

Data Gathering Session

Group engaged with: Faculty of Liberal and Applied Arts College

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Design: Survey

Participants: 108

Responses: 20

What are the top three strengths of SFA? (*cumulative of all responses*)

- Good students
- Good faculty
- Good staff
- Relatively small size
- Traditional university (plenty of activities for the students)
- Student/professor interaction (small class sizes, professor involvement in student activities, etc.)
- A diverse undergraduate population; I really enjoy my connection to the students here on campus
- The flexibility to teach an array of different courses
- There are colleagues across campus that I value and am proud to work alongside.
- Collegiality
- SFA's connection to the local community
- Its reasonable size
- We are regional
- We are independent
- A diverse student body.
- The opportunity and support available to teach a wide range of courses.
- The sense of a small campus community can occasionally be SFA's strength.
- Beautiful, spacious, and convenient campus integrated with the piney woods.
- Undergraduate students at all levels can get individualized attention from and have frequent interactions with tenured and tenure-track professors.
- SFA is a teaching-focused college so students are the top priority over research and sports.
- SFA is a relatively small, traditional (and independent) university.
- There exists a somewhat family atmosphere between faculty (generally speaking) and between students.
- We have relatively small class sizes, with opportunities for faculty to get to know students personally and to be involved in students' academic (student group) and extracurricular (sports, banquets) activities.

What are the top three weaknesses of SFA? (cumulative of all responses)

- Poor pay
- The primary concern is not only the low faculty salary but the salary disparity within the university that also concerns the faculty. It is difficult for the faculty to fathom why the salary of the administration and the coaching staff are ranked in the middling order within the state of Texas while that of the faculty is ranked as second lowest in the state. This is not only embarrassing, but for the faculty it also signals the lack of concern on the part of the administration.
- Faculty are undervalued by the university: this is most evident in the lack of attention to salary adjustments, but also in the fact that we must carry heavy teaching loads (4-4 is standard), and yet we are constantly pulled into extracurricular administrative and committee work.
- Heavy service load
- Heavy teaching load
- Equipment antiquated or unavailable (classroom computers, copy machines, statistical programs, etc.)
- Online library resources lacking
- Lack of funding for research and even student events (travel to professional conferences for professors and students, etc.).
- Many regents and administrators do not seem to value faculty and the university's academic mission. Not all of them, of course, but enough of them to create and foster a culture of contempt toward faculty. Regents and administrators express this culture of contempt in many ways, such as low faculty salaries, an overreliance on disincentives to motivate faculty, a failure to think creatively in ways to help faculty do their jobs, a tendency to make excessive demands on faculty, a reluctance to take faculty concerns and suggestions seriously, and a denigration of important faculty issues such as academic freedom. Over time, this attitude becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: since many regents and administrators do not expect much from faculty, they do not invest much in faculty, so good professors leave or give up, leading to mediocrity and low morale.
- No sustained interest in building/improving faculty morale
- High teaching workload demands with very little classroom assistance (large class sizes without the mechanics of a legitimate TA structure and merit based mainly on research productivity)
- Low salaries, heavy teaching loads, lackluster benefits (our dental plan, etc.), and a moribund/limited town is simply wearying on faculty, particularly junior faculty
- Very low salaries
- High teaching load
- Little scholarly incentives.
- Trying to be too much for too many students (at what point have we spread ourselves too thin?)
- Lack of true institutional support for graduate programs
- Being an independent school with a board that may not always put the academic mission of the university first.
- The seeming disinterest in improving and addressing some of the basic needs of the faculty some of which are as follows: research facilities in the form of more

grants, travel funds, more books and journals in the library. Limited resources in these areas hinder the ability of the faculty to grow as true scholar-teacher.

- Oftentimes it is difficult to distinguish whether SFA is a teaching university or a teaching-heavy university. Given the teaching course load, and the amount of preparation time required, without an adequate support structure it appears that we come through as a teaching-heavy university which leaves faculty to juggle the limited time they have between class preparation and research.
- Graduate programs are not funded well enough to actually attract a diversity of students and grow.
- Our academic programs do not integrate with local, regional, national, international, and virtual communities as visibly and frequently as they might.
- The biggest problem (especially with morale) is the polarization of salary between administration and faculty and inequitable faculty salaries between colleges/departments.
- We often are forced to use substandard, antiquated, or unavailable equipment.
- We constantly face a lack of funding for research, development, and travel to professional conferences for professors (and for qualified students). I have attended one regional conference this year (to which I drove 9½ hours—in Texas), and I have \$40 left in my Faculty Development Fund.

