

Engagement and Data Gathering Session

Group:	Community and Business Leaders
SPT Partners:	Megan Weatherly, J.D. Salas
Date:	October–November 2014
Design:	Interviews
Attendees:	10 (list of interviewees included after key data)

KEY DATA:

1. What makes SFA special? Unique?
 - a. Truths
 - i. Location (part of Nacogdoches, caring community)
 - ii. Size – not too big but not too small; small enough to enable good relationships between faculty and students
 - iii. Campus is beautiful
 - b. Trends
 - i. College of Forestry (lots of schools have education, nursing, etc. programs, but not many have forestry programs)
 - ii. Faculty are engaged with the students
 - c. Unique idea(s)
2. What could SFA do or be to encourage you to support the university?
 - a. Truths
 - i. University needs to continue to work to improve its connections with the community, including ensuring that community knows about events other than athletic events that are going on.
 - ii. University needs to partner more with city, county, etc. promotional organizations such as Chamber, CVB, etc.
 - b. Trends
 - i. Seems as if the right hand doesn't know what the left is doing at SFA; need to ensure that all on campus know about ongoing projects and work together toward a common goal.
 - ii. Get the alumni more involved
 - c. Unique idea(s)
 - i. Increase the continuing education component

- ii. Take care to ensure that campus and its leadership are not sending mixed signals about the acceptability of alcohol use at events (see notes for further explanation)
- 3. What is one innovative idea SFA should implement?
 - a. Truths
 - b. Trends
 - i. Create an entrepreneurship program, incubate student business ideas
 - ii. Try harder to recruit top-notch students at area schools; seems like university just accepts as a given that they'll leave for larger schools.
 - c. Unique idea(s)
 - i. Challenge students with programs that encourage integrity, citizenship, and ethics.
 - ii. Need to become more modern in terms of technology; need innovative living spaces and classrooms.
- 4. What do students need to get from a college education/experience to be successful in life?
 - a. Truths
 - i. Hands-on, real world (applied) experience
 - ii. Personal communication skills (written and oral)
 - b. Trends
 - i. Life skills, independence
 - ii. Professionalism
 - iii. Self-awareness
 - c. Unique idea(s)
 - i. Training on inter-generational communication
- 5. What have we not asked you that you would like to discuss?
 - a. Truths
 - b. Trends
 - i. Remember not to be an island; be easy to access
 - ii. Get faculty and staff more involved in the community.
 - c. Unique idea(s)
 - i. More local events/school events instead of moving out to the metroplex areas (Battle of The Pineywoods)
 - ii. More business involvement in Lumberjack Alley vs. Greek life emphasis.

Individuals interviewed (alphabetical by last name):

1. Gary Lee Ashcraft (President/CEO, Nacogdoches County United Way)
2. Wendy Buchanan (Managing Director – Investment Officer, Wells Fargo)

3. Kati Harris (Owner, Liberty Bell Restaurant)
4. Fred Hayes (Superintendent, Nacogdoches Independent School District)
5. Bruce Mayfield (Financial Advisor, Wells Fargo)
6. Brett Maisel (former sergeant (recently retired after 32 years), Nacogdoches Police Department)
7. Dr. Jennifer Criss Montes (Owner, Nacogdoches Pediatric Dentistry)
8. Bruce Partain (President/CEO, Nacogdoches County Chamber of Commerce)
9. Melissa Sanford (CEO, Nacogdoches Convention & Visitors Bureau)
10. Michelle Smith (Vice President/COO, Nacogdoches County United Way)

ALL DATA:

What makes SFA special? Unique?

