is a cleared defense contractor. The A&M System holds a DOD Facility Clearance, a Department of Defense Facility Clearance at the TOP SECRET level, and a Q-level Facility Clearance from the Department of Energy. We can conduct research on-site up to the TS/SCI level.
 - The RSO security program has seven consecutive SUPERIOR ratings on Defense Counterintelligence & Security Agency (DCSA) Security Vulnerability Assessments dating back to 2012. RSO was recognized with the Colonel James S. Cogswell Award for Industrial Security Excellence by DOD in 2015 and 2020 (only ~ 40 of more than 12,000 cleared defense contractors received this recognition). In 2017 and 2019, the System was one of two cleared defense contractors from more than 12,000 recognized by DOD with the Award for Excellence in Counterintelligence.

- **System Research Compliance Office:** The System Office of Research Compliance provides administrative oversight to ensure that each System member develops, implements, and maintains an appropriate research compliance program, and to facilitate and coordinate research compliance programs within and between members. This office also provides oversight and support in all the following compliance areas: Animal Care and Use, Biosafety, Conflict of Interest, Human Subjects, Responsible Conduct of Research, Controlled Substances, and Export Control.

- **System Technology Commercialization Office:** The System Technology Commercialization Office works with researchers, entrepreneurs, and investors to spin out new companies based on System research. The mission is to encourage broad practical application of System research for public benefit; to encourage and assist those associated with the System in the protection, licensing, and commercialization of their discoveries; to ensure the equitable distribution of royalties and other monetary benefits resulting from the commercial application of intellectual property; and to see that commercialization activities benefit the research, education and outreach missions of the System into the future. The System Technology Commercialization Office serves all System members. Since 1992, the System commercialization efforts have resulted in over 5,500 inventors, over 5,300 disclosed discoveries, over 2,200 issued patents (US + Foreign), over 1,100 licenses + over 460 options with over 1,000 companies, over 130 start-up companies launched.
- **System Research Partnerships:** Provides support for private research and industry partnerships for all System members with over 150 active Master Research Agreements with private research sponsors. Private sponsorship contributes to over 35% of the System's total annual research expenditures.

System Office of Governmental Relations: The System Office of Governmental Relations provides a coordinated, system-wide approach to support funding initiatives and achieve policy goals for System members at the state and federal levels. The office includes the State Relations team and the Federal Relations team, which work together to support the System members in advancing policy and funding goals to accomplish their education, research, and service objectives. Governmental relations maintain relationships with the Texas Legislature, Congress, statewide leaders, and state and federal agencies to garner support for System priorities.

Budgeting questions (possible category):

53. How are budgets balanced and managed in this system? More specifically, at what level of an organization's operations are budgets balanced (e.g., program, department, college, Cabinet or VP-level, holistic university, across multiple affiliates, at the macro system level, etc.)?

Each member is responsible for balancing their budget at the level they deem most appropriate. The A&M System Budget & Accounting office does review the final total institutional budget recommendations to provide assurance that it is prepared within the estimated funds available. In addition, annually, each member will present their proposed budget to the Board of Regents Finance Committee at our annual Programmatic Budget Reviews.

54. What actions are taken, and at what organizational level, when spending is projected to exceed revenue?

The A&M System budget guidelines state that reserve balances should only be used in special one-time situations or where a definite plan provides justification of a limited use of such balances. The A&M System Budgets & Accounting office does monitor each

member's reserve balance via a reserve ratio and during the overall budget process. As part of the budget approval process, each member is required to provide an explanation on any one-time use of reserves to balance their budget.

55. Are the percentages of budget allocations required to be similar across all affiliates (i.e., the % of budget that goes to divisions like academic affairs, student affairs, athletics, etc.?) Why or why not?

No. SFA administrative decision.

56. What percentage of the budget is directed towards academic affairs/instruction across the system? Or is this figure determined within each affiliate?

SFA administrative decision.

57. How are your library, cultural heritage departments, and other primary resource areas funded? What is the level of that funding, aggregated at the system level?

SFA administrative decision.

58. What campus groups are typically involved in annual budget developments—or is this left up to each affiliate? What is the typical timeline and set of informational flows related to the budget development (both pre- and post- budget finalization) within your system?

Each member determines which campus groups are involved in the budget process. The A&M System does provide oversight on the budget calendar to be followed each year and does provide budget guidelines and instructions to the members. Below is an example of our most recent budget calendar.

FY 2023 Budget Calendar (Non-Legislative Year)

- November
 - Tuition and Fee requests submitted to the Board
- February
 - Budget Instructions provided to Members
 - Budget Module made available to Members
 - Capital Plan finalized
- April
 - Member Budgets submitted to System Office for review
- July
 - Member Programmatic Budget Review Presentations due to System Office
- August
 - Member Programmatic Budget Reviews presented to the Board
 - Board meeting to approve Budget

Research collaboration questions (possible category):

59. Can you provide examples of significant or noteworthy research-based program collaborations across affiliated members in your system?

There are numerous examples of significant and noteworthy research-based program collaborations across affiliated System members. Several recent examples that strongly reflect collaborative efforts across the System include:

- **System National Laboratories Office:** The System National Laboratories Office opened in 2018 to support the System's role in the management of Los Alamos National Laboratory. The office is the primary point of engagement with all U.S. Department of Energy and National Nuclear Security Administration laboratories, facilities, and sites. The National Laboratories Office builds connections between academia across all affiliate System members and the national labs through linking faculty and students with the labs, forming new research connections, developing research proposals, locating funding opportunities, and enhancing the future employment pool for the national laboratories through student engagement. – Click [Here](#)
- **Bush Combat Development Complex:** Located in Bryan, Texas, the Texas A&M RELLIS campus is home to a unique, comprehensive research and testing ecosystem within the George H.W. Bush Combat Development Complex (BCDC). The complex is home to a number of high-tech research and testing facilities, including the Mobility Challenge Course and Off-Road Test Area, as well as the Ballistic, Aero-optic, and Materials Range and the Research Integration Center. – Click [Here](#)
- **RELLIS Research Alliance:** The RELLIS Research Alliance (Research Alliance) is a consortium of the System Office of Research, participating System member institutions and agencies, and certain other institutions that participate in research activity on the RELLIS Campus. This consortium facilitates collaborative research across all affiliate System members on the Texas A&M System RELLIS Campus. – Click [Here](#)
- **\$65M USDA Multi-System Member Award:** This trailblazing multi-system member USDA award is led by Texas A&M AgriLife Research in collaboration with multiple affiliate System members, including Tarleton State University and Prairie View A&M University. This is the latest success in Climate Smart Agriculture Program. The Texas A&M System is also partners in other awards from this first cohort of USDA funding – Click [Here](#)
- **\$100M DOD Multi-System Member Award:** The University Consortium for Applied Hypersonics (UCAH) is an inclusive, collaborative network of universities working with government, industry, national laboratories, federally funded research centers, and existing university affiliated research centers. It aims to deliver the innovation and workforce needed to advance modern hypersonic flight systems in support of national defense – Click [Here](#)
- **DOE Multi-System Member Award:** Texas A&M University is set to lead its first Department of Energy (DOE) funded Energy Frontier Research Center (EFRC). The center will focus on Reconfigurable Electronic Materials Inspired by Nonlinear Neuron Dynamics (REMIND), an initiative that strives to transform computing to behave more like a human brain for rapid and efficient processing – Click [Here](#)

60. What process would be followed to initiate, say, a shared research project or program initiative with other affiliates in the system?

The System Office of Research provides structured support for shared research initiatives among affiliate System members. The System Research Development Office has extensive knowledge and experience in planning, coordinating, and assisting with collaborative research initiatives (proposal development and submission). This office assists in many large multi-System member collaborative proposals. The Vice Chancellor for Research oversees this office and is highly responsive to affiliate institution research needs and initiatives. The Vice Chancellor for Research provides strategic support, as well as enables the support and processes that leverage existing resources across the System. The Vice Chancellor for Research coordinates regular meetings with all affiliate System member Chief Research Officers. Group meetings with all Chief Research Officers facilitate collaboration across the System and augment the work of the System Research Development Office.

