

Faculty Senate Chair's Report
Le'Ann Solmonson, Ph.D., Faculty Senate Chair 2017-18
Address to Board of Regents
July 25, 2017

Greetings Mr. Chairman, Board of Regents, Dr. Patillo, Dr. Bullard, Colleagues, and Guests:

I am honored to be able to address you as the Chair of Faculty Senate. I recognize that I have some big shoes to fill in following Dr. Salas and Dr. Embry-Jenlink. I am very thankful for the example they have set and the mentoring they have provided. I would like to take a minute to formally introduce myself to you. I am a professor in the Counselor Education Program and am beginning my 12th year with SFA. This was my first faculty appointment and will, most likely, be my last. I came here with 13 years of experience as a professional school counselor. I am also a Licensed Professional Counselor and have experience in private practice, as well as hospital administration. Before I started my career as a counselor, I was a public-school teacher. As a faculty member, I am able to combine my love for the counseling profession and return to my roots as a teacher. I have the best of both worlds. As someone who has spent the majority of my professional career working with children and adolescents, advocacy is a part of my professional identity and value system. As the Chair of Faculty Senate, I believe it is my role to promote and advocate for the entire SFA faculty. I take that responsibility seriously and will be thoughtful and conscientious about my role during the next year.

I would like to also introduce you to our Chair-Elect. I really do not think he needs an introduction because he is one of the shining stars in our faculty video series. Nonetheless, let me introduce Dr. Jason Reese, assistant professor of Sports Management in the College of Business. His wife, Kristin, is a Family Nurse Practitioner in the SFA Clinic. If Jason isn't looking quite as good today as he did in his video, we are going to excuse that as he and Kristin and their 3-year-old daughter welcomed a new addition to their family 4 weeks ago and he may be a little sleep deprived today. I look forward to working with Jason during this year.

I know Dr. Salas was diligent in providing you information on the work of the Senate through his reports last year. I would like to highlight a few of our accomplishments during the 2016-17 academic year.

- We participated in the policy review process for several important policies including the post tenure review policy and the academic promotion policy. In addition, the Professional Welfare Committee drafted a policy related to alternative work assignments when faculty members are capable of working, but due to personal or family illness may not be able to maintain regular hours. That was presented to the Provost and Policy Committee for consideration.
- On the financial front, we advocated for the reinstatement of the professional development funds that were cut from the budget. We want to acknowledge Dr. Bullard who also championed the cause and was instrumental in recovering the lost funds.

- The Senate also hosted the first financial forum that allowed faculty and staff to engage with Drs. Bullard and Gallant and ask questions about financial decision making on campus.
- In order to support the university goal of recruiting and retaining a high-quality faculty and improving the campus culture, we hosted three social events in an attempt to increase faculty connections across the campus. We had one morning coffee and two evening social hours at a local adult establishment where we attempted to increase our feelings of happiness. Attendance increased at each event, which we viewed as a success. We have some ideas for this next year to engage more faculty and increase participation.
- We awarded the adjunct teaching excellence award to Marie Kelly, a lecturer in the accountancy program.
- Out of concern for our faculty and students who are not US citizens, we drafted a statement of support after the Presidents Executive Order on immigration.
- After hearing concerns from numerous faculty members, we developed resolutions related to the use of grade distribution and course evaluation response rates as a part of faculty annual evaluation and tenure and promotion decisions.

We have already started planning for next year and have set goals for our committees.

- The Academic Affairs committee will be researching different course evaluation systems for the purpose of making recommendations to change our current system. We are looking for an instrument that has been evaluated for reliability and validity and is focused on teaching effectiveness.
- The Administration and Finance Committee is going to host the 2nd annual financial forum and also research how professional development funds are awarded across campus. We are aware the system varies among the colleges and departments. This creates concerns about equal access to the funds for all faculty members.
- The Ethics Committee is going to continue to advocate for the creation of an Ombuds position. This is a goal that was set about three years ago and has stalled. Our research revealed that the majority of Texas Universities have this position and we would like to see this as a part of the benefits we offer to SFA faculty.
- The Professional Welfare Committee will be researching titles and career ladder options for our adjuncts. We have full time adjuncts who teach a full load and have for many years and currently have no opportunity for advancement. We recognize the important role adjuncts play in the delivery of academic programs. We would like to see their contribution and dedication to SFA acknowledged and rewarded. We are reviewing a system that was developed at Princeton as an example of non-tenured academic ranks and titles.