- I think the atmosphere and surroundings of Nacogdoches make the campus special. Having SFA here makes Nac more special, and having Nac here makes SFA more special. The campus is beautiful with the trees and all, and it's obvious that time and energy are dedicated to that endeavor.
- I like the small campus, and I think the atmosphere on campus is special. What's unique about SFA is Nacogdoches and the fact that the citizens welcome the students and are so friendly toward them. They don't think of the students as a nuisance.
- Its small size makes SFA unique. It's unlike a chain, but has more of a boutique feel. The campus is small enough that students can be very involved and not feel like they're just a number. There's still a place for everyone in the campus community. What's unique about it is that it's one of the prettiest campuses in the state of Texas. It's in the center of the town and the community, and it's part of the heart of the town. Also, it's a very safe environment for students to come to.
- At [the institution where I went to undergrad], the classes I had were 500-800 people, so if I needed attention, I had to buddy up to a grad student worker bee. What I loved about grad school at SFA is that the professors were very hands on and classes were small. Most classes my team speaks to are small, at most maybe 80-100. Faculty is engaged, knows students' names. The faculty is very dynamic these days.
- For me, what's special and unique is the intimacy of campus. It's not so huge of a system that people get lost. I was attracted to SFA for a couple of reasons, including the forestry department and the rural setting and the quality of life and the small town feel. I can go on campus, and I know people. SFA is growing and doing great work, but at the same time, you're not lost in a sea of humanity. You know people and can talk to people. Class size, for the most part, is reasonable. You can connect there; it's not a UT or A&M, but it's possible to still have some interpersonal connection with faculty and staff here.

- The location is very special and unique. The community engagement in association with the university is also special. There's so much of a tie between the university and the community that the two are almost inseparable; you can't associate one without thinking about the other. SFA attempts to reach out to the community and Nacogdoches and has regional and state presence. For example, at community events, SFA always has key representatives present. In the few days alone, I've been to two NISD events that SFA wasn't a key stakeholder in but that the SFA administration was present to support.
- Also, the setting of the campus is unique and special. The fact that it offers a big city experience on a small town level makes it special. Parents understand that and know that at SFA, they get bigger bang for their buck. The forestry college, I think, makes us unique. Every school has education and nursing, which we're great at, but not every school has a forestry program. I think it's also unique that Dr. Pattillo came from the ranks. He's not a stuffed shirt. He's a working guy.
- Has everything you could need in a short distance
- Not as much depth but there is a variety of options available (shopping, entertainment, etc.)
- Quality instruction – personalized (not very many TA taught classes for major courses)
- Beautiful campus
- Reasonable commute to several metro areas (Dallas/Houston)
- Location of campus
- Has grown from a party school to a college town (town is starting to reflect that change)
- Geography
- One is able to get resources from the metro areas but retain a rural atmosphere.
- Population is just the right size for the area
- Beautiful campus – created by the people

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

- We at the CVB want to work more closely with all facets of SFA to promote Nacogdoches and the university. It's tough to get an "in" and to partner with SFA. I'm not sure how to get that "in," but having it could help SFA in recruitment could help the CVB attract alumni to events. We all need to work to get the students to buy into being an active part of the community. Also, the university needs to continue to work on building stronger traditions that cause alumni to return to town.
- Support the high caliber of students who represent SFA well. SFA gets out and supports the community by having partnerships with schools, other athletic events. (e.g. soccer team helping with small kids' soccer program) More connections like that would be great. Also, many pre-dental students come to me, but more formal externships and community partnerships would be great.