61. How does system affiliation influence the development of research centers, clinics, and lab spaces?

There are many examples of System-wide initiatives to develop research infrastructure that benefits all affiliate System members. Several examples include:

- **Texas A&M RELLIS Campus:** The System RELLIS campus is an over 2,000-acre collaborative ecosystem in Bryan, Texas, built to foster advanced research, technology development, testing and evaluation, higher education, and hands-on career training. – Click [Here](#)
- **RELLIS Research Alliance:** The RELLIS Research Alliance (Research Alliance) is a consortium of the System Office of Research, participating System member institutions and agencies, and certain other institutions that participate in research activity on the RELLIS Campus. This consortium facilitates collaborative research across all affiliate System members on the Texas A&M System RELLIS Campus. – Click [Here](#)
- **Bush Combat Development Complex:** Located in Bryan, Texas, the Texas A&M RELLIS campus is home to a unique, comprehensive research and testing ecosystem within the George H.W. Bush Combat Development Complex (BCDC). The complex is home to a number of high-tech research and testing facilities, including the Mobility Challenge Course and Off-Road Test Area, as well as the Ballistic, Aero-optic, and Materials Range and the Research Integration Center. – Click [Here](#)
- **System National Laboratories Office:** The System National Laboratories Office opened in 2018 to support the System's role in the management of Los Alamos National Laboratory. The office is the primary point of engagement with all U.S. Department of Energy and National Nuclear Security Administration laboratories, facilities, and sites. The National Laboratories Office builds connections between academia across all affiliate System members and the national labs through linking faculty and students with the labs, forming new research connections, developing research proposals, locating funding opportunities, and enhancing the future employment pool for the national laboratories through student engagement. – Click [Here](#)

Tenure and Promotion questions (possible category):

- 62. Do you use a single set of tenure and promotion criteria across the system? Perhaps within specific disciplines taught across multiple affiliates in the system? Or does each affiliate manage its T&P processes itself?**

System Policy 12.01 describes our commitment to academic freedom and our common policy on tenure. The policy allows that the responsibilities of individual faculty within a university may vary, and that universities vary in focus within the A&M System. Teaching, research/creative activity, and service are most common in the A&M System but variance occurs and the specific criteria by which one meets university standards is determined by the university. There is no standard tenure criteria across System universities, nor within academic programs offered at multiple TAMUS universities.

- 63. If a system-wide T&P process is in play, can you provide that policy/process description?**

System Policy 12.01 describes the tenure process and at a broad level the tenure criteria.

- 64. Would existing tenured faculty be grandfathered in as tenured—and with credit given for their elapsed-time in current position—in the event of an affiliation? What about the time-in-role conditions relative to tenure-track (yet not-yet-tenured) faculty?**

No changes would occur in time in service for not-yet-tenured faculty. Similarly, those tenured under SFASU's existing policies would continue to be tenured at SFASU under the A&M System affiliation.

Questions Submitted by the SFA Staff Council

Governance/Policies and Procedures

1. Which of the following policies and procedures will remain local and which will be adjusted to merge with system expectations following affiliation:

a. contracting/purchasing

SFA administrative decision with adherence to A&M System Policies and Regulations.

b. information technology applications

Members of the A&M System are only required to participate in four assessed, mandatory contracts (i.e., Multi-Factor Authentication, Open Records, I-9 Compliance, and Website Accessibility). Members are not required to participate in any discretionary, “opt-in” contracts.

In addition, the A&M System has implemented a strong suite of enterprise-wide applications: purchasing (Aggiebuy), travel (Concur), financials (FAMIS/Canopy), position budgeting, grants management (Maestro), time and effort, and HR/Payroll (Workday). All members of the A&M System utilize these enterprise-wide applications. The A&M System would work with Stephen F. Austin to migrate purchasing, travel, financials, position budgeting, grants management, time and effort, and HR/Payroll to the system enterprise-wide applications in a manner and in a timeframe that does not harm Stephen F. Austin’s ability to complete research, educate students, or report to the State.

In contrast to these enterprise-wide applications, each institution in the A&M System can select their own Learning Management System, Student Information System, academic technology, marketing, cybersecurity, e-Signature, HR, virtual conferencing, business services and other applications. The A&M System has a pool of 54 system-wide agreements that can be leveraged by its members.

In addition to the system-wide agreements, the A&M System formed the Council on Academic Technology and Innovative Education (CATIE) to support the educational mission of the system members in matters related to technology use in the design, development, delivery, and assessment of courses and programs. CATIE members provide collaborative strategic direction, guidance, and recommendations on technology-enriched teaching, learning, and assessment initiatives that present a continuum. This continuum begins in the classroom with learning space design and classroom technologies and expands to encompass new environments and emerging trends. More about this strategic, dynamic, collaborative, and innovative council can be found at <https://www.tamus.edu/catie/>.

c. software purchases

SFA administrative decision.

d. emergency management

SFA administrative decision with adherence to A&M System Policies and Regulations.

e. construction management

SFA administrative decision with adherence to A&M System Policies and Regulations.

f. insurance and risk services

These services would be merged with the A&M System Risk Management office, but we would work with the local risk manager for SFA. The A&M System property insurance program insures \$12.8B of property across the State of Texas, and should SFA join the A&M System, would benefit from increased buying power and overall program structure. The A&M System is self-insured for auto insurance, with rates much lower than commercial insurance products. The A&M System is also self-insured for Workers Compensation Insurance; again this allows for lower premiums than commercial insurance. Both of these self-insured programs are administered in-house; premium claims are adjudicated by A&M System employees/adjusters and premiums are assessed by the Office of Risk Management. SFA would take part in our best in class, ROCIP and builder's risk programs. These programs allow A&M System Risk Management to better control safety and claims adjudication and have saved our members millions of dollars in insurance costs.

g. hiring procedures

SFA administrative decision with adherence to A&M System Policies and Regulations.

h. holiday and academic calendars

SFA administrative decision with adherence to A&M System Policies and Regulations and state law.

i. scholarship procedures/deadlines

SFA administrative decision.

j. property inventory/management

SFA administrative decision.

k. payroll

The A&M System utilizes Workday for HR/Payroll.

l. accounts payable

SFA administrative decision.

- 2. SFA is currently without a permanent president. The selection of our next leader will be critical to our success, and our institutional commitment to shared governance means that many stakeholders will want to be part of the selection process. How will the system approach the presidential selection process?**

The presidential search process is outlined by Board policy and was discussed in an earlier question. Two regents of the A&M System serve on each presidential search advisory committee. The balance of the committee consists of faculty, students, staff, alums, etc. The composition varies by the needs, history, and culture of the university. Board policy dictates that the committee is advisory. The advisory committee conducts a national search, aided by a recognized search firm and facilitated by the A&M System Academic Affairs Office. Ultimately, the advisory committee recommends no fewer than three names to the Chancellor who then brings one name to the Board of Regents as sole finalist. This process typically takes six to eight months before the new president would be onboard. SFA would have an interim president until such time a permanent president would be named.

- 3. What level of autonomy will SFA retain regarding its institutional shared governance practices?**

SFA administrative decision.

Will there be any changes to representative bodies such as Staff Council?

SFA administrative decision.

How will the system actively facilitate staff representation in system-level and university-level conversations?

The System Office does lead several system-wide committees that are represented by members of the A&M System. These committees cover areas in finance, human resources, employee benefits, pay plan administration, and information technology.

System Resource Investment & Affiliate Accountability

4. Please provide specific examples of how system affiliation will benefit SFA with respect to:

a. legislative representation,

Each A&M System member has a Government Relations (GR) representative that works on behalf of the institution and as part of the A&M System Government Relations team at the state level. The GR team develops broad legislative goals and policy initiatives for the system based on guidance from the Chancellor and Board, and the GR team's role is to provide information to legislators and policymakers, while not advocating for or against specific legislation. Two important initiatives that developed as a result of the leadership and discussions of our board of regents are the Comprehensive Regional University initiative from the 87th legislature and the affordability initiative that we are working on for this session. The A&M System has been the catalyst for developing these two initiatives and getting other systems of higher education on board. Another policy issue where the A&M System took the lead was getting an increase for the Small Institution Supplement, within the General Academic Formulas during the 86th Legislature. With 11 campuses that are part of the group of comprehensive regional institutions, our board, chancellor and GR team have worked hard and continue to work to garner additional resources for our regional institutions.

