

**STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**Senate Subcommittee on Higher Education**  
**Testimony Regarding the Benefits of a Stand Alone Institution**  
**June 25, 2008**

Good morning, Madame Chair and members of the committee. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today on this important topic.

Stephen F. Austin State University is one of four independent institutions in the state, having its own Board of Regents. This arrangement has worked well for SFA and provided numerous benefits.

Because of its status as an independent institution, SFA realizes greater local control. The Board of Regents is able to focus on one campus and develop policies that are tailored to the needs of that one institution. In a system, policies may be uniform for multiple campuses, which may or may not be able to address the special needs of each institution.

As an independent institution, SFA is able to make decisions more quickly because of the easy accessibility of the Regents. In fact, the SFA Regents are frequently on campus for various events; therefore, they maintain a current knowledge of institutional affairs that would be difficult for a regent overseeing multiple campuses.

As a result of their familiarity with the campus and its challenges, they can act more quickly. In a system, an extra layer of bureaucracy may slow down the process and increase the time between problem and resolution.

In addition, SFA's institutional leadership is not as far removed from the Board; therefore, it is easier for the Board to obtain timely feedback on institutional issues and to find resolutions that reflect input from the grassroots.

For example, the Chair of SFA's faculty senate gives a report to the Board at every quarterly meeting. At a system, this is not always possible because of the number of institutional faculty being

represented and the number of issues the regents must address. One faculty member representing all faculty may give a report at a system meeting once each year.

At SFA, the Board of Regents assists in campus planning, rather than focusing on system planning. Therefore, instead of focusing on a larger, over-arching system plan, which then impacts campus planning, SFA is able to focus solely on the institution's mission and needs. This provides a clear identity and a voice for the institution, which is not lost among a group of institutions.

We have also found that being an independent institution lessens multi-campus competition and provides a greater sense of community.

As an independent, SFA is not competing for the attention of decision-makers since it has a single dedicated Board. Within a system, regents may be overwhelmed to address all the needs of the

various institutions causing a competition for attention amongst the institutions resulting in a lessened sense of community.

In addition, being an independent institution has not limited SFA's collaboration with other institutions. In fact, we share academic programs and research with UT Tyler, UT Austin, Texas A&M University, Lamar University, Texas Tech and the University of North Texas just to name a few.

SFA also collaborates financially with other institutions. For instance, we signed a contract with Texas A&M University System to purchase power, using economies of scale even though we are an independent university.

We recognized that there are pros and cons of both being an independent university as well as being in a system. Texas' higher education structure has developed sporadically over the years and is somewhat chaotic. Many of the systems are composed of institutions

with highly divergent missions and one governing board is asked to make policies for all of those institutions.

The leadership of SFA has found that the present status is a better fit for this institution. We appreciate the leadership and undivided attention that the Board has provided and look forward to working with future local boards.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions that you might have.