I shared with you that I am a counselor. As a counselor, I have been trained to evaluate systems. That can include a family system, a communication system, or a system of employees. In working with individuals, I understand that you have to identify and name the problem before you can solve it. With that being said, as has been the case for several years, we will also be advocating for addressing faculty salaries. SFA ranks in the bottom

three of Texas public universities for faculty salaries. We are joined by Sul Ross and Angelo State. Are those the universities we want to be compared to? For Assistant and Associate Professors, we are \$15,000 below the state average. For Professors, we are \$40,000 below the state average. SFA will not be able to reach the strategic goal of recruiting and retaining high quality faculty until we address these disparities. We are working at cross purposes when we continue to connect faculty salaries to enrollment numbers. A faculty who perceives they are underpaid and undervalued will not attract the number of students necessary to achieve the enrollment goals presented yesterday.

I realize that SFA is not a corporation. However, I think we can learn from Richard Branson's philosophy about his employees. Branson founded the Virgin group, which controls over 400 companies. When asked if customer service was the highest priority of his companies, he said it was not. He went on to explain why his employees come first. These are his words:

It sort of should go without saying -- and it's surprising that it still doesn't go without saying at some companies -- if the person who works at your company is 100% proud of the job they're doing, if you give them the tools to do a good job, they're proud of the brand, if they were looked after, if they're treated well, then they're gonna be smiling, they're gonna be happy and therefore the customer will have a nice experience. If the person who's working for your company is not given the right tools, is not looked after, is not appreciated, they're not gonna do things with a smile and therefore the customer will be treated in a way where often they won't want to come back for more.

Branson believes the features and amenities offered by his airline such as mood lighting, leather seats, newer planes, and seatback entertainment systems are a good package, and while the package might entice customers to give the product a try, the quality of interactions they have with Virgin employees encourages them to return. He goes on to say that quality interactions between leadership, staff, and customers is what separates the average company from the exceptional one.

The forums that were held three years ago as the beginning of the envisioning process revealed the need to address the climate and culture of the campus and the low compensation of faculty and staff. The need was so significant that these were included as two of the supporting goals. Faculty felt encouraged that their concerns had been heard and hopeful that changes would occur. And yet, here we are two years into the plan and very little has been done to meet these goals. We are beginning an academic year in which no salary increases will occur. Minimal increases were awarded last year.

We understand that money does not grow on trees and state funding was decreased this year. However, we also understand money can be reallocated through difficult budgetary decision making that demonstrates what is valued by the university. I truly believe that by addressing faculty and staff salaries, the culture and climate will improve. When the culture and climate improves, you are going to have happy and smiling folks who are going to attract the high-quality students we are hoping will choose SFA. Those happy

and smiling people are going to help the university achieve the enrollment goals that were presented yesterday.

And that's all I have to say about that...for now.

I want to close by directing your attention to the five pages of faculty accomplishments that I have provided. These activities have all occurred in the last three months. I am certain this is not a comprehensive list and there are activities that have not been reported. As you can see, we have folks doing some pretty cool and impressive stuff. We have faculty that are contributing to the body of knowledge of their chosen profession. We have faculty engaging in innovative work to enhance the education of their students. And we have faculty serving in state and national leadership positions for their profession.

One of the most awesome realizations for me as a faculty member is knowing that I am shaping the face of my profession through the highly qualified counseling professionals we develop and that my service and scholarship will impact the future of the counseling profession. I know many SFA faculty are doing the same thing every day.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today on behalf of the faculty body. Are there any questions?