

Data Gathering

Group: Chairs

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

Design: Survey + Focus Group

Part One – Survey

Number of Participants: 14 Date:

October 10 -- 17, 2014

Question #1: What Makes SFA Special? Unique?

- Rapport between faculty and students.
- Student /teacher ratio is relatively small.
- Students appreciate being known as opposed to being lost in the crowd.
- Location is a plus.
- Fewer distractions.
- Change of pace is useful for the increase of academic & social pursuits.
- Caring & collegial faculty.
- Just the right size.
- Strong traditions & beautiful campus.
- Not a part of a system.
- Has its own Board.
- Smaller classes & small town atmosphere with quality faculty & quality programs.
- Beautiful location, real world, hands-on experience that engage students in many programs.
- Small class sizes/close relationships with faculty.
- Talented caring faculty who provide individual attention to students.
- Fairly high level of “success” with student population of first generation students, a significant segment of our student body.
- Opportunity for many students to have a traditional college experience while still being relatively close to home.
- I am not convinced our University, its curriculum, student/faculty, or its accomplishments are unique. But SFA is special in the hearts and minds of many

students, alumni, faculty, and staff. The SFA experience in some form does shape and enrich our students' and prepare them for careers.

- A more "personal" feel for students with their instructors and support personnel. Not lost in the system. Not just a number. More rural location, less rushed and hectic, students can adjust, particularly first year students. Less threatening for first in their family to go to college. Student support with AARC, SFA 101, Student life etc. are back up system for success.
- Rec Center, Student Center and newer dorms.
- Location: proximity to Houston & Dallas and a scenic campus with modern conveniences.
- Size: small enough to know your name, large enough to meet your needs.
- Value: relatively low cost compared to other state universities.
- Focus on high quality education programs where teaching comes first.
- Location in East Texas Forest Country.
- Small town values and a safe environment.
- Mix of colleges in another.
- Strong nursing & forestry program on top of our strong and well known college of education.
- Small college town with good athletic programs.
- Intense attention to student success.
- Young people who might otherwise not go to college often choose SFA because of our programs that reach out to struggling students.
- Special is the lively campus culture with extraordinarily strong arts and athletics programs.

Question #2: What could SFA do or be to encourage you to support the university?

- University could be more appreciative of faculty efforts.
- It seems as if so often non-academics get recognized in far greater proportions than academics.
- Salary problems. Their claim is they're being asked to do more and there's little incentive-financially or other tangible rewards, such as 3-3 teaching load.
- Morale is declining among the constituents whose talents are most needed.
- To see admission standards raised.
- Faculty need to be treated better (low faculty salaries, but faculty are sometimes devalued & overworked).
- I already support the university. I do not understand the question.
- More support for faculty, Office of Social Equity is needed.

- Provide a clear vision of the purpose/direction of this institution.
- Provide regular updates that inform & illustrate progress toward widely known goals.
- Specifically regarding donations/giving, provide evidences of success to donors in use of funds given for stated purposes.
- SFA as an institution of higher learning does create a sense of affiliation and bond with those who work and learn here. It is more likely because of the overwhelming presence of SFA in the lives of everyone who lives and works in Nacogdoches.
- Provide specific projects or missions that could directly appeal to what is valued in higher education (ex. funding for library research support spaces, more diverse technology spaces for student use, highlight a specific research initiative in various departments that could make a change to the greater community).
- Demonstrate a commitment to excellence in education by supporting faculty as if they won a first round game in the NCAA basketball tournament. Summer pay, travel budgets and faculty development have been severely underfunded. Faculty perks should include free parking and free rec center membership.
- Adoption of a real strategic planning process that considers all alternatives.
- Greater cultivation of alumni and donors; support global initiatives; stronger IT support.
- Increase salaries for my team so that we feel more valued.

Question #3: What is one innovative idea SFA should implement?

- Tried to get Distinguished Professorship.
- Parley the residential nature of the university to advantage (distinguish ourselves from University of Phoenix).
- Go Mobile: reach students through mobile devices & mobile courses (ex. Lone Star College).
- Find a way to recruit & retain quality faculty. SFA's faculty retention needs some serious attention. Competitive salaries, Step up Technology, the Online degree, Audit program does not work. Faculty cannot even trust the total number of institution & transfer hours at the beginning of each transcript.
- New students mentoring, especially students who are first generation college students.
- Increase technology use & access: the tablet initiative is one idea.
- Move to greener/more sustainable campus.
- Vision-the creation of a common and compelling vision for the general education

of all of our undergraduates; current emphasis is more on collecting burdensome (probably unimportant) data as a means of justifying, valuing, and understanding our undergraduate general education.