The GR team, including the institutional representatives, develops a coordinated plan to work on both broad system-wide policy initiatives and individual institutional initiatives. The GR team provides guidance on cross cutting issues such as formula funding or other appropriations policy decisions impacting higher education, higher education policy issues, or general business policy issues impacting higher education. The GR team has experts in each of these areas that coordinate these cross cutting issues on behalf of the entire system and in coordination with other systems of higher education. These subject matter experts work closely with all system members on these issues, including legislative tracking and reporting. For example, we work very closely with the institutions in training, preparation and review of each institution's Legislative Appropriations Request to ensure quality documents are submitted. We also have a former attorney on the GR team that coordinates with our Office of General Counsel on any potential legislation, whether broad or institution specific.

The GR representative is the institution's boots on the ground in Austin both during the session and the interim, providing regular feedback to the institution president and leadership. The GR team member for each institution works directly with the President and other leadership within the institution on institution specific legislative priorities for the institution. This would include exceptional item funding initiatives, potential Capital Construction Assistance Project Requests (formerly TRBs), institution specific legislation, or any other potential legislative issues. The GR representative works closely with the institution on developing the details of any proposals, testimony, handouts, legislative and staff visits, etc. The GR representative coordinates getting the

President to Austin to make key legislative visits, works with key staff from the institution's legislative delegation on the institutional initiatives, and coordinates efforts with the GR team.

b. resource allocation,

The A&M System has a strong governmental relations team that has been working on funding initiatives for regional universities with the goal of accessing more funding. A&M System-funded initiatives such as the Regents' Grants Program, the Regents' Scholarship Program, RELLIS, software/computer system projects, to name a few, benefit all system members easing the financial burden on the members.

SFA will gain access to A&M System-funded initiatives, collaborative projects and programs, lower borrowing costs, and legislative support from our teams in Austin and Washington, DC, examples of which are addressed in answers to questions in this request. Expertise in various subject matters and administrative functions are provided by highly-skilled individuals housed at the A&M System offices will be available to assist SFA.

c. employee benefits, and

The A&M System falls under Texas Insurance Code Chapter 1601. The A&M System offers coverage for employees, retirees and their eligible dependents. All A&M System member institutions and agencies offer the same benefits to their employees.

Employee Health Benefits

Employees of the A&M System are offered the A&M Care Plan for healthcare coverage. The employee premiums for the A&M Care Plan are Employee only (E/O) = \$0.00, Employee & Spouse (E/S) = \$281.04, Employee and Children (E/C) = \$195.26, Employee and Family (E/F) = \$395.50. The A&M Care Plan has a \$400 deductible with a \$5,000 Out of pocket maximum with in network providers. The copays are \$20 for a Primary Care Physician and \$30 for a specialist. The coinsurance is 20% paid by the employee and 80% paid by the plan. Our third party plan administrator is Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas. A designated Primary Care Physician is not required by the A&M Care Plan. The prescription benefits are a \$50 deductible with \$10 for generic and \$35 for preferred brand. Express Scripts administers the prescription benefit.

The A&M System offers dental through Delta Dental. The Dental PPO premiums are E/O \$30, E/S \$60, E/C \$63, E/F \$96. The Dental HMO premiums are E/O \$21.08, E/S \$37.48, E/C \$37.76, E/F \$58.66. Vision coverage is offered through Superior Vision. The premiums are E/O \$7.60, E/S \$16.12, E/C \$12.46, E/F \$22.22. The vision plan covers anti-reflective coating, scratch resistant coating, and polycarbonate at 100%.

The A&M System pays for Basic Life coverage of \$7,500 and Accidental Death & Dismemberment coverage of \$5,000 for all benefits-eligible employees. Optional life is offered up to six times salary or \$1,000,000 maximum. Three times salary is offered to new employees without evidence of insurability. Spouse coverage is offered up to \$200,000. Child coverage is offered up to \$10,000. Accidental Death & Dismemberment coverage is offered up to \$800,000.

The A&M System also offers Long Term Disability, Health Care Flexible Spending Accounts, Daycare Flexible Spending accounts, and an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP offers 5 in-person sessions per incident, unlimited telephonic counseling, and work/life solutions including training sessions, estate planning, legal counseling, financial education, travel planning, etc. The EAP program is 100% paid by System Benefits Administration and is not charged to the member locations.

Each A&M System member has their own wellness program led by their wellness champion. Each member can decide what programming, education, resources, events, and challenges they find best suited for the culture of their institution or agency. Each wellness program can apply for grant funds from System Benefits Administration to help fund their program.

Employee Retirement Programs

The A&M System is under Texas Government Code Chapter 821 Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS) for their mandatory retirement programs. All benefits-eligible employees are required to participate in TRS with some positions offered a one-time irrevocable decision to participate in the Optional Retirement Program (ORP). This is the same code that SFA currently falls under.

As set by the State of Texas, TRS participants currently contribute 8.0%, and the employer contributes 8.0%. Currently, all ORP participants contribute 6.65%. ORP participants that started in Texas ORP on or after 9/1/1995 receive a 6.6% employer contribution. Those who started in Texas ORP before 9/1/1995, receive an employer contribution of 8.5%. The ORP has 6 authorized vendors to provide investment options, Fidelity, Lincoln, Voya, TIAA, Pentegra, and AIG Retirement (VALIC).

The A&M System offers a voluntary Tax Deferred Account (TDA) 403(b) and the Texasaver 457 Deferred Compensation Plan (DCP). Both options offer Roth contributions, loans, and hardship withdrawals. The TDA has 6 authorized vendors to provide investment options, Fidelity, Lincoln, Voya, TIAA, Pentegra, and AIG Retirement (VALIC). The vendor for Texasaver is Empower Retirement.

Retiree Benefits

Under current state law, to qualify for A&M System benefits at retirement:

- You must be at least age 65 and have at least 10 years of TRS, ERS or ORP service credit, or your age plus years of service equal at least 80 and you have 10 years of service credit, and,
- 10 of those years of service are with the A&M System, or you have a combined total of 10 or more years of service with the A&M System, UT System, and ERS and the A&M System has the most years of service, and,
- you have an intact TRS or ORP account.

If SFA were to join the A&M System, time worked at SFA would count as A&M System time for retirement eligibility. This would be consistent with past affiliations.

If you qualify for A&M System benefits at retirement, all retirees receive the same employer contribution whether they were full or part time during their employment. There are no tiered amounts. Vision, dental, life insurance, and AD&D coverage are also offered to retirees at the same rate that employees pay. Life insurance is capped at \$100,000 at retirement and tiers down at 70 and 80 years old. An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is also offered to retirees with unlimited telephonic counseling and additional services like estate planning, legal counseling, financial education, travel planning, etc.

There are two retiree options for healthcare coverage. The A&M Care plan for retirees and their covered dependents that are not Medicare eligible, and the 65 Plus plan for retirees and covered dependents that are all Medicare eligible. The retiree premiums for FY2023 are: A&M Care Plan Employee only = \$0.00, Employee & Spouse = \$281.04, Employee and Children = \$195.26, Employee and Family = \$395.50; 65 Plus Employee Only = \$0.00, Employee & Spouse = \$134.90, Employee & Children \$67.54, Employee & Family \$224.81.

The 65 Plus is for Medicare primary retirees and covered dependents. The 65 Plus Plan has a \$400 deductible with a \$1000 out of pocket maximum for medical and \$400 out of pocket maximum for prescription drugs. The 65 Plus plan pays secondary to Medicare.

Retirees that have certified other healthcare coverage can use ½ of the employer contribution for employee only coverage, \$410 for FY2023, to pay for vision, dental, life insurance, and AD&D premiums.

**Comparison of Texas A&M University System Benefits
with Stephen F. Austin State University Benefits**

A&M Care			Total Premium	Employer Contribution	Employee Contribution
		E/O	815.28	815.28	\$0.00
		E/S	1,377.36	1,096.32	\$281.04
		E/C	1,205.80	1,010.54	\$195.26
		E/F	1,606.28	1,210.78	\$395.50
ERS HealthSelect					
		E/O	\$622.60	\$622.60	\$0.00
		E/S	\$1,338.60	\$980.60	\$358.00
		E/C	\$1,102.00	\$862.30	\$239.70
		E/F	\$1,818.00	\$1,220.30	\$597.70
Consumer Directed HealthSelect (High Deductible Plan)					
		E/O	\$622.60	\$622.60	\$0.00
		E/S	\$1,302.80	\$980.60	\$322.20
		E/C	\$1,078.02	\$862.30	\$215.72
		E/F	\$1,758.22	\$1,220.30	\$537.92
Difference in Employee Premium		ERS HealthSelect	Consumer Directed HealthSelect		
	E/O	Same	Same		
	E/S	\$(76.96)	\$(41.16)		
	E/C	\$(44.44)	\$(20.46)		
	E/F	\$(202.20)	\$(142.42)		

d. vendor relations.

