

Sul Ross Group (SRG) Bulletin Twenty-Four

24 January 2021

Introduction

We, the Sul Ross Group (SRG) Board of Directors (BoD), have been discussing the importance of: “The Other Education” (VP of Student Affairs and all); what sets Texas Aggies and TAMU apart (lots), “Transcendence” (LSR); “The Aggie Spirit” (All); “**It**” (SRG and all); “Can’t understand it on the outside; and can’t explain it on the inside” (Chancellor and lots), “The Aggie Miracle” (Bob Gates), etc. In other words, “The Spirit can ne’r be told!” Despite the aforementioned, we believe we have an explanation for why “**it**” needs to be perpetuated, and that we have shared it several times. We also believe that:

- **It** is embodied in “The Aggie Spirit.”
- **It** is something that others covet but can’t understand, nor can one understand “**it**” unless they attend TAMU as Texas Aggie students and experience it.
- **It** is definitely what sets us apart as Aggies.
- We can and have offered evidence of the results of “**it**” in our former students - who they became, how they have given back and have answered the “call to duty,” with character, over our long history of service to State and Nation
- **It** has been the binding tie as we have made the trek from the “traditional” to today’s “modernity” in a huge size with incredible diversity.
- In itself, **it** is divisive – and we are seeking a condition where all diverse parts, assimilated and integrated, equal a whole greater than the sum – our Aggie strength.
- The Diversity of our current student body - welcomed properly - and oriented, familiarized and integrated into the Texas Aggie culture, values, traditions and history of service to State and Nation, is what “inclusion” at TAMU is all about!
- And this part needs to be reflected in the guidance from the TAMU President on down, and promoted, explained, and perpetuated by the Texas Aggie leadership.

Our SRG strategic purpose is to help ensure that “**It**” is understood and comes true as stated here. And, that **it** is well worth defending and perpetuating for those who follow, despite our institution’s incredible change over the past 50 years. It has worked so far with plenty of evidence (see the chart), and certainly continues to benefit all Texas Aggies and the University similarly today as well as it will into the future – provided that we all understand **it** and assure that the Aggie Spirit is not lost. We, the SRG BoD embrace the change that is inevitable and marches on as long as “inclusion, equity and diversity” mean what we Texas Aggies intend when we say, “We are the Aggies, the Aggies are we!”

Example Evidence about “Transcendence”

- A Tier One, AAU (academic) University (of 62 total)
- “Best value” University in Texas; and overall 18th ranked University in US (Money Mag, Aug 2019)
- 2nd in service, and 4th in “bang for buck” (2019 Washington Monthly US nat’l rankings)
- Top five “most sought after” graduates
- #1 in Nation for most Fortune 100 alumni CEOs
- The Aggie Network’s reputation for assistance and comradeship unmatched
- First Texas public institution of higher learning; and now largest University in Texas and top three largest Universities in USA, with the 3rd ranked alumni association (Princeton Review)
- Facilities and (range of) degree offerings exceptional
- The Morrill “Land Grant” Act laid the foundation, but TAMU now one of 16 “land-sea-space grant” universities
- The only University in Texas in top 20 for research annual (\$922M) expenditures (Nat’l Science Foundation)
- Athletics (all sports) consistently ranked in top 15 of the National Learfield/Directors’ Cup
- Top 3 in Football gameday experience, with the 12th Man (the largest college student section) standing in support – “ready”
- Per Forbes, 2019 - “Most Valuable” athletics department nationally (revenues/profit with no State funding assistance)
- First in US for six-year grad rates (Chronicle of Higher Education)
- Campus Reform ranked TAMU in top 1% of all US Universities for conservative student bodies Dec19
- Top public University in US for both lowest student debt and highest median mid-career salaries for graduates (US DoE)
- Per Federal law, TAMU is largest of 6 US colleges classified as “Senior Military Colleges”
- Corps of Cadets still produces more commissioned military officers than any other University other than the Service Academies, and the most USMC Officers
- Texas Aggies serving and leading in battle since the Spanish-American War have done so with valor and distinction
- Research Institute and Extension Service “touch” every county in Texas, melding science and theory with ranches/business needs for success in Texas
- The Sul Ross traditions and Core Values have long been and still are based on leadership of character and the traditions of integrity and “service before self”
- The fightin’ Texas Aggie Muster Tradition embodies The Spirit. On a single day annually, Texas’ San Jacinto Day, April 21st, which reunites, globally, more students, former students, and friends of Texas A&M University than any other program of event sponsored by any other college or university worldwide (Softly Call the Muster, 1994, John Adams, Jr, ‘73)

Note: The Fortune 100 CEO’s, and these other examples, are only the tip of the iceberg of what TAMU President Robert Gates referred to as “The Aggie Miracle”. He defined this as best exemplified by the tens of thousands of Aggies, most who came from very humble backgrounds, the first in their families to attend college, who then graduated and rose to careers and lives of exceptional accomplishment and selfless service. He attributed the “it” that they learned and received at TAMU as the cornerstone supporting the building blocks of their character and their career achievements and accomplishments. This reinforces the idea of “The Aggie Miracle” and

“it” to the notion that Texas Aggie diversity and inclusion are dependent! This also helps confirm what Texas Aggie **inclusion** of a **diverse student body** into the Texas Aggie family is really about!