What do you think are ways to create opportunities to improve SFA by expanding on strengths, eliminating weaknesses and/or constructing new paths?

(cumulative of all responses)

- SFA's strengths are solid. The weaknesses are very problematic. With not much pay, we are constantly pushed to take on more service and expand our research – all while teaching 4/4 loads. Something has to give! Increased service takes away from time for research. Research is difficult enough with 4/4 loads; increasing service just takes time from everything else. SFA should start honoring the teaching load policy and reward those who carry a heavier load by teaching grad classes, supervising internships, and supervising independent studies. Finally, the new post-tenure review policy being considered will effectively gut the meaning of —tenure. Instead of heaping more requirements on tenured faculty, without increasing salaries, they should be thinking of ways to appreciate that we remain at SFA!
- Ensure that student to professor ratios meet the national average...or perhaps are lower. Many programs meet this goal but some do not. Student/professor interaction is one of our greatest strengths. How can professors know student names, advise students appropriately, and/or provide opportunities for student involvement with poor student to faculty ratio!!
- Ensure that proper equipment is provided for teaching, research, and advising. How can we teach a class when classroom computers have software that is so outdated that it won't show a graphic or run a video clip? Keep not only the hardware up to date, but the software!
- Make statistical software available for professors who use them. If you can't afford a license for a few professors, the university should rent it for them. If it has to come out of professional development funds, we are going to need more of that. How can we attend a conference and buy software with \$700? You want

us to take students and get them involved in research and regional competitions...we need funds to do that.

- Update facilities. All freshmen come to the Liberal Arts North building. Have you seen the restroom on the first floor? I would change schools just so I never have to go there again.
- A normative 3/3 course load (or greatly lowered caps on classroom enrollment) would go a long way to making us a legitimately classroom-centered institution. SFA should strive to be a teaching-*centered* university, not simply a teaching-*heavy* institution.
- Attention paid to increasing morale of faculty (there are few quantifiable "perks" on campus. What about free rec center privileges, faculty club, etc.? Some creativity here would go a long way)
- A better acknowledgement of research and scholarly agendas that eventually will reflect on our students, departments, colleges, and the university in general. Knowing that my salary is among the lowest in the state of Texas is definitely not an incentive and it shows how much our employer values our work. Entering a state system: UT, Texas A&M, Texas Tech, Texas State, could be part of the solution.
- Focus on what we do best and not try to be all things to all students. Provide on-campus activities for students and visitors on the weekends.
- While the administration may often suggest that there is no revenue to bring about an increase in faculty salary, the administration can at least demonstrate their genuine concern by pledging that across the board, that is administration, staff, athletics and across all colleges, the salaries when compared to that of other public institutions in Texas will be ranked similarly.
- If we are a teaching university with a genuine concern for our students, a 3/3 teaching load will go a long way to facilitate innovating teaching amongst faculty that really places the students at the center. In order for this to happen, classes should also be capped at a reasonable size.
- Teaching should be protected by minimizing the faculty's involvement in administrative tasks. Faculty research and pedagogical development should be supported and encouraged as a direct benefit to teaching. In order to promote ongoing disciplinary expertise, faculty should be granted semester-long post-tenure sabbaticals in their 9th or 10th year, pending the approval of a documented plan of study, and every 10 years after that, also pending an approved plan. Post-tenure sabbatical plans could be for research and/or pedagogical purposes.
- Public spaces such as lounges or cafes should be added in or close to academic buildings to promote informal interactions and mingling between all community members (students, faculty, and staff) closer to the formal environment of the classrooms. This would deepen the local sense of academic community and the collegiate feel of our campus.
- SFA should look for ways to increase regional interaction, such as through summer camps, which might also be a source of stipends and experience for graduate students.

