

Stephen F. Austin State University
REPORT TO THE BOARD OF REGENTS 10/31/00
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Report Given Prior to Board Vote on Presidential Search

I would like to again thank the Board for this opportunity to report on issues addressed by Faculty Senate in recent months as well as general faculty concerns.

In the past quarter, the Senate has passed three resolutions of note, one of which was related to identity theft. The crime of identity theft is becoming increasingly widespread. The acquisition of someone's Social Security Number allows a criminal, in essence, to assume the victim's identity – to obtain credit, a driver's license, and any number of other benefits. The use of Social Security Numbers for faculty, staff, and student IDs is a practice of great concern to the Senate. Many people, including myself, have had our wallets stolen on campus and our ID cards were among those items in the wallet. The Senate has requested that the administration devise an alternative alphanumeric system for IDs to cut down on the possibility of identity theft.

The other two resolutions passed relate to the state mandated Developmental Education program. Many faculty do not believe it is the responsibility of higher education to provide such programs and are concerned with the cost, both in monetary and staffing terms, to provide such services. However, the legislature has spoken, and we must now comply. The Faculty Senate has suggested some guidelines for administering these programs and they are now under review by the Academic Affairs Council.

The Senate is continuing its work on issues related to intellectual property rights and will likely pass suggested modifications to policy by December. A second policy being reviewed is Faculty Attendance at Commencement. A variety of perspectives have been offered, ranging from requiring attendance at one ceremony per academic year, to required attendance at all ceremonies. In the latter case, alterations to the current commencement process have been discussed, but the policy is still in committee. Finally, the Senate continues to address the need for increasing graduate assistant stipends, as this is one of the major roadblocks to recruitment and retention of graduate students at SFASU.

The Senate has devoted a great deal of time to the Presidential Search, in regularly scheduled meetings, interviews, receptions, and specially called forums. Historically, the faculty have felt removed and uninvolved in these processes. In this search, however, the faculty requested and took advantage of every opportunity to participate. Unfortunately, there was no formal, identified mechanism by which we could provide our perspective to the Board at the conclusion of the interviews and meetings. It was discouraging to me, personally, how few faculty took an active role. Is this due to lack of interest? I think not, given the many one-on-one and small group discussions that occurred on a daily basis. I believe that the faculty feel powerless in the process, meaning that their voice will not be heard. Therefore, why expend the energy.

One of my goals as Chair of Faculty Senate was and continues to be improved communication between faculty, administration, and the Board. However, communication is a 2-way process. One of the luxuries of being an independent university is the ability of the Board, the administration, and the faculty to work together to further the mission of the university. At this point in time, faculty communication with the Board is essentially one way, with the Chair of Senate giving a 5-minute quarterly report to the Board. I would like to work with the Board to set up dialogues with the faculty. Whether this is accomplished through Faculty Senate meetings or some other means, the faculty would welcome the opportunity to talk WITH the Board rather than to the Board. In this way, the academic status of SFA may be advanced with cooperation and understanding rather than with the trend of faculty speculation and paranoia continuing. I have been pleased in the past year and a half with the Board's willingness to listen to faculty concerns.

We are entering a new era, so to speak, with a new President about to come on board. With this transition into the new millenium, may we now begin to move forward to more open dialogue.