

## **Sul Ross Group (SRG) Bulletin Thirty-One**

**8 April 2021**

### **Background and Context**

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of April (yesterday), The Association sent us a survey via our President Porter Garner '79 regarding the ongoing activities of the Task Force (TF) on Campus Displays. The request for former students to participate was sent to Porter to distribute from the two Co-Chairpersons of the TF. So the purpose of this entire Bulletin is to give you our perspectives of this topic from being involved in it, and solicit your support in filling out the survey.

As you will note from the correspondence below, the survey as originally sent did not include former students. As we pointed out to President Junkins, we believe TAMU belongs to us as much (or more) than faculty, staff and students. So, we now have an opportunity to fill it out and make comments – thanks to him.

We have been providing information about the purpose of the TF via our SRG Bulletins, but as a brief reminder- it began with Action #7 of Interim President Junkin's recommendations to the TAMUS Regents (who unanimously approved them) in February. Number 7 provides the authoritative decision that the LSR Statue will remain in place and become a part of a newly designed Academic Plaza, opening up toward the West, and conveying a continuum of historic A&M narratives.

In our discussion with the president, the original tasking due date was the 26<sup>th</sup> of March. Our former student representative, Jim Singleton '66, is a super competent gentleman and is doing a great job in representing us. If you cross his path, thank him please!

We were asked to "be patient" by President Junkins in his 25 March letter below, and we have honored that. We don't know the status of the proceedings and cannot inform you of such. But your inputs would be helpful in this Survey. We trust that this update will assist you as you formulate your input comments on the survey Form.

### **Correspondence - For Your Info**

25 March 2021

Interim TAMU President

Dear Dr. Junkins,

We, the SRG Board, believe that we (twice) listened to you intently, understood you perfectly as to your "President's Intent" regarding the tasking for your "TF on Displays," and that we have followed your directions to us to work this through our former student representative on the TF, Jim Singleton. He has been fantastic in doing so and we salute him! Based on your crystal-clear concept, as well as your guidance and "bounds"

on the near-term redesign of the Plaza, we believe what you asked for is not too difficult to figure out.

Tomorrow is March 26<sup>th</sup>. We have been following the proceedings closely as you would expect. The meetings to date, to put it mildly, have missed the mark by a wide margin relating to any semblance of an intended product. And, we have now learned that a “survey” is being conducted. After reviewing it, any comment would give it credence which it does not deserve. And there is little connection between it and what we heard as your intent – particularly after all that has transpired leading up to Action Item 7. Again, here is another survey which does NOT include former students as participants! We continually bring this up and hope that you and Dr. Banks can “slay this dragon.” We believe that TAMU belongs to us as much or more than any other cohorts (except Texas and Texans) for good reason.

We are trying to be helpful and patient here. Our conclusion, though, is that the TF either did not hear your guidance, misunderstood you, or ignored you. Our membership strongly believes that “we have a lot of skin in this game.” ***[This is a summary of what he basically told us was his President’s Intent during a meeting with him: The plaza design will begin with the Ross statue in the east (it is not to be moved), and open up toward the west in north and south arcs. The narrative will be told with displays including narrative plaques about great (posthumous AMC/TAMU leaders WHILE at AMC/TAMU and what they did to save the Institution and/or make it great or greater. He named Ross and Rudder, and then said “between 1 and 3 more, but closer to one, should be added – and that on this Intent he expected the TF formulate a design.]*** We are sorry to bother you with this but would appreciate a word of reassurance from you that you have not changed your intended outcome and product with which we are totally comfortable. We need to keep our membership informed.

As a postscript, the TF co-chairperson, Lilia Gonzales ’94, University Architect, agrees with our suggestion regarding Simpson Field (a memorial) needing some overdue repairs and updates, and we appreciate that! Additionally, we hope for good reasons that the ugly, insulting fence around LSR’s statue is removed ASAP (with added security measures). Every day, TAMU “tour guides” are touring it with a multitude of visitors. The optics, narratives and takeaways are unsatisfactory – for us and our University.

Thank you again for your support and leadership!

Sincerely,

Joe Ashy ‘62  
President, Sul Ross Group

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From President John Junkins  
25 March 2021

Howdy Joe:

I assumed the task force was in the home stretch aiming for this Friday, so asking for a survey this late in the time window was surprising & yes, I concur that the former student input to such a survey should be of vital importance, given former students' appreciation and personal connections to the history of Texas A&M.

That being said, I recommend patience. I do expect the task group's report will have emphasis on a good conceptual design for the Academic Plaza, which is of central concern to SRG, all students (current and former) and to me personally. I am holding onto my faith that the task force will do a good job, and at this point, I am anxious to see their preliminary report before passing judgment. I encourage you to do the same.

I understand your angst on these important issues (which I share) but let us see what the task group produces in their report.