- Study-abroad programs, faculty travel, and online education should be looked at strategically as a way to build national, international, and virtual community.
- I believe that we need to examine student/teacher ratios (by program, not by classroom) to determine the best way to serve our students. We need extra personnel to perform academic advising so that faculty did not lose over 8 weeks per year advising. Now, with the new Student Success Advising Tool, this is even more of a burden. This exorbitant time commitment not only takes away from our research time, but it takes away from our ability to grade and ability to perform at the level that we would like in the classroom (and with our student groups). The teaching/service requirements are unrealistic, and the salary issues mentioned above are exacerbated by that fact. We are here because we WANT to be, but that is not a guarantee that we will be able to continue at this pace.
- SFA should ensure that updated equipment is provided for teaching, researching, and advising, and that that equipment is regularly updated.
- Advising should be computerized so that we do not have to manually keep up with degree plans!

What is the one thing you would like to see change for the better at SFA?

(cumulative of all responses)

- **Increase salary of faculty to align with regional and national trends. This is the most important factor that needs to change to see SFA become better at faculty recruitment and retention. Without improving faculty economic viability and morale, there is going to be very little change between what we were and what we want to become.**
- More balance between research, service, and teaching. The administration needs to make up their minds on what SFA should be. If they want SFA to be a teaching university, cut back on the research pressure. If they want SFA to be a research university, reduce the teaching load to a 3/3. As it stands now, it's difficult to excel in any one area because the other areas require too much time.
- The one big change is probably the mindset. We are so focused on losing students right now, that we actually hurting ourselves. We are adding initiatives with little information. This new advising software has packages the university can buy that would give us exact information, by program, on when students are leaving and where they are going. We could then develop program specific plans for retention. Instead the university is trying approaches that are unlikely to work in most programs. By adding essentially busy work to professors, it removes time that they could be using to grade papers, attend student meetings, etc. Further, if we work on the image of the university, by updating facilities, advertising student opportunities (because we are now funding them better), illustrating the success of our graduates (because we pay our faculty better and worry about retention less), we would not have a retention problem. We don't want to get to a place where we retain students merely for the money. If we get there, we can just give them an A when they register for the courses and be done with it. If we are rigorous, if we pass or fail students based on tough standards and their efforts, if

we are allowed to do this as academics have been for centuries, then retention will dip and then it will return. We will have students with potential and they will make it. Retention issues do not always signify a problem...sometimes they merely mark a change in rigor. Focus on the image of the university, not solely on numbers.

- Take faculty morale seriously. Incentivize working here in a such a way that faculty feel engaged/involved/connected to the life of the university.
- Teaching load: 3/3.
- Faculty can be great ambassadors for the SFA brand - they need to feel that way. That can only happen if the interests of the faculty and their morale are taken very seriously. After all, one should realize that the job of a university professors has one of the highest barriers to entry given that we all have to have the highest degree in our fields, but the compensation is hardly reflective of that. Beyond salaries, it would help immensely if the university recognizes that most faculty also have a genuine interest to remain life-long students and in order to remain that way, adequate resources should be made available to support their research.
- Budgetary concerns, limited resources have always challenged administrators, but it is in these situations that they should begin to think creatively in order to foster a greater sense of community among the faculty. Help keep faculty morale high.
- The faculty's teaching time should be protected by minimizing our involvement in administrative tasks.
- The biggest change that I would recommend, is that we should stop worrying so much about overall retention and focus on specific retention. We have many students in our program that will never work in the field! (We are the experts, and we should be trusted to know.) If they want to leave, they should be allowed to do so. If they want to change majors, they should be allowed to do that, too. I realize that we are moving toward outcome-based funding (a HUGE mistake), but SFA should not have a —no college student left behindll attitude.
- Another recommendation regards the —rebrandingll and new marketing campaign. First, why does the university not use its own resources (such as the art department, the marketing department, etc.)? Is this not a direct statement to those departments (and to their —professionalll faculty) that they are not good enough? The administration needs to realize that there are thousands of students that do not major in forestry, engineering, nursing, or business that are just as important (and most are just as concerned with the quality of their education) as the students in those fields. By the same token, the faculty members feel the same...