

Data Gathering

Group: Deans & Library Director

SPT Partners: Dr. Janice Hensarling and Mr. David Justus

Design: Survey + Focus Group

Part One – Survey

Number of Participants: 6

Date: October 15- 22, 2014

1. What makes SFA special? Unique?

- Percentage of first-generation students.
- Focus on teaching as a faculty member's primary obligation.
- SFA is unique in part because of its location in east Texas...far away from the hustle and bustle of city life.
- SFA is unique because it is not part of a university system, which would be lost if that were to happen.
- Residential campus, just about the right distance away from two large metropolitan areas (Houston & Dallas/Fort Worth).
- Just about the right size—large enough to have a good array of programs yet small enough to have small and smallish classes with faculty who are interested in knowing and supporting students.
- Highly qualified faculty; faculty who were prepared in their content areas at institutions from around the USA and around the world.
- ECRC/Charter School/ECHL—there should be more promotion about this and more research/grants focused on these resources.
- SFA gardens and native plant research center.
- There are many ways that SFA is unique—but this is not necessarily a good thing inasmuch as this uniqueness has put SFA out of step with the mainstream. As just one example, being an independent university is touted

as being something positive—yet those institutions that are part of a system find advantages of unity, sharing of scarce resources, identity with a “flagship” institution, etc. Instead, SFA has an image of being isolated—not only geographically, but politically, financially, etc. as well.

- Talented, caring faculty who provide individual attention to students.
- Opportunity for many students to have a “traditional” college experience while still being fairly close to home.
- Individualized, personalized instruction in courses and labs.

2. What could SFA do or be to encourage you to support the university?

- I already support the university.
- There needs to be more transparency in the university budgeting process. Understandably, there will never be enough funding to go around; however, administrators should be aware well in advance where and even why funding to support approved and accepted programs and services continues to dwindle.
- Focus more energy/attention/money on academics than on athletics.
- Develop an annual giving campaign for faculty and staff.
- Support/provide a broader range of learned activities to bridge the campus and the community (i.e., lectures; guest speakers; artists-in-residence).
- Develop a faculty club/dining room to encourage collegiality.
- Support should be reciprocal, but it is only one way. President continually speaks of increasing enrolment. Certain colleges respond to this by increasing enrollment and conforming to the expectation. But there is no response to such increases. Instead of incentives, holding such colleges up as examples of what it means to conform to the expectations, and providing financial support to accommodate their increased enrollment—there is no response. The effect is that the same level of resources must now have to be spread even thinner among even more students. Under these circumstances, there are no advantages to increasing enrollment—only disadvantages.
- SFA has to break out of the current path of greater and greater emphasis on compliance, regulations, policies, and guidelines that become ‘carved in stone.’ We should try to minimize the impact of policies and regulations on

faculty and staff productivity, to free up our ability to positively affect recruiting and student development.

- Provide a clear vision for the purpose/direction of the institution.
- Provide regular updates that inform and illustrate progress toward stated goals and measurable objectives.
- Provide more transparency and evidence of success in the use of specific types of funds.

3. What is one innovative idea SFA should implement?

- Require students to complete certain skills that will make them more marketable, such as an internship, study abroad, and/or a hands-on research project.
- Update and renovate buildings and facilities to encourage academic success, e.g., a library renovation to provide space and resources for graduate student researchers.

Collaborative spaces could be created based on 21st century technology. Student success is fostered when the university does something BIG and ON PURPOSE that is especially for the students....our primary clientele. In recent years, the university has received lots of good press about the renovated student center and the state-of-the-art recreation center. Academic spaces can use a facelift as well.

- This would not be an innovation for any other university—but it would be for SFA. Why is there no capital campaign? Not even a plan for one?
- Develop a way to collect ideas for improvement from faculty and staff (as well as students) on a regular basis. Sometimes our employees feel that SFA leaders don't understand their perspectives and/or they may not know of opportunities to save costs or make our systems more efficient. We should look forward to coming to work every day.
- Decide who we are as an institution and move forward with vision and purpose.

