

Report to the Board of Regents
ACADEMIC AND STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

By Chris Barker, Chair, Faculty Senate
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Thank you for this opportunity to present this report on behalf of the faculty senate.

I would be remiss if I did not thank you one more time for the countless hours of work you do for SFA before, during and after these Board meetings. Being at these Board meetings I have gained a deep appreciation for the time-consuming, selfless work you do for SFA.

Next, I'd like to formally introduce Marc Guidry, the new in-coming chair of the Faculty Senate. He will be your new link with the faculty beginning at the next Board meeting in July. Marc is a professor in the English department. He is also a Louisiana Cajun with a great sense of humor, so I'm sure you will enjoy getting to know him. Like most of the faculty here, he has a deep commitment to making SFA the best that it can possibly be.

I was out of town yesterday on a geology field trip and missed the opening of the new Student Center, but Marc told me that it is very impressive. Having toured it during the construction phase, I was greatly impressed and I'm sure it will be a centerpiece for visitors to campus.

That Student Center, along with the new Recreation Center and the two new dorms, are going to be important, positive aspects of the legacy of this Board. I can't even imagine how much work you all put into bringing those projects to fruition, but I know we owe you a huge debt of gratitude for that.

I submit, however, that there is still important work that needs to be done to put SFA on a firm footing. Academics are the foundation of any university, and there are still critical needs in academic funding.

During the past few years, you have heard a series of different Senate chairs tell you that faculty salaries are dangerously low. But I don't know if anyone has presented specific examples of the debilitating effect of low salaries on SFA. This is what I would like to address now.

EFFECTS OF LOW FACULTY SALARIES ON SFA

This portion of my report presents data about the effect of low faculty salaries on SFA. Recently, I asked department heads or faculty members to provide specific details about the effect of low salaries during the past three years.

About one-third of the departments responded and their comments are excerpted below. Most of the comments were from chairs who are very familiar with problems associated with hiring faculty.

Responses indicate that in recent years many faculty have left SFA for higher salaries elsewhere. In many cases teaching loads were lower at the destination universities (a lower teaching load means that the faculty member will be able and expected to produce more research, which many highly motivated faculty members consider desirable). There are also examples in the report of significant difficulty in recruiting new faculty due to SFA's low salaries.

Many of the faculty members who have left SFA were among our "best and brightest" -- teachers and scholars whose efforts here made them attractive to other universities. This includes both junior faculty as well as tenured professors. In addition, an unknown number of potentially excellent candidates for positions at SFA have turned down offers or simply stopped pursuing positions once they found out how low the salaries were at SFA.

When a faculty member leaves SFA he or she takes away a deep well of knowledge about their particular discipline and how that subject relates to SFA's students. Years of training and mentoring of a faculty member is suddenly lost to a department. This loss of continuity severely undermines the quality of departments and the university. Thousands of dollars will have to be spent in new job searches and training of new faculty members to replace those who took better-paying jobs elsewhere. However, salaries at SFA are now so low that the replacement faculty coming in might not be of the same caliber as the person they are replacing.

It should be noted that salaries are variable across disciplines at SFA and two departments reported no problems, in one case because salaries were adequate in that academic unit.

CONCLUSIONS:

SFA is now second lowest in average faculty salaries among Texas public universities. This is a critical situation that threatens our academic reputation. Any organization is only as good as the people within it, and this is especially true for a university. Unfortunately, we can not attract or retain good faculty with salaries that are significantly lower than our competing peer institutions.

I respectfully urge the Board of Regents to pursue academic excellence for SFA with the same vigor, zeal and talent that they have put into bringing about infrastructure improvements.

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APPENDIX:

COMMENTS ABOUT THE EFFECT OF LOW SALARIES ON SFA

(Academic Departments are listed by College)

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COLLEGE OF SCIENCE AND MATHEMATICS

DEPARTMENT 1:

- Last year we lost one of our most productive faculty to Baylor. He left with an increase of \$12,000+ and a six-hour teaching load.
- Last year we lost our top candidate to fill an assistant professor position to Sam Houston. At SHSU, the teaching load is nine-hours for faculty [in our discipline] with a significantly higher entry level salary.
- Last year, two people on our short list asked their names to be removed when they were informed of the entry level salary.
- We were able to hire one excellent candidate who was also considering SHSU. The only reason was that his wife refused to live in Huntsville because of the prison there.

These are the most recent examples, but there are several such stories over my tenure as chair.

If we are going to hire and keep quality faculty, the Board must recognize this as a major problem and stop the revolving door of good faculty going elsewhere.

DEPARTMENT 2:

[Our department] was turned down four times over the last 4 years [by job candidates] while searching for three positions. Twice, our number 1 and number 2 candidates turned us down. Money is a big issue because in [our] field postdocs are being offered salaries for the same amount that we are offering for tenure track positions. The other problem we have is startup money [i.e., money to set up a lab and buy equipment for research]. While we offered none, other places offer \$25k - \$1M.

DEPARTMENT 3:

Nationwide demand for qualified candidates to fill positions [in our discipline] makes the market for individuals highly competitive.

Increased demand for faculty [to teach service courses] for pre-nursing, nursing and pre-health professions schools will continue well into the foreseeable future. The relative low salaries offered at SFA will not allow for competitive offers to teach in this area.