The A&M System has established vendor relationships in many different areas and industries with its network of eleven universities, health science center, eight state agencies, and the RELLIS Campus. We also employ a shared services model that leverages our large network to create efficiencies and savings in many areas including various information technology initiatives.

5. What will the system gain by affiliating with SFA?

As mentioned in a previous Q&A, the Texas A&M System's mission is to serve the entire State of Texas and its citizens through research, education and service. SFA would add an important region of the state to our System, while allowing us to leverage our resources already in the region in such areas as forestry, agriculture and life sciences and emergency management.

SFA already has projects and programs with Texas A&M AgriLife Research, Texas A&M Agrilife Extension, and the Texas A&M Forest Service. In addition, SFA is a member of the RELLIS Academic Alliance at the System's RELLIS campus in Bryan. We could build on these collaborations by co-locating our Deep East Texas operations for all of these agencies plus the Texas Division of Emergency Management in Nacogdoches, providing real research and educational benefits for your students and giving us the benefit of establishing a closer strategic cooperation with a university of SFA's caliber.

The A&M System is interested in building and expanding SFA as a center for forestry management research and education, teacher preparation, the health care professions, engineering and other needed academic disciplines. We are interested in helping SFA create new programs in public health, nursing, engineering and cybersecurity to name a few. We also want to make SFA the home of our Healthy East Texas effort, which would be a collaboration between SFA, the Texas A&M Health Science Center and the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

We also admire many of your existing programs and believe they will become even better through a closer collaboration with our members who share similar missions and who will benefit from SFA's experience.

We also believe that SFA's values closely align with those of the A&M System and that our organizational structure with our ten regional universities is a good fit for SFA.

6. In what ways will the system assist with increasing SFA's enrollment? Describe how the system addresses potential enrollment competition across member institutions.

The enrollment management vice presidents of the A&M System meet weekly in a Community of Practice. This allows them to share market information, experiences with software and vendors, collaborate on financial arrangements for new products, etc. They work together in various ways to their mutual benefit. There is natural competition where recruitment areas overlap (for example, many of our universities draw well from Dallas/Ft. Worth, Houston, and San Antonio). We view the competition as good for both the students and the universities. We also find that recruiters employed at A&M System universities routinely refer students to their colleagues when there clearly is a better fit for that student at a "competitor."

7. Describe system expectations of institutional performance and accountability. How will performance objectives be set and measured? What happens when expectations are not met?

A&M System expectations of institutional performance and accountability are established by the Board. These performance and accountability measures are laid out in the A&M System Board of Regents Strategic Plan.

https://assets.system.tamus.edu/files/strategicplan/pdf/2016-2021-TAMUS_Long_FINAL.pdf

Human Resources

8. Will system affiliation require adjustments to current employment benefits, such as:

a. retirement

Please see response to question 4(c) above.

b. employee assistance programs

Please see response to question #2 under the “Academic Department Chairs Forum” section.

c. leave accruals

All accumulated leave accruals would transfer over.

d. compensatory time accruals

All accumulated leave accruals would transfer over.

e. employee and dependent tuition assistance

SFA Administrative decision.

Please provide a comparison of each of these current (SFA) vs. future (system) benefits, specifically noting potential reductions.

Please see response to question #2 under the “Academic Department Chairs Forum” section.

9. Will the system allow ERS years served at SFA to count toward the 10-year minimum rule for insurance at retirement?

Please see response to question #2 under the “Academic Department Chairs Forum” section.

10. There is significant concern about the impact of system affiliation on job security. Please describe how you will address positions at SFA that overlap with positions at the system level (e.g., general counsel, Title IX, audit services, human resources) as well as positions that may be currently outsourced at other institutions affiliated with your system (e.g., financial aid verification, grounds keeping, custodial services, and skilled trades work).

The A&M System Office offers many centralized shared services that take advantage of economies of scale and provide value-added expertise that would otherwise be too expensive to acquire and maintain by the members independently. SFA and the A&M System would work collaboratively over time to determine

which operations could be most effectively performed at the campus, at the A&M System Office through a shared service, or some combination.

11. In recent years, Hanover conducted salary studies for staff and faculty positions at SFA. (Detailed findings are available [here](#) and [here](#); in short, most salaries at SFA are below average compared to peer institutions and market.) What specific actions will the system take to

a. close the gaps between SFA employee salaries and salaries at peer institutions and

The A&M System has led an interim study, under the guidance of the Board of Regents, on the issues affecting affordability and access to higher education in Texas, particularly at the four-year institutions. In testimony before the House Appropriations Committee on September 9, Chancellor Sharp outlined the need for increased investment in the core higher education funding formulas, beyond simply covering student enrollment growth since the previous session. This base funding increase is critical to our ability to recruit and retain faculty and staff in this challenging economic environment. The A&M System is leading the charge, in partnership with the other systems, to increase the base funding needed to support faculty and staff pay. We also are working with the Legislative Budget Board to draw attention to the need for our higher education employees to be considered as part of any statewide strategy to increase state agency employee pay. In addition, we have called for the Legislature to close gaps in their commitment to support the Hazlewood legacy tuition exemption and the cost of Higher Education Group Insurance. All of these strategies would provide increased revenue available to address compensation and hiring levels for faculty and staff at SFA.

b. address salary equity, compression, and disparity concerns?

The A&M System Human Resource office would work with SFA to assist with identifying pay inequities.

Organizational Structure/Institutional Alignment and Identity

12. How will SFA's organizational structure change as a result of system affiliation?

SFA administrative decision.

13. Describe the criteria that will be used to evaluate potential department realignments and position reallocations.

SFA administrative decision.

14. In what ways does the system’s mission align with the values of our local and regional communities? Please provide evidence of how the system will support the growth, health, and continued success of both our local and regional communities.

The A&M System is comprised of a diverse mix of universities and agencies. We have a major R1 research university, a Historically Black university, and four members that are minority serving institutions by national designation. Unique among university systems nationally, we also have eight state agencies involved in such vitally important areas of research and service as agriculture and life sciences, engineering and emergency management. Our members not only educate Texans, they also fight wildfires, provide workforce training, develop new types of food and are a national leader in areas like nuclear engineering, autonomous vehicles and hypersonics.

At our core, though, is our overriding goal to provide a quality, affordable education for anyone in this state who desires it. We welcome all, and proudly live by the values of respect, excellence, leadership, loyalty, integrity, and selfless service. We want to produce leaders who can shape the future of Texas and leave it in a better place than they found it. We want our member institutions to excel not only in Texas but nationally and internationally. We spend billions of dollars nationally on our mission, and we never want the people of Texas to doubt for a moment the wisdom of that investment.

It is true that our System is bigger than a single university, but we recognize that each of our members has something unique and important to offer. We want each of our members to grow and prosper and to build on their existing values and traditions to continue their legacy of education and research into the future. SFA has served Texas for nearly 100 years. That is an accomplishment that should be celebrated by all Texans. We believe your values are our values—that, in the words of our Chancellor John Sharp, we “fit like a glove.”

15. Describe how the system aligns with and will further support SFA's current commitment to non-discrimination and diversity in addition to equity, and inclusion practices.

The A&M System is strongly committed to equal opportunity, diversity and inclusion, and full compliance with HUB laws. See the following: [Policy 08.01](#) (Describing the System’s commitment to equal opportunity and compliance with civil rights laws and affirmative action programs), [Policy 11.04](#) (the Board’s policy on academic member university admissions policies), the Board’s [Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#), and [Policy 25.06](#) (Describing System HUB programs).

16. To what degree are member institutions allowed to maintain their traditions and unique identity? Will SFA keep its name, mascot, traditions, colors, logo, and ring? Would local traditions and/or institutional identifiers be expected to change over time?

It would be a mistake to believe that the Texas A&M University System is all Aggies and Maroon. Our flagship is a large and important university with many singular achievements, but our System also includes Panthers, Buffalos, Islanders, Javelinas, Jaguars, Texans, Warriors, Lions, Eagles and Dustdevils.