4. What do students need to get from a college education/experience to be successful in life?

- Employer surveys indicate that skills are more important than substantive knowledge in today's job marketplace because of frequent career shifts. Thus a solid skill set is the most important outcome of a college education.
- According to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, the following skills: inquiry and analysis, critical and creative thinking, written and oral communication, quantitative literacy, information literacy, teamwork and problem solving.
- Of course, the university wants to increase student graduation rates. The university needs to produce life-long learners by exposing/involving students to real-world opportunities from the various disciplines. Life-long learners recognize that the world

never stops changing, the end is never reached, another point of view exists, and it's always too soon to quit. Hopefully, students will leave college with the hope that they will receive employment. So, frequent exposure to career opportunities is essential.

- Deep content knowledge that should be represented by a degree.
- The ability to work productively with others. Ability to work successfully within groups and with others unlike themselves.
- The ability to communicate effectively in multiple modes.
- The ability to use technology for multiple purposes.
- Self-discipline and confidence.
- A work ethic that will help them be critical to the success of their employer.
- Depends on one's perspective. From a perspective of marketing to parents for their son or daughter—this means preparation for a career with a stable income. From an academic or humanistic standpoint—this would mean an ability to think logically and analytically, solve problems, communicate effectively, and in so doing contribute to society.
- The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People should be internalized as part of the college experience. This approach has power that is transformational on a personal level and on a professional level.
- Experience with persistence in the face of challenging situations or problems.
- Ability to think critically and solve problems.

5. What have we not asked you that you would like to discuss?

- What, if anything, is impeding the university in accomplishing its mission and goals?
- What can the city of Nacogdoches do to enhance the residence experience of the SFA students and faculty? Where are the venues for finer shopping and dining?
- No one could argue that marketing holds the potential to enhance the institution. But, the approach being taken appears to allow questions to be asked about the clarity, honesty, and comprehensiveness of the approach being taken. Certain programs are omitted entirely from the promotional materials. In other cases, an image is being created to be identified with a particular college—when that college does not even offer a program related to that image.
- The work environment. I feel that many staff employees feel overwhelmed by the level of bureaucracy in their work environment; many employees comment on this who have worked here at SFA for decades.
- How is SFA dealing with national challenges in high needs areas (STEM career preparation, nursing shortage, etc.)?
- The need for examining current processes across the university with a goal of increasing efficiencies.

Part Two – Focus Group

Number of Participants: 6 Date:

October 27, 2014

Note: Focus group questions were developed based on responses to the survey. After the focus group concluded, Deans were invited to send additional comments to focus group questions.

Several of you are in agreement that SFA is unique in terms of its caring and committed faculty. What objectives should be included in the strategic plan to promote SFA as a unique place to attract and maintain the most talented faculty?

- Faculty salaries should be addressed.
- Better spousal involvement in SFASU and the Community.
- Include in mission: “this is what we are about and what we expect”.
- Issues with faculty coming and not staying because of the community we are in.

A. Potential faculty have been offered positions but turned the positions down because of not enough local interests or entertainment.

B. New faculty did not last because there was nothing to offer outside of SFA (one person left for spring break and did not come back).

- Need diversity at SFA and in community that will attract & keep faculty.

Suggestions:

- ✓ Single women & men have social events.
- ✓ “find a mentor” program to welcome new faculty.
- ✓ Be proactive about social interactions.
- ✓ Help them build a relationship with like-minded people (age, similar interests, similar religious affiliation, travel programs to show them what we have and include them in travel opportunities with SFA groups, help with referral for needs such as day care for their children).
- “Group Hires” to strengthen orientation for new hires & help to make connections.
- Mentoring beyond “Welcome Back Luncheon”.
- What could we do better to get them acclimated?

- Faculty clubs to include new and seasoned faculty.

Several survey responses addressed lack of transparency and support, both financial and academic, from upper levels of administration. What objectives could be included to encourage university administrators to address these concerns?

■ Lack of transparency (Money).

- Money being moved around (Where does it go and why?).
- Budget meeting with administrators at the beginning of the school year.
- Need to see how money is moved around.

■ Documentation.

- Evidence (What did we get from it?).
- More regular updates.
- Clear vision & clear division.
- Ask “Who we are?”
- Action oriented.
- Written communication & feedback.
- Open forums with feedback.
- Meet with chairs.

