

## Engagement and Data Gathering Sessions

<b>Group:</b>	Students representing majors in Geography, Spatial Science, Music Performance, Creative Writing, Art, Sociology, Social Work, Modern Languages, English, Theatre
<b>SPT Partners:</b>	Fenci, Kiesel
<b>Date:</b>	October 8 and October 9, 2014
<b>Design:</b>	Interview with Open Discussion
<b>Attendees:</b>	24

### What makes SFA special or unique?

#### ***Beautiful campus and grounds; some beautiful facilities***

- Azalea gardens are beautiful, great stress reliever.
- Rec Center, Student Center, some classrooms are state-of-the-art.
- AARC and other study space in library, up-to-date foreign language lab, tech equipment in many classrooms are excellent.
- Innovative technology is available for use by Art students.

#### ***Rural location, but not too far from cities***

- Older, quaint parts of town appeal to urban students.
- Jack Camp eased transition to campus, rural location.

#### ***Small classes; teachers are supportive, want students to succeed***

- My teachers have time for me.
- Even core classes are small enough to know your profs.

### ***SFA spirit and pride***

- Marching band and color guard represent SFA well.
- Many alumni choose to work/teach for SFA because they love it.

### ***Many student organizations, offering something for everyone***

- Student organizations improve engagement, support traditions.
- Multicultural office does great job of working with diverse students.
- Joining a student association changes everything.
- “Did not love SFA” until getting involved in organizations.

## **What could SFA do or become to encourage you to support the university?**

### ***Facility improvement to enhance daily quality of life: maintenance and upkeep, space availability, security, lighting, electricity***

- Improve facilities for students with special needs. Elevators are unreliable. Many classrooms lack adaptable furniture—a problem for pregnant students, those with back pain or other conditions. In Education building, desks are too small for use by tall or overweight students. These problems affect student learning because of pain and discomfort.
- Refurbish Ferguson and LAN buildings. Money for improvements has gone to offices, not classrooms. Teachers must use outdated computers and tech equipment. There is real disparity in resources for these buildings, but every student pays tech fees. At least address the appearance of these buildings, because nearly every student has class(es) there.
- Improve older residence halls, resolve problems quickly. Too much wait time when maintenance problems are reported; students feel they must get to “Winston himself” to get problems addressed. Fix mold problems in Hall 20 and old/broken furniture in Wisely.
- Address facility needs of students in Fine Arts. The photography dark room is “like a 70s time machine.” Music has only 20 practice rooms for 400 students. Students book rooms until 3 or 4 a.m. Only 3 accompanists are available to students. In some classrooms, students take lecture notes on music stands. Inadequate studio and exhibit space on campus for art majors.

Cole Art Center has little storage, antiquated plumbing , AC and electrical systems. The facility needs better lighting and improved security.

### ***Improvements in services and opportunities***

- Improve quality of life for residential students. Residence Life staff members are “not trained well.” Activities by CA/RA staff feel like “cheerleading sessions,” not community building.
- Improve quality of dining on campus. Hours do not suit many students’ class schedules, and to-go meals are inadequate. Food service should use local produce or farmer markets. Few options are offered for vegetarian students, who do not get enough protein and nutritious choices for the money paid. Commuters opt for fast-food options because of crowding and limited hours.
- Increase specific academic opportunities for students. Increase study abroad options related to majors. Organize more academic competitions and research opportunities for undergraduates. Implement more applied studies classes or internships in all majors. Consider duplicating the seminar structure in Sociology, where students get practical help with life after SFA at multiple stages of study.
- Strengthen sense of community (internal and external). Make everyone on campus more aware of SFA’s assets and features (Cole Art Center, planetarium, student publications). Get all students to be active members of a club/organization. Publicize events the whole Nacogdoches community might enjoy and attend (Dia de los Muertos, exhibitions and performances, services available to public). We need to reach out to Nac community.
- Provide accountability and transparency to justify tuition and fee charges and increases. Students want to know where their money is spent. Real disparities exist in tech resources, but all pay fees. Many classrooms and buildings are freezing during hot weather, so we should improve energy/utility usage.