We have no desire and no intention to change SFA's name, its mascot, its colors, its school song, its traditions, its logos or its rings. We want your university to affiliate with us for your benefit and ours. It would be a mistake to change the values and traditions that make Stephen F. Austin University the unique institution that it is.

17. SFA is a current NCAA Division I member of the Western Athletic Conference. Will system affiliation result in divisional membership changes?

No.

Will the system require changes to SFA Athletics' visual intellectual property?

No.

Finance

18. What level of financial autonomy will SFA retain with respect to:

- a. local holdings &**
- b. investments**

Response for both (a) & (b):

All A&M System cash is pooled for investment in the Cash Concentration Pool and endowed assets are similarly pooled for investment in the System Endowment Fund. A portion of SFA's operating reserves and endowments are already pooled for investment in those portfolios. That relationship would continue in a similar fashion with added benefits related to endowment reporting that is not currently provided. In addition, the A&M System would manage the daily cash needs to ensure sufficient resources are available to meet immediate needs while investing any excess funds on a daily basis.

- c. construction, and**

SFA administrative decision with adherence to A&M System Policies and Regulations.

d. the procurement of goods and services.

SFA administrative decision with adherence to A&M System Policies and Regulations.

19. Please detail any costs that member institutions are required to pay to the system for support services. What benefit does SFA yield from these payments?

The A&M System has deliberately consolidated certain essential services and functions at the System Offices to take advantage of economies of scale and to provide value-added expertise that would otherwise be too expensive to acquire and maintain by the members independently, including cash, debt and investment management; health benefits, risk, and property insurance programs; facilities planning and construction; audit and legal services; real estate management; information technology services; budgeting, accounting, and payroll.

20. How does the system allocate assets between member institutions?

While A&M System member assets are pooled for investment purposes, all assets of the A&M System members are accounted for separately.

21. Will funds raised by SFA's capital campaign or SFA Alumni donations be retained as local resources, or will they be absorbed as system revenue? Please provide specific examples from a previous affiliation with your system.

Funds raised by SFA's capital campaign and alumni donation will be retained locally.

Questions Submitted by the SFA Student Government Association

Student Life and Culture

1. Will we have to change our university's name?

No.

2. What can your university system offer to our students?

Many of the advantages of joining the A&M System are largely invisible to students and are related to administration, funding, governmental relations and research opportunities, which you may not see but which could vastly improve your experience at SFA and the value of an SFA diploma.

What we offer your students directly is access to a wider world that is made up of the more than 150,000 students that are already part of our System. We encourage our members to collaborate and share ideas, and that includes our student organizations. Chancellor Sharp has a council of student representatives from all of our institutions that he meets with regularly.

We believe we can also use the breadth of the A&M System—which currently includes 11 universities and eight state agencies—to improve the educational and research offerings at SFA, an issue that is more specifically addressed in earlier questions.

We also offer several system-wide programs that can benefit SFA students that need them. For example, Regent's Grants are a 10-year commitment to help students facing significant hardships to help them stay in school and graduate on time without incurring debt. Our Regent's Scholarships are another 10-year program to assist our member universities in attracting students who are from low-income, first generation, and/or under-represented populations.

The A&M System also offers major graduate opportunities in areas like Law, Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Veterinary Medicine, and other professional fields. For those interested in research, we encourage our members to collaborate whenever possible and have many examples of successful collaborations between our universities and agencies in areas like solar research, unmanned aerial vehicles and other areas.

3. Will we have to change our university's colors?

No.

4. Would e-sports and other student clubs merge with joining a larger system?

No.

5. Will this change the 100-year anniversary of Stephen F. Austin State University?

No.

6. What is the process and/or timeline for joining your university system?

Pending Board of Regent and Legislative action.

7. Will this affect student employee salaries?

No.

8. What will students have to give up in exchange for joining your university system?

Nothing.

9. Will we have to change our university's mascot?

No.

10. Will Stephen F. Austin's traditions still be supported if we were to join your university system?

Yes.

Academics, Faculty/Staff

11. Will there be any changes in current employee wages such as health insurance?

Changes to current employee wages will be the decision of SFA administration.
Employee health insurance will transition to the A&M System health plan.

12. Will joining your university system affect academic programs and/or guidelines?

SFA administrative decision.

13. Will faculty/staff be cut or downsized if we join your university system?

SFA administrative decision.

14. How will affiliation with your university system support academics and student success in the classroom?

There are many avenues whereby student success and academics would benefit from affiliation with the A&M System. To mention two: all of our universities engage in "ACUE," (funded by the System offices). ACUE is arguably the most effective program in the nation designed to improve the instruction of faculty. This improves the academic performance and satisfaction of our students. Secondly, all of our universities participate

in “EmpowerU,” a database/dashboard focused exclusively on student success (graduation rates, time to degree, excess hours, cost, etc.). Each university has stretch goals to improve performance and are held accountable for these metrics.

15. Will affiliation with your system help us with reducing Stephen F. Austin's financial challenges?

Affiliation with the A&M System will allow SFA to continue access to diverse investment pools for operating and endowed assets. Larger pools of assets provide for investment in a broad set of opportunities to enhance the return profile of the assets and enable for allocations to provide downside protection in volatile markets. The A&M System works with its members to balance short and long-term needs to ensure the proper allocation of operating resources to meet immediate needs while investing longer term assets. In volatile markets, the A&M System works to minimize the realization of losses while looking for opportunities to invest when valuations are lower.

Employing the highest rated system-wide financing program allows for economies of scale when issuing bonds as multiple projects are bundled into one financing. Larger deals garner more investor interest which results in a competitive edge to achieve lower borrowing costs, providing savings to all A&M System members. We have flexibility to tailor a financing structure to meet the specific needs of each project to meet cash flow needs or constraints.

Shared assets and programs allow for resources to be maximized to meet the needs of multiple A&M System members. An example that would be relevant to SFA is the A&M System’s desire to locate a forestry and emergency operations center in East Texas which would provide opportunities to collaborate on delivery of shared programs.

A&M System-funded initiatives such as the Regents’ Grants Program, the Regents’ Scholarship Program, RELIS, software/computer system projects, to name a few, benefit all system members easing the financial burden on the members.

16. How will joining your university system affect the average tuition costs for students?

Tuition and Fee rates are set by the Board of Regents. The A&M System does offer a 4-Year guaranteed tuition and fee rate as well as a one-year variable tuition and fee rate. Any changes to the current SFA rates will be made based on the recommendation of SFA administration and subsequent approval by the Board of Regents.

17. If we join your university system, will our projected graduation date(s) and/or requirements change?

SFA administrative decision.

18. How will joining your university system affect faculty and staff at Stephen F. Austin?

The primary impact will be through affiliation with others in the A&M System working on similar tasks. We call these “Communities of Practice” and they are helpful in addressing challenges the individual programs, faculty, and staff face.

19. How will affiliation with your university system affect the library at Stephen F. Austin?

The libraries in the A&M System are organized with a council and a chair. The primary activity of this council has been collaborative pricing on databases. As you are well aware, access to electronic resources has become a significant library cost. By partnering with a large flagship, all of our universities have been able to access these resources at reduced cost. To do so requires considerable coordination and the library directors and deans work together to accomplish this. You may also be knowledgeable of the collaborative effort state-wide in addressing the Elsevier contract. That effort’s origins lie in the A&M System’s library consortium.

Questions Submitted by the SFA Alumni Association

Identity

- 1. To what level will the university retain its identity - name, mascot, branding/logo, spirit, colors, traditions, culture, etc.?**

It would be a mistake to believe that the Texas A&M University System is all Aggies and Maroon. Our flagship is a large and important university with many singular achievements, but our System also includes Panthers, Buffalos, Islanders, Javelinas, Jaguars, Texans, Warriors, Lions, Eagles and Dustdevils.

We have no desire and no intention to change SFA's name, its mascot, its colors, its school song, its traditions, its logos or its rings. We want your university to affiliate with us for your benefit and ours. It would be a signal mistake to change the values and traditions that make Stephen F. Austin University the great institution that it is.

- 2. How will affiliation with the system preserve the integrity of the degree?**

Legally, the integrity of a degree is determined by the accreditation entity, in this case SACSCOC. Nothing changes in this accreditation from independent public university status to affiliation with a System. SACSCOC does not accredit "systems." SACSCOC accredits colleges and universities. This will not change following an affiliation. The *credibility* of the degree has been established over your long and successful history. This too will not be negatively impacted as SFASU will continue to be SFASU, producing outstanding graduates who reinforce the well-earned credibility you possess. If anything, affiliation with a university system with a world-wide reputation—as the A&M System has, will enhance the integrity and credibility of the degree.

