

Stephen F. Austin State University

REPORT TO THE BOARD OF REGENTS, Jan. 14-15, 2002

The concerns of the Faculty Senate remain the same ones that I reported on in October.

As I said in October, low salaries are a serious problem. I'm sorry to be singing the same song, but the problem is there. Higher salaries are needed to retain good young faculty and to attract good replacements to replace retirees. According to figures from the Coordinating Board, SFA salaries at each rank place us near the bottom compared to the other public universities in Texas. In Fall 2000, SFA's average salaries for full professors ranked 28th from among 35 campuses; associate professors' salaries were 32nd among 35, and average assistant professors' salaries were 33rd among 35. Low assistants' salaries really hurt in recruiting new faculty. As you know, in September, Dr. Guerrero appointed a Salary Equity Committee, of which I am one of the nine members, to study this problem, and this Spring the committee should have an initial report. Finding money to begin correcting these deficiencies will be a real challenge for your board. (Although I am only discussing faculty salaries today, staff salaries are also too low.)

Turning to another subject: The Faculty Senate has recommended raising admissions standards by requiring that freshmen in the second 25% of their high school class have SATs of 930 or ACTs of 19. Presently we have clear admission for the top two quartiles. Raising admissions standards does run the risk, at least in the short term, of reducing enrollment, and faculty are very aware of that risk, but the Senate believes a modest increase in admission standards will improve retention rates in the long run by attracting better students. A modest increase in admissions standards would help publicize to students, parents, and high school counselors SFA's commitment to quality.

We need to improve our retention rate. Our retention rate for Fall 2001-- the percentage of last year's first time freshmen who returned to SFA this Fall was 59.5%. This was an increase of 1.4% from the previous year, but we can do better, especially among Black and Hispanic freshmen whose retention rate this Fall was less than the overall average.

Faculty and administration are doing everything they can to raise that rate. A better screening of students who are admitted would help. We need to continue building strong developmental programs to offer remediation to students whose high school preparation was lacking. The Faculty Senate strongly believes that faculty in the departments, such as the English and Math departments, are doing a good job in remedying deficiencies that were twelve years in the making. We believe that decisions about teaching techniques and developmental curriculum should remain in the academic departments. Sadly, we must realize that all students in Math 98 or 99 or English 99 are not going to succeed in overcoming bad high school and elementary school preparation, and, frankly, faculty who teach developmental courses resent being accused of bad teaching when not every developmental student passes a remedial course.

Finally, as I reported in October, faculty are very concerned about what rights they will have to the ideas and content they develop and contribute for distance learning courses. The present policy D-20 is under study by the administration for revision to meet changing technology. When that policy is modified, the Senate hopes that the main principles of the Intellectual Property Policy which it recommended in May will be included.

Thank you for your attention. Please contact me at any time if you have any questions.

Dr. Joseph A. Devine
Professor of History
Faculty Senate Chair, 2001-2002
[Phone: 936-468-2072; Mail: Box 13013, SFA Station; E-mail: jdevine@sfasu.edu]