QEP designed to help students reduce debt, graduate *faster*

SFA's Quality Enhancement Plan is designed to reduce student debt by helping Lumberjacks earn their degrees faster.

The plan was developed during the university's recent reaffirmation of accreditation process with broad-based input and support from across campus. Its five main strategies include: creating ideal degree sequences; continually analyzing course demand; creating student-centric schedules; providing informed, proactive advising; and actively monitoring registration.

"An extra full year in college costs around $69,000 in tuition, books, lodging, meals and lost wages," said John Calahan, director of the SFA Office of Institutional Effectiveness. "Our plan, which has been called 'cutting edge' by members of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges visiting committee, is laser focused on reducing student loan debt by helping students graduate in four years or less."

SFA's "15 to Finish" campaign encourages students to take at least 15 credits per term or 30 credits per year to ensure they graduate on time. Taking just three fewer credits per semester puts students on a five-year plan for a bachelor's degree. Taking summer courses also can help students stay on target for a timely graduation.

"The sooner students graduate, the sooner they can begin work and start moving up in their careers," Calahan said. "Parents can help by encouraging their students to follow their degree map, take at least 15 hours per semester and take advantage of SFA's flat-rate tuition program, which allows them to take up to 21 credit hours at the cost of 12."

Recommended course sequences for each degree are available to help students plan their semesters and ensure required courses are offered when they are needed. SFA's academic advisers are available to help students address concerns and clear away roadblocks that threaten to interfere with their plan.

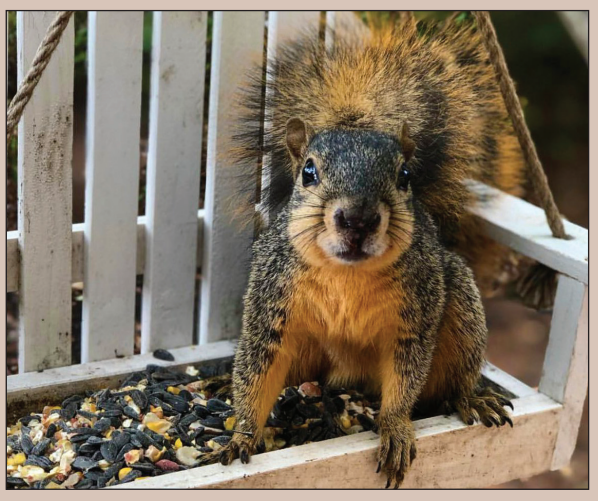
"Graduating early from SFA did assist me both financially and in starting my career much earlier than anticipated," said Vanessa Huynh, who graduated in 2019 with a bachelor's degree in food and nutrition. "I was able to reduce the number of years owed on my student loan debt, which of course helped to decrease the amount owed upon graduation."

To schedule an advising appointment:

- Log into mySFA
- Click the "Advising" tab
- Locate your assigned advisor in the "My Advisor" portal
- Click on "Schedule an advising appointment with your advisor"
- Select a time that works best for your schedule

For more information about reducing debt and staying on track, visit https://www.sfasu.edu/stayontrack.

@SFA_Twiggy



On our beautiful campus in the heart of the Piney Woods, we are proud to be axe-toting Lumberjacks and Ladyjacks! However, we also claim one of the cutest, most bright-eyed and bushy-tailed unofficial mascots you can follow on Instagram and Twitter… it's Twiggy, the SFA squirrel!

Usually found eating snacks and hanging around his swing outside the Ferguson Building, our furry friend enjoys meeting and greeting anyone who stops by or tosses a few crumbs his way. Join Twiggy's more than 2,000 followers, and add a little sunshine to your day.

Perkins College of Education launces research center

SFA's James I. Perkins College of Education has launched a stand-alone, independently funded research center dedicated to the study of college students' identities.

Called the Center for Research Advancing Identities and Student Experiences, or RAISE, its creation was led by assistant professor Dr. Pietro Sasso, who also will serve as the center's director. Sasso's hope is that the center, housed in the Department of Human Services and Educational Leadership, becomes the hub of research and outreach centered on facilitating research to amplify voice, affirm identity, and advance belonging about college student development and their experiences to better understand their formative lived experiences and multiple identities.

As the center ramps up, research will focus on the latest generation of students to enter collegiate ranks, Generation Z, who were born between 1996 and 2014.

"They are on our campus and are completely native to computers and technology," Sasso said. "They are different from former students, and we don't know much about them."

As Gen Z cycles out of college and is replaced by a subsequent generation of students, Generation Alpha, the center will adjust and evolve, Sasso said. But the goals of the center will remain.

"This center will aim to profile the spectrum of diversity comprising the contemporary college student through research and critical praxis," Sasso writes in the proposal. "Programming will discuss and highlight student populations, trends and issues in regard to how they are supported by our institutions."

In terms of output and production, Sasso wants the center to host a speaker series, produce a new research journal, author research papers, facilitate a network of scholars, and host a textbook series.

The new center will be housed in the Human Services Building in an office staffed with a graduate assistant. The center will begin by collaborating on research with the Pennsylvania State University's Timothy J. Piazza Center for Fraternity and Sorority Research and Reform as well as produce a new forthcoming co-edited text on multiracial college students. These sponsored research projects will be used to support a graduate research assistant and to attend scholarly conferences. For the long term, Sasso said there are good opportunities to receive grant funding from private foundations, small federal grants, and perhaps a named donor.

While year one is dedicated to the basics — establishing the center and its advisory board, reaching out to potential partner universities, looking for funding and connecting with departments on the SFA campus — year two will be dedicated to building the center's capacity. In year three, Sasso looks to begin publishing the center's academic journal.

"The proposed research agenda and projects would position SFA as a unique and distinctive place to examine how the college experience is formative to student identity development," Sasso said. "No current public or private higher education institution in Texas has such a center."

For more information, visit gosfa.com/raise-center.

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