- Diversity- Don't see a diverse faculty, don't see SFA actively recruiting or supporting underrepresented minority faculty.
- Development-Don't see a connection between the Development offices and the building of an excellent university. Is there an endowment? What percentage is being distributed back to the schools, departments, and colleges?
- Globalization-Don't see a commitment to being a globally connected university (There could be with the internationalization of the faculty, curriculum, and the students).
- A variety of technology spaces for student use that is adaptable and utilizes the most current trends. There would have to be a high level of support for these initiatives to make them cohesive and not just throw the technology at the teachers of support systems.
- Some programs should consider withdrawing from online education and focus on being the best in traditional face-to-face classes. Our claim of small classes and individual attention is quickly fading. Online classes are partially responsible for space utilization problems.
 - Determine the effects of dropping second year dorm residency requirement on finances and enrollment.
 - Programs supported between departments and colleges would expose our students and faculty to new and different concepts.
 - More innovative approach to online education.
 - Quit trying to be like big schools, sell ourselves as being different from them, different in that we are small, personal and into helping struggling students (First Gen, Low income, Low SAT scores, Low HS rankings) close the gap and compete on an equal par from other universities for employment.
 - Leveraging technology for educational innovation, including low-residency programs, experimentation with competency-based credit, etc.

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

- Provide the ability to think & express themselves, learn how to live independently & responsibly, recognize that success is earned and not handed to them.
- They need to learn how to learn.
- They need to learn critical thinking, writing and oral communication skills, as

well as developing a rich knowledge base in their field of study. They also need to be adaptable.

- Work ethic, responsibility, & marketable skills.
- Critical thinking/problem solving skills so that they will be able to adapt to a changing world. Ability to work with a broad range of people.
- Ability to think critically & solve problems.
- To help produce individuals who are more competent, committed, cultured, knowledgeable, confident, and concerned with the world.
- A strong base of core information from their field. Acquire intellectual curiosity. Acquisition of tools to evaluate that information for accuracy and reliability. Ability to become a productive and active member of the community after school and the desire to make an impact.
- In addition to a quality education, they need leadership opportunities, networking opportunities, and enhanced career services.
- Development of life-long learning focus and willingness to adapt to change.
- Learn to be independent in a supportive atmosphere. However, that means that sometimes they must be allowed to fail. I get the impression that the upper administration is not willing to let some students learn that lesson. We need to provide them with the resources to learn and experiment and work with others.
- Critical thinking, global citizenship and awareness; intellectual curiosity and confidence.
- Ability to manage time. Approach to problem solving systematically, think critically when gathering information, ability to write coherently, persuasively, and cogently, ability to learn new information, and ability to demonstrate competency in basic math and spreadsheet skills.
- Significant experience in learning to take full responsibility for their own learning and to manage their time accordingly.
- Develop abilities in critical thinking and creativity, communication, teamwork, leadership and project management; grit. Embrace lifelong learning and the pervasive influence of accelerating technological innovation. Take responsibility for citizenship in a free country.

Question #5: What have we not asked you that you would like to discuss?

- What are the threats to the existence of SFA?
- How can we use mobile devices more effectively in the classroom?
- At least 40% of Texas is Hispanic, yet only 13% of SFA is Hispanic. Need to reach out to them.

- What is SFA doing to recruit this underrepresented segment?
- That the strategic plan will find a way to incorporate the many excellent resources across campus in a more cohesive way. A better communication structure for what resources are available for faculty, staff and students.
- Some things that have been mentioned as barriers that hinder the growth and prosperity of SFA:

Few job opportunities for students

Few options for fun and entertainment

Parental attitude of SFA toward students

Living on campus requirements

Inability to schedule 4-day week classes

Local police harassment of students

- Invest in graduate programs as a potential growth area.
- Several strategic plan sessions have already have been done and have failed to address our limited resources (financial). This needs to be a part of the big plan.
- How to help faculty develop leadership skills in their fields through professional collegiality.
- What big changes need to happen so that freshmen receive better attention to their needs in the first semester?
- Current challenges faced by SFA and a vision for addressing them; the need for examining current processes across the university with a goal of increasing efficiency and, where possible, reducing time demands on faculty and department chairs so they have more time to focus on creative endeavors and direct investments in students.
- Why is the university seemingly ignoring the research of its expensive consulting firm (EAB) indicating that we must innovate to continue to thrive?

Part Two – Focus Group

Number of Participants: 12

Date: October 24, 2014

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

Several of you were in agreement that SFA is unique in terms of its location and its place in the community. What suggestions would you have for developing objectives in the strategic plan to promote the logistical advantages of SFA?

- Safety of East Texas.

We don't capitalize on this enough.

This would appeal to parents in Dallas & Houston. Need to advertise to point this out.

Several responses addressed lack of incentives, both financial and professional, to attract and maintain the most qualified faculty. Increasing salaries would be an obvious objective in the strategic plan to address the financial concerns. What objectives could be included to encourage professional development or additional non-financial incentives?