Note: This chair sent data for his department for the past 3 years in a table indicating:

- Resignation of 7 assistant professors, all for better pay ranging from \$8K to \$22K more.
- 3 failed searches for junior faculty due to low salaries and lack of qualified applicants.
- Failed search for department chair due to lower salary than requested by applicant...

DEPARTMENT 4:

We hired a new faculty member this year but had to offer a starting salary that was about \$7K above the original planned salary because otherwise the search would have failed. Several of the candidates said that they would not consider the position for less.

In another example of low salaries, we had an industry service company representative visit our department on a recruiting trip this semester and his company was offering starting salaries to students with bachelors degrees that were the same or higher than what SFA is offering to pay new PhDs!

Another example: one of our master's students is about to graduate and has accepted a position with a starting salary that is higher than I am making as chair of the department.

Our faculty salaries are too low!

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COLLEGE OF LIBERAL AND APPLIED ARTS

DEPARTMENT 1:

Here is what I can share.

- Typically it is difficult for an academic couple to find employment at the same institution. It is even MORE difficult if they are in the same department. We hired a couple thinking it would solve our incredibly high turnover problem. Nope. James Madison University recruited them at a higher salary (about \$8000 if I remember correctly). We subsequently shut down [one of] our master's programs and the Teaching Emphasis, both of which produced highly marketable individuals. I'd like to add here that when we hired them two years prior to their departure, it was our 3rd attempt. The two previous searches failed due to salary.
- We cannot focus solely on starting salaries with respect to new hires. This one requires an example to explain. For new hires in the College of Liberal & Applied Arts who begin 9/1/07, the starting salary will be \$43,000. That's too low to begin with, but it creates a problem in-house. Faculty who joined us this year got a starting salary of \$40,000. Those hired the previous year have likely not reached \$43,000 or may have slightly exceeded it. What about their salaries? We cannot perpetuate and exacerbate the salary compression problem that exists on this campus.

I have many other examples, but you asked for a very limited time period.

DEPARTMENT 2:

In response to your request for examples of faculty losses due to low salaries:

This year we're losing 3 junior faculty, all of whom have received higher paying jobs in tenure-track positions with lower teaching loads.

We also lost our most published senior faculty member two years ago to an endowed chair position (1-1 teaching load) at the University of Indiana-Purdue at Fort Wayne. This professor had begged the former dean of Liberal Arts, Bob Herbert, for higher pay but was denied. He said he had grown to love Nacogdoches and did not want to leave, but he felt he was simply under-compensated and after 12 years at SFA he had finally had enough of the low pay. He had published at least 3 books and several articles prior to leaving.

We also lost another senior faculty member to a deanship at a community college in the Chicago area. She also felt she was under-compensated.

We have lost several other junior faculty for a variety of reasons, but low pay and the teaching load ... were definitely major issues for those who have left.

Here is a letter of departure from a professor who left our department:

"Dear colleagues and friends, as the poet says, were there world enough and time I would have told you all individually that I will be leaving SFA after the conclusion of the spring semester to take a position [elsewhere]. My reasons for leaving are few though significant as most of you can appreciate. The university sent a clear message to us as a faculty that it does not prioritize scholarship and academics as highly as, say, baseball and landscaping, and I am afraid that the only efficacious way of responding in kind is to resign. Politics aside, I have enjoyed your friendship and support and admire and respect all of you.... "

DEPARTMENT 3:

This spring we offered a position (Assistant Professor, tenure track) to a highly qualified candidate. Although the candidate stated that she found many aspects of the department attractive, she was accepted a position in Maryland which offered her:

- a lighter teaching load,
- \$11,000 more than we were offering,
- paying all her moving expenses, as opposed to the \$1,000 we were able to offer (split between the dean's office and the department).

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COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

DEPARTMENT 1:

[One of our professors] was lured away to Texas State San Marcos with the offer of teaching fewer hours and a salary increase of \$26K.

[We] offered a candidate a tenure track position with a salary of \$90K and she turned us down to go to Baylor for \$110K as a VISITING PROFESSOR!

Several of the [our] applicants have withdrawn their name from consideration when they found that the position here pays less than what they are already making.

Nationwide there is a shortage of professors [in our field] with no relief in sight. With the current age of our faculty, I am very worried about being able to replace the faculty with qualified individuals!

DEPARTMENT 2:

I have supplied you with some information ... We at SFA in [our department] are in the lowest quartile (25%) in terms of salary.

This is not anecdotal evidence, it is cold hard facts that I as chair would have to face if I had to search for a faculty member in the various disciplines housed within this department.

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COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS

DEPARTMENT 1:

Last year we lost an outstanding junior professor: she took a position at a university in Michigan where the salary was more than \$10,000 higher than at SFA and the teaching load was 3/2 [i.e., significantly less than at SFA, giving her the opportunity to pursue more research].

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COLLEGE OF FORESTRY

This is probably not what you want to hear but I cannot think of a single faculty member who has left because of salary issues nor have we experienced any problems with hiring viable candidates....

We do have some salary issues related to younger faculty making almost as much or more than faculty who have been here for some time. The lack of timely and substantive raises for many years is a concern; new hires are often brought in at relatively high salaries, because we have to pay that high to attract them. I think everyone on our faculty is underpaid based on the teaching, research, and extension duties we ask of them...

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