

Faculty Senate Report to the Board of Regents

October 20th, 2005

Due to a previously scheduled professional meeting in Oklahoma, Brian Oswald, Chair of the Faculty Senate is not able to present this report. My name is Chris Barker, Chair-elect and a faculty member in Geology, and I will be providing you this report today.

Only a few months into the new academic year, it has still been very busy for all of us. Katrina and Rita have influenced activities across campus. In spite of the hurricanes and the building activities on campus, the academic instruction on campus has continued, with increases in enrollment reported. The Senate is pleased to see this increase, and hope that this represents the beginning of a trend for years to come.

We were pleased that Mr. Fred Wulf was able to attend our first meeting of the year. His willingness to answer questions raised by the Senators was a great step in addressing the communication issue raised in our last report. We thank Fred for coming and hope others of you will take the opportunity to attend our meetings. We especially wish to invite the new Board members to attend so they can begin to meet and interact with our faculty.

At the September Senate meeting, the Senators voted to transfer the office space we have had in the Library over to the Provost's office. We determined that with the improved Faculty Senate webpage, holdings of Faculty Senate documents in the ETRC, the increasing use of electronic communication on campus and for many other reasons, we really didn't need the office space. Dr. Cullinan will use this space to start the development of a Faculty Development/Teaching Excellence Center. The Senate believes this Center will greatly improve the academic delivery on campus, and encourage you to support the development of this center.

The faculty have been told for the last couple of years that our salary increases will be tied to increases in enrollment. If Spring enrollment also increases, we are assuming that the administration and the Board of Regents will be providing a salary raise pool greater than this past years 3%. If SFA is to make any movement towards placing our faculty salary rank in the state to the same level that of Deans and administrators (as reported to this body by past-chair Dr. Wurtz in April), a long-term plan should be developed and an institutional commitment made. We look forward to hearing from the Boards' committee on faculty salaries in the near future on their findings, and offer our help if needed.

In addition to general salary levels, the problem of faculty salary compression is an issue of concern. The August, 2005 TACT Quarterly report contains a listing of 34 state academic institutions as to their difference between Full and Assistant Professors (salary compression). SFA ranks 26th out of 34. This ranking is

better than our ranking for overall faculty salaries, but if not addressed soon, will further contribute to our poor overall salary position. While there are many short-term reasons that can cause this, at SFA it has not been a short-term problem and contributes to both a morale problem on campus and the loss of qualified faculty who leave to other institutions for better pay and working conditions.

This fall the Senate will be responding to a request by a number of past-chairs to conduct a survey of the faculty as to their opinion on whether SFA should be part of a system. The survey instrument will contain questions on why the faculty member thinks we should/should not be part of a system, what system we should join if we could choose one, as well as general information on the background of the faculty member completing the survey. Once analyzed, we will be forwarding the results to the administration.

The Senate would also like to take this opportunity to thank the President and the Provost for their efforts towards improved communication with and involvement of everyone on campus. While the increased committee work may be overwhelming at times, we are more involved in the decision-making process than in the past. Our opinions are respectfully considered, and while the final decision is not always what we desired, we know we have had a part in the final decision. Current efforts to make the budget-building process more transparent and consultative will go a long way to improve morale on campus and remove some of the “urban legends” that are commonly found on a college campus. It is said that information is power, but improved information and communication can be empowering for everyone involved. We believe these actions, along with many other initiatives begun in the past 3 years, have contributed to a greater buy-in by the faculty into what SFA is and what SFA can be.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dr. Brian P. Oswald, 2005-2005 Chair
Dr. Chris Barker, 2005-2006 Chair-elect