■ Lack of transparency (Information).

- SFA Today newsletter (with more concise & pertinent information) would be more active & transparent. The current SFA Today emails are too frequent and redundant.

■ Address the issue of transparency.

- Sustained professional development.
- Have advanced suggestions or questions.
- We realize there are some things that we don’t need to know but there is frustration by lack of consistency.
- Allow everyone to make suggestions.
- Red tape needs to be sliced
 - Needs to be lean and mean.
 - Culture changes.

- Look at student learning.
- Bring the data to the table.
- Step back and look at the process of assessment we do & why.
- Identify positive outcomes of assessment.
- Let go of traditional reasons for assessment
- Make assessment count
- What do we look like as a university?
 - ✓ What about other universities?
 - ✓ How are we doing?

■ Faculty professional growth

- Center for Teaching & Learning.
- Faculty development offerings.

How would SFA go about executing fund-raising campaigns and then directing those funds to enhance the education experiences for its students?

■ Capital campaign as a standard.

- What to do with the money?
 - Scholarship.
 - List of priorities – what is most important.
 - Each dean comes up with a discipline to target.
 - Vice President & President develop a campaign strategy.
 - Alums meeting.
- Need for development.
- Need a goal.
- What money you get & from whom (donors).
- What is done with the money?
- Showcase our greats (Examples of who has come out of SFA and their successes).

What strategic objectives could be developed to address the (perceived) conflict between student learning goals? That is, how do we bridge the gap between preparing students by providing a specific skill set vs. teaching them to be critical thinkers and life-long learners? How do we promote these concepts as not being mutually exclusive?

- Develop internship opportunities (learn theoretically) (NPR).
- Have internship clearing house through Career Services.
- Lifelong mentorships.

- *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* included as part of the college experience.
- Personal, Technical, and General Competencies intertwined.
- Jobs for Jacks.

If you were in charge of developing a marketing campaign for your college, what motto or catch-phrase would you start with?

Motto:

- Rigor, Relevance, & Relationships.
- Learn, Launch, Lead.

Additional Comments:

Several of you are in agreement that SFA is unique in terms of its caring and committed faculty. What objectives should be included in the strategic plan to promote SFA as a unique place to attract and maintain the most talented faculty?

- Without beating a dead horse, salary is at the top of our college's faculty desires. We have a difficult time competing and retaining for this reason. Also, several low-cost amenities could be included in the faculty package, like free parking, free membership in the Rec Center, and a faculty lounge for lunch. Additional professional development opportunities would also be beneficial (e.g., more travel funds, professional workshops of a high quality, or a seminar series overseas).

Several survey responses addressed lack of transparency and support, both financial and academic, from upper levels of administration. What objectives could be included to encourage university administrators to address these concerns?

- If any one step were taken, a review of the assessment process would greatly enhance morale across campus. It is far too burdensome. Additionally, I do not think O&M budgets have been increased in over a decade despite severely escalating costs. Finally, there has been a tendency in recent years for major decisions to be imposed without much involvement, consultation, or communication. Topical forums on issues like salaries and assessment would buttress support for contemplated administrative actions.

How would SFA go about executing fund-raising campaigns and then directing those funds to enhance the education experiences for its students?

- I think a useful exercise would be for each college to develop a "case statement" that outlines funding needs would go a long way in providing targeted goals for

development officers.

What strategic objectives could be developed to address the (perceived) conflict between student learning goals? That is, how do we bridge the gap between preparing students by providing a specific skill set vs. teaching them to be critical thinkers and life-long learners? How do we promote these concepts as not being mutually exclusive?

- The American Association of Colleges and Universities composed a report entitled Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP). While this report was supposed to guide the development of SFA's core curriculum, its principles are not much reflected in the final product. This report outlines in clear terms how these twin objectives can be accommodated and implemented. It provides a step-by-step guideline.

If you were in charge of developing a marketing campaign for your college, what motto or catch-phrase would you start with?

- For the College of Liberal and Applied Arts, I like the motto: "A Relevant and Refined Education." This captures the idea that humanities degrees can be practical while adding the refined dimension. The word "cultured" may be better since a focus group indicated that the term "refined" was not understood by the average person.