## **What is one innovative idea SFA should implement?**

### ***Employ students in meaningful, helpful ways.***

- Hire students for project or service work (example was graphic design for an English publication). Students learn to work ethically, meet deadlines and

client requirements, schedule large projects. Examples include grant writing, advertising, peer advising, student outreach and recruitment. Students would acquire skills and experience. SFA would save money.

- Establish a “student liaison” within each academic department. They could counsel students on courses to take concurrently, building a reasonable schedule, getting involved in student organizations.

### ***Incorporate practical, hands-on experiences throughout curriculum***

- Offer pay or stipend for ALL internship experiences, so that all students can afford to participate. “A college degree is just a piece of paper unless you have experience and skills.” Many interns face steep cost of living in larger cities to gain experience.
- Form more connections with agencies and employers not connected to SFA. Current opportunities focus on alum employers like Mattress Firm and on opportunities for future teachers. Students want connections to government agencies, other Texas companies/industries.
- Provide essential content and practicum-style experiences early on, in every degree. This would provide a real intro to the possible major and give students a reality check about what they thought the major was like.
- Offer field studies as an option where appropriate. This is another way to give students hands-on experience.

### ***Support unique/innovative programs; highlight successes***

- Establish new programs and strengthen existing ones. Several ideas were mentioned: create a Classics Department to provide interdisciplinary study of ancient history, classical languages and civilizations. Improve strings program within Music (students feel it is weakest component). Recruit more international students, especially grad students.
- Provide more financial assistance to encourage graduate study. Job market remains weak. Increase assistantships and funding to allow students to earn available grad degrees here.
- Streamline process for scholarship startups. This would motivate possible sponsors/donors to pool resources, invest in SFA and its students.
- Publicize SFA’s opportunities. BFA is not offered at many schools, so emphasize its existence here. Publicize science and social science labs and equipment (like 3-D scanner in Archaeology Lab). Especially in east Texas, we lose too many students to the system schools.

- Publicize results of student experiences in research, study abroad and internships. Use Sawdust, have presentations, class visits, brown bags.

## What do students need to get from a college education or experience to be successful in life?

### *“Real” experience*

- Create professional preparation courses in every major.
- Provide role modeling—faculty need to dress/appear professional.
- Emphasize growing importance of global community in every major.
- Require students to join clubs, organizations.
- Offer more applied courses so students get in-depth application of what they have learned.
- Use Texas and regional resources to expand knowledge (organize bus trips to urban opera, symphony, theatre, ballet performances; visit Death Row or Texas State’s body farm; take students to Dallas market).
- Increase courses with multicultural emphasis.

### *Development of practical skills and knowledge*

- Enhance instruction in time management skills and self-motivation.
- Educate students about money management (how to handle taxes while working as a student, planning for loan repayment, balancing checkbook and starting a savings fund).
- Encourage autonomy and independent ideas. Students should not always depend on other people telling them what to do. “You won’t always be told exactly what is expected of you in the real world.”

## What have we not asked that you would like to comment on or discuss today?

*Students held a group “gripe session,” with many suggestions for specific services, facilities and aspects of student life.*

- Students should be more engaged, on campus and off.

- Students seem unclear about their own priorities and SFA's priorities.
- Improve variety/quality of activities and events on campus to appeal to more students and improve participation.
- Unite efforts among departments by having officers of discipline-specific organizations get together to generate ideas and plan programs.
- Ensure that all faculty members have adequate office space.
- Encourage student involvement in community and civic affairs.
- Improve parking and bus routes, especially for commuters.
- Require training for faculty advisors. Many of them are not interested and feel forced to advise. Reward those who do it well.
- Staff advisors are invested in advising, and they are passionate about it.
- Students would like one "go to" location for essential academic questions.
- Some students expressed anger over expensive advising errors, graduation delays and lack of advising resources in particular programs. All students pay advising fees, but services are not equal across the board.
- Out-of-state tuition for excessive hours is not fair, not a good idea. One student felt that SFA was choosing to charge 100% of the fee, but it could be set lower.