

Engagement and Data Gathering Sessions

Group:	Employees from Physical Plant, jobs ranging from Level I Workers to Forepersons/Supervisors to Associate Director (Custodial, HVAC and Electrical, Gardeners and Arborists, Building Trades, Garbage, Heavy Equipment, Transportation)
SPT Partners:	Fenci, Kiesel
Date:	October 14 and October 16, 2014
Design:	Interview with Open Discussion
Attendees:	40

What makes SFA special or unique?

University's location offers "small-town" experience for urban students and "city" experience for rural students.

- Southern hospitality, friendly people
- Chance to get to know people here and in community
- Experience like small-town private school, at public price
- Students know staff members who work in their residence hall
- Students experience the old and the new
- Faculty enjoy teaching and getting to know students
- World-class forestry program
- Small class sizes, low student/faculty ratio

Beautiful campus and grounds

- Employees take pride in maintaining SFA's beauty
- Emphasis on projects like student safety, lighting

- Pride in university's appearance, working in beautiful place
- Recent improvements in student hangout areas (charging stations, seating outdoors, public areas)

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

Improve employee compensation and benefits

- Address salary compression (example given was similar salary for a new arrival and a worker with 20+ years on the job).
- Stop calling current plan "merit increases" because the raise is not really a reward for individual performance.
- Raise tuition reimbursement benefit to keep pace with rising tuition.
- Reduce cost and expand hours of Rec Center so shift workers can use it.
- Offer a range of perks to make up for low pay (lower parking cost, free tickets or passes to Athletics and Fine Arts events, scholarships specifically for children of employees).
- Insurance plan is inadequate. Dental benefit is useless with just one in-network dentist. We have no choices among health plans, unlike state employees in larger cities. Would be okay to have just one option if it was a good option.
- "Get outside the Pine Curtain" to see which benefits are offered elsewhere.
- General agreement that not being part of a system costs us in pay/benefits as well as in staff and faculty retention.
- Provide child care assistance. Most people cannot afford ECRC child care at \$900 per month for an infant, \$100 per month supply fee. Quality, affordable child care is a problem in general, for students as well as for faculty and staff.

Increase transparency and accountability

- Provide more opportunities to be heard. Do we need suggestion boxes? Including my input is likely to increase my support.
- Have meetings like this focus group more often. It matters to be heard.
- Hold all departments equally accountable for how they spend state funds.
- Stop expecting PPD to "clean up messes" when other departments say "not my responsibility" to get the job done. Specific example was Residence Life and the need to IDT many jobs.

- General comments about not understanding the new branding campaign, where outreach is occurring, how input is sought.
- Several people commented that they feel the administration wastes money.
- We have seen growth in buildings, faculty jobs and administrative jobs. This growth has outpaced enrollment, but purpose is not always clear to employees. Physical Plant lost jobs in 2010 and must do more now with less.

Manage facilities and funds wisely and efficiently

- Student Center parking garage is too expensive, goes unused.
- Rec Center is not customer-friendly.
- Spend capital improvement money to update equipment and space used by students, not to update individual offices. Focus on library, new cafeteria for Student Center, classrooms.
- Improve overall look of library by replacing carpet.
- Centralize more processes to improve efficiency.
- Implement “Tobacco-Free Campus,” including chewing tobacco.
- Invest in updated WiFi network on campus. Existing contract was for antiquated service. Need more powerful network, stronger signal.
- Beautify older areas of campus, such as landscaping near Griffith and Kerr. Freshmen live there, but no improvements have been made in years.
- Eliminate zero-based, line item budget. It is easier to manage, but not efficient. Carryover funds would allow departments to save to meet their needs without relying on capital funds.

Invest in sustainability and green building practices

- A statement about sustainability should come from the Board of Regents, and then policies should be developed.
- SFA should educate rural students about importance of recycling.
- We should instill in everyone a sense of personal responsibility about litter, disposing of garbage, recycling, conserving water and electricity.
- Sustainability suits our geographic location and academic programs.
- Solar panels could be placed on top of parking garages to generate power for recycling water or lighting the garages.
- SFA is not identified as an “aspirational model” by people in the facility planning and management profession.