John

**Back to the Survey – here is Porter's Message to Us**

## Survey on Campus Historical Displays

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Howdy!

7 April 2021

As members of The Association of Former Students' Leadership Council, your opinions are important to us, as well as to Texas A&M University. I have been asked by Dr. Jorge A. Vanegas, Dean of the College of Architecture, and Lilia Gonzales '94, University Architect, to share a survey with you from the Task Force on Campus Historical Displays. The committee has been charged with accurately and fully telling the story of Texas A&M through its heritage assets (i.e., buildings; open spaces and view corridors; monuments, statues and busts; public art; and other types of displays and iconography, both indoors and outdoors).

If you could please take a few minutes to complete the survey at [tx.ag/TFCHDSurvey](https://tx.ag/TFCHDSurvey), it would be most helpful to the task force's efforts. We ask that you please share this important survey with your constituencies as the group is seeking input from our former students. For more information on the Task Force on Campus Historical Displays and the survey, please go to [tx.ag/TFCHDSurveyinvitation](https://tx.ag/TFCHDSurveyinvitation). The survey will remain open through noon on Thursday, April 15.

[Take the survey](https://tx.ag/TFCHDSurvey)

On behalf of The Association of Former Students, thank you for all that you do to serve Texas A&M and the worldwide Aggie Network! We appreciate your assistance with this important project.

Gig 'em!



Porter S. Garner III '79  
President and CEO

### **Some SRG Board Comments**

You will note that our pointing out that the survey initially omitted former students (and President Junkins agreed that it should be corrected), it appears that he did that and we thank him for including us now! You will also note the deadline to fill it out and submit it is **15 April!**

Please note what the TF Co-Chairpersons say about their “charge” - “accurately and fully telling the story of Texas A&M through its heritage assets (i.e., buildings; open spaces and view corridors; monuments, statues and busts; public art; and other types of displays and iconography, both indoors and outdoors.” The President, in his session with us reference above, said something far short of this; and he was specific, not only about his intent for the near term (suggesting “stages” of accomplishment) but confirmed in his TF due date (26 March) for the product he had asked for (to date not delivered as far as we know). He asked us “to be patient” in his letter to us, and we have been silent in honoring and respecting that since.

There is another issue that we feel strongly about and have worked on in a supporting role via our able representative John Singleton '66. What that critical element is in “telling the story” is the NARRATIVE that all the iconographies will SUPPORT – meaning that there must be plaques on each! This means some credible, historically accurate prose! We believe we know what those should say for the Academic Plaza but have heard nothing about them otherwise from the TF. We need SRG members and other former student constituents to make this point! In other words, how can you determine the design unless we all know who will be represented and what the stories about them will say – adding up to the continuum narrative?

### **Concluding suggestions**

The Survey, in our Board’s opinion, is poorly written (i.e., the questions and box check options are – well - but are what they are. We suggest that you consider the information we are giving you here and make your inputs appropriately - in your judgements - in the Survey comment boxes provided. We urge that you participate in the Survey and trust this update will be of assistance as you formulate your responses and inputs. Here are some points to think about:

- We support the SRG BoD letter to the TAMU Interim President – which is consistent with what they have been stating for the past three months and supported by their representative.
- What is the narrative as the basis for the “fully and accurate story” in the TF charge tasking? If it doesn’t exist, then stop the display activity and write it for our review. You cannot do a design to tell a story that does not exist!
- Who is in the lead for drafting the story and accountable?
- We support the original “president’s intent” expressed by Dr. Junkins.
- Implement a Phase I for this project in the Academic Plaza and move out!
- Delete the check box questions – they are all immaterial.
- The fence around the LSR Statue must be removed ASAP and follow what the Regents authoritatively approved for action by the TAMU President.
- Since you missed your tasking deadline, when do you expect to have a TF product for consideration – this is not an open-ended endeavor.

Thank you and Gig ‘em!

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### **Notes:**

**SRG Bulletin Sign-Up Reminder:** Anyone (Ags and non Ags, SRG Ags and all other Ags too) can “opt in” and sign up by going to:

<https://www.aggienetwork.com/theassociation/sulrossgroup.aspx> and simply putting in your name and email address, and then clicking on “submit.” You will then automatically receive all the SRG Bulletins.

**If you wish comment to those who decide:**

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**You can reach us at:** [SRGpresident@aggienetwork.com](mailto:SRGpresident@aggienetwork.com). The Sul Ross Group (SRG) Board of Directors (BoD) are responsible for producing and editing these SRG Bulletins, with transparency and advice from The Association of Former Students, under whose auspices we operate. We do so in keeping with one of our four charged SRG Constitution’s Purposes, which is keeping our represented SRG Membership informed in a timely manner. To access information about us as the elected SRG Board of Directors, and our Constitution, we shall soon have an “SRG Tab” on The Association’s website at: [aggienetwork.com](http://aggienetwork.com) so you can access information about us.