- Townspeople don't know enough about what's going on. It would be neat if they had access to consolidated information like what comes out in SFA Today. They need to know about the opportunities at the university other than just sports. We should publicize our fine arts series, the fact that they can attend movies at the Student Center, and public lectures. It would be neat if the SFA app disseminated this information since we all have tablets and smartphones.
- Enhance community connections. Those connections are present, but they need to be stronger. We have to remember that we're not just producing a product for our economy; we're producing better people. The idea of education as a product has been coming to bear since the 50s. It ties into the notion that everybody ought to go to college. Socially, this notion has a place, but why does everyone need to go to college? We need to question whether college now is what high school was years ago. Have we turned college into a money making process/program/institution at the expense of really educating students? Sometimes I think we have. It wasn't long ago that college wasn't an expectation. What changed in our culture to cause that shift? Maybe there ought to be things in college that are different, like specialized tracks for real skills.
- Personally, it bothers me that no longer is a prayer offered at graduation. It is my assumption that you're really not supposed to have alcohol on campus, but SFA, in most of their activities (and not just students) revolves around alcohol, which is a surprise to me. In the recent past, a young lady presented to the Rotary about homecoming and all of the events scheduled. I was surprised that all events had margaritas, wine, beer, open bar, etc. All of these wonderful, social activities—part of the description of each of these activities—had alcohol involved. This was very saddening to me. We say that we're trying to reduce alcohol-related losses, but then alcohol is always present. The campus and leadership are sending mixed signals.
- We partner with almost every department on campus—business, education, student activities, athletics, social work, liberal arts—and what I've learned over the years is SFA has awesome things going on (research, livability, etc.), but no one knows what each other is doing...You have to start working together as an institution. Talk about projects across campus. Also, SFA should be a regional university, not just a Nac university. We are it in the region, so treat it that way...Also, the university could play more of a role in town, especially in terms of helping the disadvantaged. Big Serve is great, but it's a one day thing. We need programs with sustainability and long-term impacts, like the work Emmerentie Oliphant is doing. SFA has the capacity to engage, partner, and lead in getting sustainable results for Nacogdoches and cities around here.
- Take the ego out of it. There's so much strength in the different departments, and they're interdependent and need to embrace that. The sum is greater than the parts.
- Get the alumni more involved

- Market to the alumni – send out information on our excellence
- Build SFASU pride in the alumni
- Already support the university in several ways but some ideas to help others support more include:
 - Have businesses partner with the university
 - Have a direct line of communication between students/businesses/community
 - Shop Nac for campus
 - Continue emphasis on studies over numbers in enrollment
 - Create an easier path for non-traditional student
- Increase the continuing education component (several opportunities at AC/Lufkin but not so much at SFA)
- Creating more community interest in the school

What is one innovative idea SFA should implement?

- One thing that I routinely here is that SFA isn't modern enough, especially in terms of technology. Families go to other universities that have innovative living spaces and classrooms, and we don't have that. Or, if we do, people don't know about it.
- I'm excited about the new engineering program! That's huge and a major innovation that will allow us to compete with other schools.
- I've noticed that there's a slogan going around: the SFA Way. I would consider innovating an initiative that has to do with improving citizenship. For example, I notice that among some athletic teams and leadership programs, the language the students use is shocking. Among other coaches and leaders, it's kept in check. We should challenge our students to take part in integrity, citizenship and ethics.
- Have an entrepreneurial track of study. University needs to get better about bringing entrepreneurial experiences to students. Maybe use Mast Roundtable money to seed student businesses? We need to bring that opportunity and experience gained by entrepreneurship home. I think something innovative would also be creating more online degrees. Online grabs students who are older and have to work or care for family. There's a huge market there.
- University is reaching out by relationships (e.g. College of Business). The Rusche CoB board has some tremendous entrepreneurs on it, and the university needs to utilize that knowledge base in a way that young people on campus can take advantage of that.
- More practical experiences/life skills
- Mentorship within the degree program
- Push dual-credit courses for local students to create a recruitment advantage.
- I think it would be innovative to connect with high school staff and students more. I'm not wholly sure what this would look like, but I think that SFA needs to be more aggressive in its approach to reaching our high school students in NISD. There's a sort of

assumption by SFA that dual credit students will continue to come, but that's not aggressive approach to get our students to SFA. There seems to be a resolve that those students motivated enough to pursue dual credit will go to other schools like A&M and UT. SFA needs to show those students what opportunities are here. Again, I'm not sure what that looks like, but I've seen other institutions, specifically UT-Tyler, that will court those students for a while. For example, the UT-Tyler president hosts a dinner with those top 10 and top 10% students. It's a way of saying, "We're here. We want you here, too." Those top students also need to hear from previous top students who have chosen SFA.

