

INTRODUCTION

In our 80th year many exciting events have been occurring across campus. As examples, the public recognition of the Nursing program expansion into additional facilities and the dedication of the Human Services and Telecommunications building represent visible evidence of commitments by SFASU to provide needed higher education opportunities to our present and future students. The Faculty Senate applauds the Board of Regents, individuals, faculty and groups that brought these events to fruition. Further, recent visits from foreign delegations broaden our horizons and strengthen networks to attract new students as we embrace global ideas and campus diversity as central themes to being a 21st century university.

Moreover, faculty are pleased with Dr. Guerrero's decision to remain President of SFASU and look forward to helping to implement his vision of a university on the way up to a new level. To that point, the Faculty Senate extends appreciation to the Board of Regents for rallying quickly to remind Dr. Guerrero of their support for him to lead SFASU in the coming years that will be filled with unique challenges coming from legislative decisions including increased pressure about accountability and to grow the student body. This insightful, consistent leadership will allow the university to remain well respected in the region and at the state level.

FACULTY RECRUITMENT

As representatives of the faculty, we suggest that recruitment of outstanding faculty will give SFASU an additional competitive edge to attract quality students. Historically, it has been a pattern at SFASU to hire Assistant Professors upon the retirement or departure of faculty from campus, regardless of rank. Among these were a significant number of Associate and Full Professors. I cannot tell you the exact number as the university does not currently keep such records. For example, over the last few years SFASU has hired an average of about 40 new faculty members; the large majority brought in at the

Assistant Professor level, except for administrative positions. The consistent arguments for this practice include budget constraints and the need for time to see if the person is a professional and can “fit into the campus culture” before being granted tenure. But this approach to faculty recruitment can create a campus that might not be able to move to a higher profile in university circles because it often takes several years for faculty to publish and gain a reputation that can attract significant extramural funding, including federal funding such as NSF, NIH or NEA grants. At this juncture in time, it may be prudent to examine ways that programs can recruit Associate and Full Professor to our campus that have well established granting skills and are recognized for teaching and service. I suggest that the university will benefit in the long run from a thorough examination of this issue in its efforts to generate a new image as more than a regional state institution.

Indeed, in the coming years, the recruitment of students will be increasingly competitive between Texas universities. Published studies suggest that because of a set of factors, among these being costs of education and quality of programs, many high school graduates are opting to start their college degree quests in community colleges; the percentage of students making this choice have been reported to be as high as 70%. The remaining 30% will have to be won over by well-marketed outstanding university characteristics. In our opinion, although biased to say the least, we feel that a robust, active, recognized, if not renowned faculty could be one of the characteristics to sway students’ decisions to attend SFASU.

FACULTY ISSUES

The Faculty Senate thanks Board of Regent members for their sincere interest in recent delicate discussions between the Faculty, Faculty Senate and the Administration. The Faculty Senate and a large portion of the faculty await final decisions in this matter. On the other hand, a positive result presently underway is the collaborative formulation of a more transparent tenure process for SFASU. This activity will go far to help faculty understand the tenure process as well as allow concerned campus constituents full access to procedures and guidelines that critically impact the professional careers of faculty. The Senate recognizes Dr. Cullinan for leading the movement to address tenure policy across campus -

certainly a major issue to attack in her first year as Provost. The Senate also was pleased to be a working part of this review process.

Another aspect that arose from a more careful look at communication lines between the Administration and the Faculty, was an idea forwarded by the Faculty Senate in the late 1990s but not implemented. Since our campus is and will be in a dynamic flux as the university moves forward, it might be an excellent time to implement the presence of an ombudsman position to provide guidance for faculty in working with the administration on broad or sensitive issues. In fact, it might be a good concept to consider a representative for staff as well. This is not to say current communication lines are not open, but an identified spokesperson for the faculty and staff could improve moral and strengthen communications between different levels of the institution by helping to produce a more effective and efficient campus communication environment. Working together will produce better results that will equate to a stronger image of SFASU meeting its mission.

The faculty is encouraged by the potential of salary increases that could result from new tuition revenue. Let me quickly add that the faculty is concerned about the additional burden to students and their families. Many of us have strong empathy for this issue as most faculty went through similar experiences to gain our credentials to become faculty members. Investment in educating ones self has been proven to yield life-long returns in earning potential and improved self esteem. It is important to add that even with a significant raise for university employees, if it is approved, our salaries will collectively be millions of dollars below average market salaries for faculty. A clear solution to meet this gap must include a campus effort to attract more students that take more credit hours per semester. Enrollment growth must remain a priority for the university.

We also are hopeful that the frozen positions be carefully evaluated and filled to support critical growth areas of the campus in the near future. It is our understanding that approximately \$ 1 million dollars of positions are on hold. Lastly, we would like to see movement on the issues of unfunded teaching obligations commonly falling under the heading of independent studies and better compensation

for adjunct faculty. Although the university receives state funds for independent study courses, the faculty does not realize compensatory gain for doing these courses above and beyond their assigned workload.

EDUCATIONAL TREND POTENTIAL

One of the ways universities can attract more students is to look down the road to future careers and plan to build those programs to meet future demands of employers. Currently, SFASU is engaging in several of these growth areas, specifically biotechnology, phyto-pharmacology (Dr. Shiyu Li), environmental management, health and geospatial technologies. In my humble opinion, there are a couple of other areas that should be explored: regional planning and integrated transportation studies. East Texas lies on and along a path of significant social and economic change in the next two decades. The Interstate 69 concept development is moving forward at a measured pace but could explode into a thing of the near future with Congressional appropriations. SFASU is in a geographically and academically central place to be part of documenting and helping to plan for the transition. Partnerships with economic development groups in the region will provide the university another voice to be able to respond to these economic opportunities. In addition, increased cross College collaboration will be needed to be able to successfully address these new challenges.

SENATE BUSINESS

The Faculty Senate has been focused on helping review the Tenure and Promotion process on campus. We also have begun an internal review of our own structure and constitution. This work will continue into the new year. It has been a pleasure to serve as Faculty Senate Chair. My colleagues on the Senate have devoted many hours of service to better our institution. I also am confident that the Faculty Senate will continue to be a positive voice for the faculty in the future and a willing partner to making SFASU a better university. My confidence is based on knowing that Faculty Senate leaders for the next few years are dedicated and devoted to education. At this point, let me introduce to the Board of

Regents Dr. Gary Wurtz who will lead the Faculty Senate next year. Thank you for allowing me to speak directly to you with faculty concerns over the last year.

Sincerely,

Darrel L. McDonald
Faculty Senate Chair 2003-2004
Professor Geography/Coordinator HUES GIS Laboratory