Resources

- 3. What would be the impact of affiliation on resource allocation?**

- a. Do we gain more funding?**

The A&M System has a strong governmental relations team that has been working on funding initiatives for regional universities with the goal of accessing more funding. A&M System-funded initiatives such as the Regents' Grants Program, the Regents' Scholarship Program, RELIS, software/computer system projects, to name a few, benefit all system members easing the financial burden on the members.

- b. Will joining a system stabilize the university's financial situation?**

The A&M System communicates with each system member through "pulse-check" meetings to identify and understand issues that are impacting our members. The A&M System endeavors to help our members find solutions to

concerns before they become problems. We don't micro-manage, but provide a sounding board and recommend potential solutions. The availability of system-funded initiatives described in section (a) alleviates some of the financial burden that would ordinarily be borne by the system members.

4. What resources will SFA gain?

SFA will gain access to A&M System-funded initiatives, collaborative projects and programs, lower borrowing costs, and legislative support from our teams in Austin and Washington, DC, examples of which are addressed in answers to questions in this request. Expertise in various subject matters and administrative functions are provided by highly-skilled individuals housed at the A&M System offices will be available to assist SFA.

5. What services would likely be outsourced if we were to join the system?

The A&M System Office offers many centralized shared services that take advantage of economies of scale and provide value-added expertise that would otherwise be too expensive to acquire and maintain by the members independently. SFA and the A&M System would work collaboratively over time to determine which operations could be most effectively performed at the campus, at the A&M System Office through a shared service, or some combination.

6. How will joining a system effect ongoing, and planned, capital improvement projects?

Ongoing and planned capital projects would continue as planned with ongoing collaboration with A&M System shared resources (Facilities, Planning, & Construction, Treasury Services, etc.).

Personnel

7. What would be the impact of affiliation on personnel management?

SFA administrative decision.

8. Are current staff and faculty reassured their jobs (job security)?

SFA administrative decision.

9. Do they plan to right-size our budget by cutting people and/or programs?

SFA administrative decision.

10. How would SFA staff members' employee pay and benefits be impacted?

SFA administrative decision regarding employee pay.

The A&M System falls under Texas Insurance Code Chapter 1601. The A&M System offers coverage for employees, retirees and their eligible dependents. All A&M System member institutions and agencies offer the same benefits to their employees.

Employee Health Benefits

Employees of the A&M System are offered the A&M Care Plan for healthcare coverage. The employee premiums for the A&M Care Plan are Employee only (E/O) = \$0.00, Employee & Spouse (E/S) = \$281.04, Employee and Children (E/C) = \$195.26, Employee and Family (E/F) = \$395.50. The A&M Care Plan has a \$400 deductible with a \$5,000 Out of pocket maximum with in network providers. The copays are \$20 for a Primary Care Physician and \$30 for a specialist. The coinsurance is 20% paid by the employee and 80% paid by the plan. Our third party plan administrator is Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas. A designated Primary Care Physician is not required by the A&M Care Plan. The prescription benefits are a \$50 deductible with \$10 for generic and \$35 for preferred brand. Express Scripts administers the prescription benefit.

The A&M System offers dental through Delta Dental. The Dental PPO premiums are E/O \$30, E/S \$60, E/C \$63, E/F \$96. The Dental HMO premiums are E/O \$21.08, E/S \$37.48, E/C \$37.76, E/F \$58.66. Vision coverage is offered through Superior Vision. The premiums are E/O \$7.60, E/S \$16.12, E/C \$12.46, E/F \$22.22. The vision plan covers anti-reflective coating, scratch resistant coating, and polycarbonate at 100%.

The A&M System pays for Basic Life coverage of \$7,500 and Accidental Death & Dismemberment coverage of \$5,000 for all benefits-eligible employees. Optional life is offered up to six times salary or \$1,000,000 maximum. Three times salary is offered to new employees without evidence of insurability. Spouse coverage is offered up to \$200,000. Child coverage is offered up to \$10,000. Accidental Death & Dismemberment coverage is offered up to \$800,000.

The A&M System also offers Long Term Disability, Health Care Flexible Spending Accounts, Daycare Flexible Spending accounts, and an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP offers 5 in-person sessions per incident, unlimited telephonic counseling, and work/life solutions including training sessions, estate planning, legal counseling, financial education, travel planning, etc. The EAP program is 100% paid by System Benefits Administration and is not charged to the member locations.

Each A&M System member has their own wellness program led by their wellness champion. Each member can decide what programming, education, resources, events, and challenges they find best suited for the culture of their institution or agency. Each wellness program can apply for grant funds from System Benefits Administration to help fund their program.

Employee Retirement Programs

The A&M System is under Texas Government Code Chapter 821 Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS) for their mandatory retirement programs. All benefits-eligible employees are required to participate in TRS with some positions offered a one-time irrevocable decision to participate in the Optional Retirement Program (ORP). This is the same code that SFA currently falls under.

As set by the State of Texas, TRS participants currently contribute 8.0%, and the employer contributes 8.0%. Currently, all ORP participants contribute 6.65%. ORP participants that started in Texas ORP on or after 9/1/1995 receive a 6.6% employer contribution. Those who started in Texas ORP before 9/1/1995, receive an employer contribution of 8.5%. The ORP has 6 authorized vendors to provide investment options, Fidelity, Lincoln, Voya, TIAA, Pentegra, and AIG Retirement (VALIC).

The A&M System offers a voluntary Tax Deferred Account (TDA) 403(b) and the Texasaver 457 Deferred Compensation Plan (DCP). Both options offer Roth contributions, loans, and hardship withdrawals. The TDA has 6 authorized vendors to provide investment options, Fidelity, Lincoln, Voya, TIAA, Pentegra, and AIG Retirement (VALIC). The vendor for Texasaver is Empower Retirement.

Retiree Benefits

Under current state law, to qualify for A&M System benefits at retirement:

- You must be at least age 65 and have at least 10 years of TRS, ERS or ORP service credit, or your age plus years of service equal at least 80 and you have 10 years of service credit, and,
- 10 of those years of service are with the A&M System, or you have a combined total of 10 or more years of service with the A&M System, UT System, and ERS and the A&M System has the most years of service, and,
- you have an intact TRS or ORP account.

If SFA were to join the A&M System, time worked at SFA would count as A&M System time for retirement eligibility. This would be consistent with past affiliations.

If you qualify for A&M System benefits at retirement, all retirees receive the same employer contribution whether they were full or part time during their employment. There are no tiered amounts. Vision, dental, life insurance, and AD&D coverage are also offered to retirees at the same rate that employees pay. Life insurance is capped at \$100,000 at retirement and tiers down at 70 and 80 years old. An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is also offered to retirees with unlimited telephonic counseling and additional services like estate planning, legal counseling, financial education, travel planning, etc.

There are two retiree options for healthcare coverage. The A&M Care plan for retirees and their covered dependents that are not Medicare eligible, and the 65 Plus plan for retirees and covered dependents that are all Medicare eligible. The retiree premiums for

FY2023 are: A&M Care Plan Employee only = \$0.00, Employee & Spouse = \$281.04, Employee and Children = \$195.26, Employee and Family = \$395.50; 65 Plus Employee Only = \$0.00, Employee & Spouse = \$134.90, Employee & Children \$67.54, Employee & Family \$224.81.

The 65 Plus is for Medicare primary retirees and covered dependents. The 65 Plus Plan has a \$400 deductible with a \$1000 out of pocket maximum for medical and \$400 out of pocket maximum for prescription drugs. The 65 Plus plan pays secondary to Medicare.

Retirees that have certified other healthcare coverage can use ½ of the employer contribution for employee only coverage, \$410 for FY2023, to pay for vision, dental, life insurance, and AD&D premiums.