- Need better students; for example, remedial math has helped.
- More respect for faculty.
- Salaries are an issue that we can't do anything about.
- Could we reach out to schools instead of expecting students to come to us?
- More public Outreach – currently we have:

Music Camp

Art Camp

Writing

Camp

- Need to reach out more to the community.

Fine Arts does a lot with its "Friends Organization" but the community fails to

respond. For example, we had reached out to a local restaurant to host a poetry reading, but the owner was concerned he would not draw enough patrons that night and declined the offer. The poetry program moved to the local yoga studio and there was a great turnout (over 250 people attended).

- Satellite campus (Have heard something about satellite campus in Woodlands).
- “Centers for outreach.”
- Growth in Art can come through transfer students from other Colleges & Universities.
- Central office (?) could funnel new students to SFASU.
- Tracking students in other places.(?)
- Instead of following Lone Star we could take the leadership role in promoting our programs & be more progressive.
- Faculty are expected to “touch” each student 3 times during a semester. This is an especially difficult situation for larger programs.
- Faculty are required to follow a deepening bureaucracy and are expected to take on more administrative functions. An example would be processing travel forms which used to be handled by the Travel Office. Another would be excessive assessment responsibilities, required here of faculty, which are not expected of colleagues in other universities. Outside colleagues express bewilderment when told how SFA handles assessment. Assessment is important but could be done more efficiently. Reports are often repetitive; outcomes and objectives are unclear.
- Advising takes up an inordinate amount of time.

How can SFA do both, promote growth and at the same time emphasize small class size and individual attention?

- The push for online classes continues to grow but our strength is the face-to-face connections we have with students.
- Maybe SFA is already the right size and doesn’t need to grow the student population. Instead focus more on graduation rates for the students we have.
- We need to decide what type of university we’re going to be. Communication is critical. Perhaps we could form “think tanks” to identify growth opportunities, and we should focus more on developing and promoting quality programs.

What strategic objectives could be developed to encourage SFA students to become more effective critical thinkers?

- Faculty should be freed of administrative tasks and be allowed to spend their time teaching students these skills.
- They have to be taught that life isn't always fair.
- A set of core objectives could be established to convince students of the importance of a good education.

During our strategic planning training, one area of discussion centered around the perception that there is a growing wave of anti-intellectualism and a fading commitment to education throughout the country. These were coupled with concerns that the state legislature would continue the trend of reducing higher education budgets. Do you agree with these perceptions? If so, how should we position ourselves, in terms of specific strategic planning objectives, to deal with these trends?

- I don't disagree but this wave has been around for a long time. We simply need to accept it and do the best we can as educators.
- Develop effective marketing plans to emphasize the importance of an education.

Additional Comments:

Several of you were in agreement that SFA is unique in terms of its location and its place in the community. What suggestions would you have for developing objectives in the strategic plan to promote the logistical advantages of SFA?

- Engage community and SFA leaders in creative partnerships to market these advantages and provide opportunities for students.
- Based on regional needs assessments, develop new programs that capitalize on local needs and strengths.

Several responses addressed lack of incentives, both financial and professional, to attract and maintain the most qualified faculty. Increasing salaries would be an obvious objective in the strategic plan to address the financial concerns. What objectives could be included to encourage professional development or additional non-financial incentives?

- Develop/support communication and feedback mechanisms that promote

trust and provide a vehicle for responding to the expressed needs and concerns of faculty and chairs. (Though faculty senate does in some way represent faculty concerns, I am unsure of broad representation or response to concerns.)

- Provide regular articulation of responses to broad-based concerns of faculty/chairs.
- Make reasoning behind funding priorities clear (e.g., if increasing faculty salaries is truly a priority initiative, explain motivation for decisions regarding other highly visible and costly initiatives).

How can SFA do both, promote growth and at the same time emphasize small class size and individual attention?

- Develop and maintain a priority of procedural efficiency across the university, removing unnecessary redundancy and reporting and allowing faculty time to continue individual attention.
- Develop new programs targeting high needs/growing areas of interest.

What strategic objectives could be developed to encourage SFA students to become more effective critical thinkers?

- Develop faculty incentives/initiatives providing time and recognition for efforts (again, also requires focus on improving efficiency).
- Revisit the high impact practices initiative and its effectiveness in promoting critical thinking across the campus.
- Continue to raise admission standards and provide scholarship opportunities to attract better prepared students.

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- The trend toward reduction in higher education budget support is clear. I would not necessarily attribute this trend to a “wave of anti-intellectualism”, but it does appear that there is a greater focus on education for the purpose of job acquisition as opposed to a more general purpose of developing a well-educated person.
- We must maintain awareness of this focus and be prepared to educate students and parents on job opportunities within our individual disciplines.

- Provide support/incentives for faculty efforts at raising external funds.
- Maintain strong relationships with alumni base and provide regular updates on activities within their areas of interest and use of donated funds.
- Examine processes to maximize efficiency and promote innovative programs.