- Create an entrepreneur program – partnering with Businesses/Small Business Association. This will help business and create actual results for students.
- Engage the community directly
- Expand online course offerings

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

- Students need real life experience—not just work experience, but exposure to the real world and common sense. Also, students need to learn personal, 1-to-1 communication (not just electronic communication) and skills like eye contact.
- At least half of our students leave with no work experience. I want to see more work programs for students that get them experience in their field of study, sort of like what student-teachers have to do. Perhaps this work experience should be required for all majors. I want students to have those experiences, but they also need to ask for those experiences.
- Students need the ability to be civil citizens of our community and world. We've lost the value of education and a liberal arts education and have become very utilitarian entity; it seems sometimes like all we are here for is to produce a product of an economy. That's not the be all and end all. We've misunderstood that there are basic things that every individual who is college educated ought to know. We're producing products (students) like they're coming off an assembly line. I think our students also have to be exposed to the world; whatever their field, they need a broader perspective, not just regional and local, but national and global perspective. That's a vital part of an undergraduate education.
- Students need a good background in their major, both academically and also through hands-on, real-world experience. They also need to learn independence so that they can go out on their own. Classes to foster that would be cool, helping them break from parents. Being involved in organizations is very important in helping them learn those practical skills, which makes them more successful and can help them learn to manage people.

- I've been working on generational leadership and communication teaching recently. The sarcasm toward people of an older generation is not going to serve students well in the workplace. What I have to do is develop strategies as a supervisor as to how to effectively interact with Xers and Yers. But these Xers and Yers also need to respect the wisdom and authority of those above them. There has to be mutual respect between these generations. That would prepare them more to succeed in life. This has to be modeled by university leadership and faculty.
- Self-awareness. They need to be able to know their potential, worth, abilities, and feel good about themselves. They need to have confidence in their skill set and be able to articulate this. Students also need to gain a sense of self-awareness about their role in the community. This is critical for long-lasting satisfaction in their lives. They need to be able to ask and answer, "What's my contribution? How am I helping pull others up?" This is very important to long lasting sense of well-being.
- Students being proud of the institution helps self-awareness. Students need to gain confidence, self-awareness, and a good education. They need to understand the importance of good relationships as well.
- Life skills – knowing what the job calls for before they graduate.
- College does not prepare students for life. There is no forethought or reality to job opportunities in the degree field.
- Come out with actual job experience
- Students not independent
- Job skills – resume, professionalism, internship
- Students need to learn how to communicate.
- Better writing skills emphasis in coursework.

What have I not asked you that you would like to discuss?

- I do like the new marketing campaign. I also think the university needs to do a better job with its social media. We don't do that enough. We could be using social media and the SFA app to do a better job of reaching out to the community.
- I think the people at SFA are passionate, so it's great that you all are doing these interviews. Just remember not to be an island; be easier to access.
- I was recently looking at the latest issues of *Sawdust*. It's a beautiful, colorful, professional publication. But lately the emphasis has been on sports, entertainment, fun stuff to do, recreation— everything but academics. I was really surprised. Where are the academics? I think we've lost that focus at an academic institution. *Sawdust* is *our* message; we produce and publish that, and we're saying this is who we are and what we think is important. We're self-reporting our priorities. And from the look of that publication, our priorities are extracurricular.

- How can we get faculty and staff more involved in the community? I meet many of them through my practice, but how can we get them more involved, even if they're only here for a short time? It's hard being an adult and only being here a certain amount of time and figuring out to get involved. Perhaps some sort of newcomers group to interface with the community? Also, can you add dental hygiene to the nursing program?
- Just remind everyone not to forget the roots, but I think SFA does a good job of remembering its roots. Focus on the global perspective of what a college educated person ought to know. Give our students a well-rounded education and world perspective.
- Marketing has got to be better
- Needs to be more inclusive of each area/department
- More local events/school events instead of moving out to the metroplex areas (Battle of The Pineywoods)
- More business involvement in Lumberjack Alley vs. Greek life emphasis.