Comparison of Texas A&M University System Benefits with Stephen F. Austin State University Benefits

A&M Care			Total Premium	Employer Contribution	Employee Contribution
		E/O	815.28	815.28	\$0.00
		E/S	1,377.36	1,096.32	\$281.04
		E/C	1,205.80	1,010.54	\$195.26
		E/F	1,606.28	1,210.78	\$395.50
ERS HealthSelect					
		E/O	\$622.60	\$622.60	\$0.00
		E/S	\$1,338.60	\$980.60	\$358.00
		E/C	\$1,102.00	\$862.30	\$239.70
		E/F	\$1,818.00	\$1,220.30	\$597.70
Consumer Directed HealthSelect (High Deductible Plan)					
		E/O	\$622.60	\$622.60	\$0.00
		E/S	\$1,302.80	\$980.60	\$322.20
		E/C	\$1,078.02	\$862.30	\$215.72
		E/F	\$1,758.22	\$1,220.30	\$537.92
Difference in Employee Premium		ERS HealthSelect	Consumer Directed HealthSelect		
	E/O	Same	Same		
	E/S	\$(76.96)	\$(41.16)		
	E/C	\$(44.44)	\$(20.46)		
	E/F	\$(202.20)	\$(142.42)		

11. What is the likelihood of staff reductions/layoffs/consolidation with system departments?

SFA administrative decision.

12. Will SFA faculty and staff be brought up to the salaries of the current system?

SFA administrative decision.

13. Are the preferred systems aware of the compressed salaries?

a. Will they be able to address the disparity?

The A&M System Human Resource office would work with SFA to assist with identifying pay inequities.

14. How would current pay inequities among faculty and staff be addressed?

System Members have the flexibility to manage pay inequities within their institution. Pay adjustments and position changes including, but not limited to, reclassification, promotion, market and equity adjustments are employment actions available and utilized by System Members. Guidance is also available from the System level to help address pay inequities.

15. Will there be any changes in current employment benefits/wages such as health insurance, LEAP employee scholarship, raises in pay for faculty and staff, retention of staff as opposed to layoffs, things of that nature?

Changes to current employee wages, scholarship programs, faculty and staff pay, employee retention would be left to the discretion of SFA administration. Employee health insurance will transition to the A&M System health plan. Please see response to question #10 above regarding employee benefits.

16. What will happen to insurance benefits when an employee retires, if we are part of a system?

Please see response to question #10 above regarding employee benefits.

17. Will any current standings be overturned (tenure...)?

No.

Academic Programs

18. What would be the likelihood of elimination of academic programs if SFA should join the system?

SFA administrative decision.

19. Will any changes be required to current programs?

SFA administrative decision.

20. What programs, schools and departments would the interested parties be able to grow, improve and elevate?

In partnership with the Texas A&M Forest Service, SFA will be a world leader in forestry and forest management research and as a leading source of economic development, jobs and growth in East Texas. We also see SFA as a Deep East Texas hub for vital educational areas like teacher preparation, nursing and other needed educational disciplines and also as a vital part of building a healthier East Texas through the Healthy East Texas program.

SFA will build on its DeWitt School of Nursing to establish new academic programs, and work with A&M System's longstanding hospital partners to facilitate the procurement of new clinical placements to support the SFA Bachelor of Science Nursing program. Masters degrees with specialties in forensic nursing or acute care, or specialized certificates in psychiatric mental health, would be added to SFA—expanding their academic scope—while enabling current SFA nursing faculty to obtain a Doctor of Nursing Practice degree, with eventual plans for SFA to have its own doctorate degree. Collaboration with the Texas A&M School of Nursing would bring cancer screening initiatives, prevention-based health care delivery, along with training of more than 100 Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners in surrounding counties. Also, with SFA beginning engineering programs and the A&M System's world leadership in engineering, we expect engineering will be a significant signature program of the university.

Tuition

21. How will joining a system impact tuition?

a. Would tuition/fees go up or down for students?

Tuition and Fee rates are set by the Board of Regents. The A&M System does offer a 4-Year guaranteed tuition and fee rate as well as a one-year variable tuition and fee rate. Any changes to the current SFA rates will be made based on the recommendation of SFA administration and subsequent approval by the Board of Regents.

Athletics

22. Will the athletics program still be under the NCAA restrictions from the win with Duke?

See [Policy 18.01](#), SFA president would be responsible for all NCAA compliance issues.

Systems

23. How will this change the size of the campus for the future?

As mentioned in a previous Q&A, the A&M System's mission is to serve the entire State of Texas and its citizens through research, education and service. SFA would add an important region of the state to our System, while allowing us to leverage our resources already in the region in such areas as forestry, agriculture and life sciences and emergency management.

SFA already has projects and programs with Texas A&M AgriLife Research, Texas A&M Agrilife Extension, and the Texas A&M Forest Service. In addition, SFA is a member of the RELLIS Academic Alliance at the System's RELLIS campus in Bryan. We could build on these collaborations by co-locating our Deep East Texas operations for all of these agencies plus the Texas Division of Emergency Management in Nacogdoches, providing real research and educational benefits for your students and giving us the benefit of establishing a closer strategic cooperation with a university of SFA's caliber.

The A&M System is interested in building and expanding SFA as a center for forestry management research and education, teacher preparation, the health care professions, engineering and other needed academic disciplines. We are interested in helping SFA create new programs in public health, nursing, engineering and cybersecurity to name a few. We also want to make SFA the home of our Healthy East Texas effort, which would be a collaboration between SFA, the Texas A&M Health Science Center and the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

We also admire many of your existing programs and believe they will become even better through a closer collaboration with our members who share similar missions and who will benefit from SFA's experience.

We also believe that SFA's values closely align with those of the A&M System and that our organizational structure with our ten regional universities is a good fit for SFA.

24. Will student press freedoms continue to be supported on our campus? If yes, how?

[System Ethics policy](#) requires all Board members and employees to comply with all applicable local, state, and federal laws.

25. Will the system come in and tear down all of the residence halls?

No.

26. What benefits will this provide to SFA, the most impactful benefit?

This important question has been extensively discussed in earlier answers, so let's focus on one: Our work together. There is strength in numbers, and our System, with its many diverse members, offer its strength and diversity to SFA. That includes not only

educational and research opportunities but also representation of your needs in Austin and Washington D. C. Our membership almost literally covers the state. SFA could be a valuable part of the A&M System and also benefit from its greater resources and the benefits that come with size. We don't want to change SFA; we want it to stand proudly with our other A&M System members.

27. What will SFA lose in this acquisition?

In fairness, what is being discussed isn't an acquisition. SFA can choose to affiliate with the Texas A&M University System just as you affiliate with the Southland Conference. In return, we benefit from your location and your many fine programs, and you benefit from our size, resources and diversity. Joining a larger organization generally brings some transitional pains, but we have committed to SFA's leadership to make the transition as seamless and stress-free as possible and as beneficial as possible to them and to you, the students. We respect and admire your university and its rich traditions. We don't want to remake it. We want to make it better and in so doing make the A&M System better.

28. Will some services be consolidated, resulting in a less duplication of similar functions?

The A&M System Office offers many centralized shared services that take advantage of economies of scale and provide value-added expertise that would otherwise be too expensive to acquire and maintain by the members independently. SFA and the A&M System would work collaboratively over time to determine which operations could be most effectively performed at the campus, at the A&M System Office through a shared service, or some combination.

29. What are the dollar ramifications for affiliating or not?

Affiliation with the A&M System would provide many opportunities that would have a positive financial impact to SFA such as:

- Access to shared services that take advantage of economies of scale and provide value-added expertise
- Cash and Investment Management
- Debt Management
- Information Technology
- Information Security
- Increased Legislative Representation

30. What is in it for the other University systems to acquire SFA?

Intentionally left blank.

31. What are the top 5 reasons [xxx system] believes their organization is the right fit for SFASU?

As mentioned in a previous Q&A, the A&M System's mission is to serve the entire State of Texas and its citizens through research, education and service. SFA would add an important region of the state to our System, while allowing us to leverage our resources already in the region in such areas as forestry, agriculture and life sciences and emergency management.

SFA already has projects and programs with Texas A&M AgriLife Research, Texas A&M Agrilife Extension, and the Texas A&M Forest Service. In addition, SFA is a member of the RELLIS Academic Alliance at the System's RELLIS campus in Bryan. We could build on these collaborations by co-locating our Deep East Texas operations for all of these agencies plus the Texas Division of Emergency Management in Nacogdoches, providing real research and educational benefits for your students and giving us the benefit of establishing a closer strategic cooperation with a university of SFA's caliber.