Seek innovative partnerships and approaches

- SFA is crucial to Nacogdoches economy. Market school and town together, make the town and ISD “bleed purple.”
- Who are our college partners? Identify and collaborate with other colleges to serve students together.
- Rural residential college is an educational model under pressure. We need to partner with “storefront” higher ed locations, such as Lone Star and HCC, to meet more students’ needs. Also, offer more classes in evening hours or modified formats. “If we are going to stay a little country college, we’re not going to make it.”

What is one innovative idea SFA should implement?

- Develop a “wayfinding” app, not just new signage. Phone apps show everyone how to get around, much like a personal navigation system.
- Invest in Continuing Education opportunities. SFA could offer programs to keep certifications current in professional fields, offer non-credit courses to Nac community. This is a possible revenue stream that we are missing.
- Produce brochure or other resource to publicize all the summer camps, fine arts instruction, etc., that SFA offers to pre-college students in Texas, even if publication includes non-SFA information.
- Introduce an SFA 401 class, required of all students, to prepare for internships, job interviews, grad school and other post-grad concerns.
- Turn the area behind the library into another gathering place, like a walking mall, where students can study and buy refreshments.

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

Real world skills

- Require all students to gain work experience, on campus or elsewhere. Allow students to work again in Physical Plant, develop jobs for them elsewhere. Any work experience teaches students to get along, interact with other people, manage their time, communicate and meet expectations.

- Help students with loan management, overall financial plans.
- Offer applied courses—theory is little help in the real world.
- Do a better job of showing students how degrees can be paths to careers, especially in liberal arts.
- Teach students to network, search for opportunities, reach out to others.
- “Do an internship—it’s like an audition for your future job.”
- Provide for more facilities like the commercial kitchen in Human Sciences.
- Students lack face-to-face skills and do not take steps to help themselves. They do not understand how to conduct personal and professional business.

Strong reputation for their alma mater and program

- Quality programs lead to quality graduates and quality companies who come here to recruit them.
- Some staff expressed concern about our purpose and identity. If we are a second-tier or third-tier school, commit to it and become the best one. We cannot be all things to all people or become another flagship school.
- Current job fairs do not attract high-quality or international employers.
- Alumni encourage their kids to go elsewhere. This happens when they do not value their own degree, or they believe that SFA has lowered its standards or changed its mission. Is this reputation problem a marketing issue or a reality?

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

- All faculty and staff should get into athletic and student performance events free. Seats at many events go unused anyway.
- The assessment process for all buildings has taken too long. The priority should be on student use areas.
- Our teaching and classroom environment and technical equipment do not look competitive. It looks like we are 20 years behind. Some ISDs have better facilities than we have, and we are behind some of them in technology.
- Physical Plant does a lot with the resources it has. The department saves the university money through care and maintenance.
- Students seem to lack common sense. Work experience might help.
- We should improve parking, make more tailgating space and beautify the area around the Ag Pond. Move the ROTC building? Install a solar fountain?

- Custodial workers need improved training on proper disposal of chemical waste, along with floor sinks in all buildings to get waste to lift station.
- Some of our buildings may be out of date, but they are clean, well-heated and cool in summer.
- During student move-in, set up a staggered schedule to prevent traffic jams and exasperation when it is so hot in August. This would improve the experience for everyone on campus.
- Personal attention is important here. Parents feel they can entrust their son or daughter to our care.
- Proud to work here because we serve many first-generation, low-income students (staff member was one of those herself).
- In travels around other conference schools, staff member has come to appreciate our beautiful, manicured grounds. Campus is kept pretty all year.
- Staff member frustrated that child is attending University of Houston. They offered more financial support than SFA did, even though student was salutatorian of local senior class.
- Too many students report that SFA was not their first choice of school. How can we attract more people who want to be at SFA?
- We need to get more alumni interested in staying here after graduation. The local economy might benefit from their presence and ideas.
- Advisors and faculty should encourage students to pursue trades/crafts if they decide a four-year program is not right for them. It gets harder each year to find qualified people to do those jobs.
- Everyone has to remember that we learn from students, too.
- Our strengths as an institution are traditional ones. Do we need to change some of them so we can grow and thrive?
- Numerous suggestions about space and traffic routes: eliminate parallel parking on Clark; consider closing the part of Raguet near the Health Center and making it into a gathering space or free-speech zone; increase safety of pedestrians in crosswalk in front of Steen and cafeteria.
- Best part of working here is that something new is always happening, even after seven years of employment.