

Faculty Senate Report to the Board of Regents April 13, 2006

I would like to thank you for giving me this last opportunity to speak to you on behalf of the faculty at SFA. It has been a privilege to be their spokesperson this past year. SFA has an extremely talented and gifted faculty who work hard to provide the students with the best educational opportunities we can offer. We are always proud of the accomplishments of our students such as those who are presented to you at many of your meetings. We must remember that their accomplishments do not occur on their own, but also must occur in the classrooms and labs led by our faculty. With me today is Dr. Chris Barker from the Department of Geology. You already heard from Dr. Barker this past fall, when he presented our report in my absence. He is the incoming chair of the Faculty Senate, and I am sure you will be impressed with his dedication to this position and to SFA.

You have in front of you the report from the Senate regarding our Faculty Survey. A complete electronic copy of this report may be found on the Senate Webpage at www.sfasu.edu/FacSenate/Survey. In this report is an Executive Summary, as well as the results from the 2001 survey. The following are highlights of some of the results.

- 1: There was an outstanding response from the faculty. To get over 60% return from a survey in any form is amazing. Response rates were high across colleges and ranks.
- 2: A large number of faculty have been educated in Texas, including 94 faculty who responded that they had earned a degree from SFA. Our faculty not only care about SFA as a place where they work, but many are alumni.
- 3: Just over 12% expressed experience as faculty in a Texas system, so overall responses are not seasoned by past experiences in a system.
- 4: Overall, 52% stated that SFA should join a system, significantly higher than not joining a system (28.1%) or no opinion (19.9%). This trend was expressed across all but 2 ranks and all but 2 colleges.
- 5: A significant majority of faculty who support the idea of joining a system identified Texas Tech as their choice. This response carried across all but the Instructor ranks. Faculties of two colleges supported the idea of joining the Texas A&M system while one college faculty would prefer UT.
- 6: Reasons for their decision were categorized into major topic areas. Three faculty members with expertise in the area of qualitative analysis, -individually and then collectively, created the groups based on the use of terms and/or phrasing. By far the most common response for joining a system was a perception of micromanagement by the Board of Regents. Also, it was felt that joining a system might assure more funds for salaries and academic activities. Conversely, loss of autonomy and independence were

the most common reasons against joining a system. The same faculty felt the idea of joining a system would not guarantee increased faculty salaries.

Please note a desire to fulfill the mission of SFA with teaching, research and service appears to be the rationale behind most responses. Both sides made strong arguments for joining or not joining a system. Both used anecdotal evidence and both made unsubstantiated claims. This survey was not taken lightly, and these results should provide all of us something to work from to improve SFA. Last summer I reported that over the years 3 themes have been consistently stated in Senate reports to the Board of Regents: low salaries, low morale and poor communication. The Senate believes that these three issues are in part driving the responses we have in front of us today.

We have a strategic plan; we have begun a technology plan; we have initiated a long-range plan. There has been a Phase 1 and a Phase 2. There will be a Phase 3, 4, etc.

The faculty would like to know: where is the funding plan to bring the faculty salaries to their proper level when compared to our peer institutions in Texas and across the south? No matter how you dice it, our salaries do not match what our peers receive. If there is an impression that the SFA faculty do not work hard, the default impression is that faculty at other institutions must be working harder to receive their higher salaries. Can we honestly make either claim? On what basis? The Senate, as am I, is looking towards your report on faculty salaries today.

The faculty would like to know: where is the funding plan to improve academic programs. How can we grow graduate programs without competitive funding for more and higher paying assistantships. With the current plan to eliminate low-cost housing on campus for nontraditional, international and married students, this will inhibit the ability for them to develop the same support groups that undergraduates obtain in the dorms or in fraternities or sororities. Slight increases in already low assistantship rates and no low-cost on-campus housing does not encourage growth in our graduate and international programs.

The faculty would like to know: how does anyone expect faculty to have anything but low morale when the oft-stated promise that only outside funds would be used for the development of the baseball/softball complex is broken to a tune of \$1 million to be taken out of our already low reserve funds that apparently can not be used for desperately needed increased O&M budgets for academic departments?

The faculty would like to know: why is that for every step forward on improved communication the campus community has attempted, such as the improved budget-building process and the current strategic plan that was built from the ground up with input from across campus, academics appears to always take the back seat to other aspects of campus life? With every effort of the Administration to obtain input from all portions of campus, it is plainly illustrated there is an apparent lack of concern about the delivery of our knowledge in the classrooms and labs.

The faculty would like to know: When will we see the same efforts and excitement on campus for academic building and program development that we are currently seeing with the UC, the Rec Center, or the dorms?

In January I was asked if we resolved the salary issue, would the faculty have any other issues. I told you yes, and the Senate believes the survey highlights some of the issues that continue to concern us. When the above issues are addressed, then it may be time for another faculty survey. When the above issues are addressed, the results of a future survey may be very different. If they are not addressed, the Senate believes that such a survey will produce even more dramatic responses than found in the survey in front of you.

SFA is a wonderful academic institution, with great potential for innovative educational opportunities for students and a creative atmosphere for faculty. The Senate wants to work closely with the Administration in developing SFA's potential in teaching, research and service. Please give us the tools to do so. Please allow the professionals you have hired to do the work they have been hired to do. Our true legacy will be the success of our students in society, as well as in bricks and concrete. Thank you.

Brian P. Oswald
Chair, Faculty Senate 2005-2006