The A&M System is interested in building and expanding SFA as a center for forestry management research and education, teacher preparation, the health care professions, engineering and other needed academic disciplines. We are interested in helping SFA create new programs in public health, nursing, engineering and cybersecurity to name a few. We also want to make SFA the home of our Healthy East Texas effort, which would be a collaboration between SFA, the Texas A&M Health Science Center and the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

We also admire many of your existing programs and believe they will become even better through a closer collaboration with our members who share similar missions and who will benefit from SFA's experience.

We also believe that SFA's values closely align with those of the A&M System and that our organizational structure with our ten regional universities is a good fit for SFA.

32. Why is each system interested in acquiring SFA? What does each system consider as major benefits of SFA joining their organization?

We have outlined how we expect to benefit from SFA's affiliation. Other systems will have to speak for themselves.

33. Will existing honorific building naming's be dismissed and sold by the system?

No. SFA Administrative decision.

34. What parts of our current processes will we lose?

The A&M System and SFA will work collaboratively over time to determine which operations and processes can be eliminated, revised, and/or enhanced to better serve the students, faculty, and staff.

35. Would SFA become essentially a feeder school for students who aren't initially accepted to the flagship institution, resulting in many students enrolling for just one year before moving on?

The A&M System does not desire for any of its universities to be “feeder schools” for any other university. The Texas A&M University System grows and improves when each of its universities grow. For the A&M System to serve your region, SFASU must grow and develop. Texas A&M cannot do this. For the A&M System to grow in market share of students pursuing higher education, SFASU must grow. Given that the level of annual applications to Texas A&M University far exceeds the actual capacity for new students, there is no capacity at Texas A&M for a “feeder school” approach.

Undoubtedly, our “Program for System Admission” (PSA) has influenced this concern. In the PSA program, applicants to Texas A&M who meet your automatic admission standard but are not admitted to TAMU due to capacity constraints are offered admission to SFASU. The “carrot” to entice the student who has not previously considered SFASU is that they are guaranteed admission to TAMU after one year if they meet certain criteria at SFASU. This program is not designed for students to transfer to TAMU. It is designed for the student to STAY at SFASU and we find that a large percentage of the students do stay at the referred university. They become involved in student life, love their classes, enjoy their roommates, and stay. They generally do not transfer.

Importantly, the program’s design is to build your enrollment. The program’s design is not to create a “feeder school.” And in fact, a negligible percentage of the students in this program use it as a feeder opportunity.

36. Does assimilation with [xxx system] provide a wider range of faculty and student teaching and learning resources? If yes, how?

The A&M System maintains a variety of teaching and learning resources that would be of benefit to SFASU. For example, all universities are currently engaged in a multi-year project through ACUE where faculty earn credentials associated with instructional excellence. We have already witnessed tremendous transformation in the quality of teaching. Faculty are generally not taught how to teach, they are experts in their disciplines, not necessarily pedagogy. ACUE has been highly effective in working with our universities and faculty in transforming instruction. ACUE is but one example. The Council on Academic Technology and Innovative Education works collaboratively across universities to bring resources that provide improved experiences for faculty and students. Quality Matters, for example, was championed by CATIE, as have accessibility issues, cost savings on technology, OER, LEAP, etc.

37. Will SFA benefit from expertise, experience, and "buying power" of the system in terms of software that the university uses to conduct business, enrollment/recruitment practices, advertising/marketing? If yes, how?

The A&M System Information Technology Office has 54 system-wide agreements in place. These agreements include ETLAs (e.g., Adobe, Microsoft, Oracle, Palo Alto), tools, and services across the following areas: academic technology, marketing, cybersecurity, e-Signature, HR, virtual conferencing, business services and others. A list of these system-wide agreements can be found at <https://it.tamus.edu/services/contract/>.

38. What will SFA give up -- although I'm sure a system cannot thoroughly answer the question of what functions, student programs, and academic programs and jobs may cease to exist until a thorough analysis of the university is completed, are there some initial thoughts?

SFA administrative decision.

39. How will the system help make SFA more academically competitive compared to other universities?

SFA has a strong academic history and we look forward to learning from SFA's success and assisting SFA in areas where the A&M System has enjoyed great success. Certainly, the university's history and prowess in teacher preparation is among the best in the state and would be a tremendous asset in the A&M System. SFA produced 301 newly-certified teachers employed in Texas in 2021, the 6th highest total in the state and was surpassed in the A&M System only by Texas A&M University. We have worked with Dr. Judy Abbott, Dean of the Perkins College of Education, through SFA's offering of the EC-6 teacher preparation program at our RELLIS campus. Our experience with Dr. Abbott and her team has been nothing short of outstanding. Including SFA's education programs in our Community of Practice of education deans and teacher preparation professionals will be an asset to SFA and to the A&M System.

We have stressed elsewhere the importance of Forestry to the region and to the university, and were surprised to find the Ph.D. program in Forestry on the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's (THECB) "Low Producing Program" inventory. Having several "low producing programs" ourselves, we understand that key programs may be maintained even when not producing the minimum number of graduates required by the THECB, but we also look forward to working with SFA in transforming that program into one that continues to meet the forestry needs of the nation for generations to come.

SFA's program inventory is extensive and includes a comprehensive range of programs in the arts, business, social sciences, education, humanities, agriculture, to only name a few. The addition of engineering physics is fairly recent (6 years) and even more recent is SFA's foray into the mechanical and electrical engineering disciplines. The A&M System knows engineering and we would take it upon ourselves to assure the developing engineering programs at SFA are first class, ABET (Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology) accredited academic programs.

40. What changes do they believe need to be made?

Intentionally left blank.

41. What do they feel are SFA's strengths and weaknesses? Why?

Please see response to question #39 above.

Alumni Association

42. What happens to the Alumni Association? Will it remain independent?

SFA administration decision in accordance with [System Policy 60.01](#), [System Regulation 60.01.01](#).

43. How does the system view alumni relations for system institutions?

SFA administration decision in accordance with [System Policy 60.01](#), [System Regulation 60.01.01](#).

44. What type of changes, if any, would be made to the Office of Alumni Relations?

SFA administrative decision.

45. Do you allow for an interdependent alumni association?

See [System Policy 60.01](#), [System Regulation 60.01.01](#).

46. Would the system recognize standing MOU's between the University and Alumni Association?

See [System Policy 60.01](#), [System Regulation 60.01.01](#).

47. Would the system make changes to the current administration (cabinet level positions)?

SFA President's decision.

48. Will the system allow the university to partially fund salary and benefits for alumni relations staff members?

See [System Policy 60.01](#), [System Regulation 60.01.01](#).

49. How can the system bring value to the 115,000 living alumni (more than 60,000 email addresses) and how to engage with alumni?

SFA already possesses an outstanding reputation among those who have encountered Lumberjack graduates. Our desire will be to enhance and grow the value of that degree for generations to come, reinforcing the well-earned credibility the university already has. Furthermore, the world-wide reputation of the A&M System will enhance the perceived credibility of the degree beyond those already familiar with the Stephen F. Austin State University.

SFASU Foundation, Inc.

50. Can the foundation remain fully independent? If yes, are we required to use the system's investment managers or select our own? Or will the system absorb the university foundation assets?

The foundation can remain fully independent, but must comply with A&M System policies on affiliated organizations. The foundation can direct its own investments. We have a mix of independent foundations that operate completely autonomously, while others choose to invest assets in the A&M System Endowment Fund. Each system member or affiliated foundation retains ownership of their assets and those assets will not be absorbed by the A&M System.

51. Describe the structure in which the foundation will operate within the system. Based on the response, do you allow for the distribution of funds from a foundation to support operations of an alumni association?

See [System Policy 60.01](#), [System Regulation 60.01.01](#).

52. Will funds raised in the "Elevate SFA" capital campaign remain with our campus?

Yes.

Would scholarships established for SFA students continue to benefit only SFA students?

Yes.

53. Does the system dictate endowment spending policies? If yes, how?

Endowment spending is prescribed by Board policy and applies to all endowments invested through the A&M System Endowment Fund. The endowment fund is structured to ensure reserves are built to provide a steady, reliable payout to meet the needs for which the endowment was established. If a member chooses, payout can be redirected to the corpus to build a larger base or defer spending, if desired.

54. What will happen to scholarships started by alumni and friends?

No change.

55. Would the system recognize standing MOU's between the University and the foundation?

See [System Policy 60.01](#), [System Regulation 60.01.01](#).

City

- 56. What, if any, consideration has been discussed concerning changes to Nacogdoches who has been generous both financially and graciously?**

Intentionally left blank.