If you are not yet convinced, suggest you read the book [Here](#) by Jerry Copper '63! It contains most of the Texas Aggie Muster speeches. We did – searching for what we needed to understand about **“it”** – and found some rich material that really contributed to our conclusions. In fact, Bob Gates made the Muster speech in 2009 (page 424) and what he said hit the mark for sure. There are about ten others that do also.

Some Context at this Juncture

A year ago, we began to enter a horrid pandemic period which is not yet over. And in June 2020, some episodes began occurring on campus that exposed issues on which we have written and commented in our SRG Bulletins. We recently published a “Compendium” of these for our members’ review and edification. Now is a good opportunity to “circle back” so our new TAMU President, when chosen and installed in June, can have the Compendium items and suggestions to consider as we move ahead. So, this is for the President and the senior staff in particular, and also for our Fightin’ Texas Aggie SRG members and readership.

Since we are in a New Year, 2021 - and fast approaching 8 March - we will have our annual “reunion” (virtual this year) and welcome and induct our new SRG class of '66. It's also a good time to set forth some suggestions about what we have observed, learned and concluded as the “elder statesmen” of TAMU. Our intention, following here, is to be helpful and constructive for our new University leadership as it materializes by offering a short “list” of things needing leadership attention. Rationale and suggested action accompany each.

To Do's

The TAMU Mission Statement

“Everyone (in an organization, and TAMU is no exception) has a boss.” Certainly, we have an exceptional one now in Dr. Junkins. We trust that the new president in June 2021, as a condition of his or her selection for employment, understands and supports what we have described above as tantamount to a myriad of required leadership qualifications. It happens that **“It”** is now missing in the current TAMU Mission Statement. We believe that this is job one, so that all subordinates to the TAMU President can follow suit and align their plans and actions with the new Boss’s guidance! And, so that **everyone** (staff, faculty, students and former students) will be on the “same page” with no “county options” and “fiefdoms” going in different directions without unity and alignment of effort!

Suggest: The mission statement should be rewritten with the direct report principals personally involved with the President all participating.

Diversity and Equity

We believe that we are well versed in these “terms,” and understand that “diversity, equity and inclusion” are used in a variety of ways depending on what one’s agenda may be. The TAMU glossary includes them and has one “slant.” When reviewing the current document, one wonders whether “diversity” is a noun or a verb! So there seems to be a variety of weaponized, agenda driven uses which should be sorted out and clarified ASAP.

When we zoomed with the Commission on DEI and asked for their definitions for systemic racism and diversity, we were told that we “could google them to find out.” We replied that for clarification, when one would eventually read what they produced in their report, that it would be necessary for the Commission to define terms like this so that the readers could understand what they were saying and concluding! The response was not what we were seeking as appropriate, even after we gave our rationale. We later learned that we were referred to as racist for asking.

We believe that the noun “diversity” is about the measurement of different elements of a cohort of things or in this case, Aggie students. We also offer that the State and Federal laws require diversity measurements on which actions to improve “equity” between elements in a cohort can happen. We also are well aware that the US Constitution’s 14th Amendment guarantees equal protection under the law; that the affirmative action “quotas” of the ‘70s were struck down by US Supreme Court decisions (albeit “targets” are acceptable for which to strive). Additionally, the Texas laws about admissions to a flagship University, as is TAMU, prescribe a competitive system!

We have paid close attention to what our TAMU System Chancellor has said about this referring to his statement regarding his ten System Universities “belonging to Texas and Texans, and that they should therefore be representative of same!” We, the SRG BoD, absolutely agree with that! But in considering what to do about elements not being so “representative of Texas” then what to actually do about it, in consonance with a well laid out plan, promulgated by the System University Presidents, Regents and The Chancellor; versus making bullhorn demands for social justice which is not or ill defined – are two different propositions! To make headway and improvements, so that everyone can fully understand what we are going to accomplish together under the law, is what we recommend.

Several things which have been tabled here, under the term “diversity,” are also related to equity and inclusion (which we shall comment about separately). Suggest these:

- The TAMU Diversity Council’s Plan is the guiding document under the Provost for all of TAMU. There are three major objectives and none of them mention “The Other Education” or “It”, and how that should affect the welcoming inclusion of a diverse and large student body into the Texas Aggie Family! That should be corrected ASAP by the VPSA (supporting the Provost), whose major mission set is precisely that.
- Review who has a seat at the Diversity Council’s table.

- Review (President, Provost, VPSA and Athletic Director) all of the existent TAMU “diversity offices” and decide how many are actually needed, and then direct how they collectively serve TAMU with unity of purpose in an assimilated and welcoming, inclusive manner. And if there are major entities of students who for some reason do not receive orientations about “The Other Education,” then fix it with no “county options.”
- Review the Glossary of Terms mentioned above and straighten it out – not from just a diversity office’s perspective. And putting out a message suggesting that “hate” may be a 7th Aggie core value is not what we have in mind for that activity!
- Get to the bottom of “the agenda” of the added “mystery question” for the fall semester of 2020 about diversity that appeared in the TAMU (only) State Admission Form (www.applytexas.org) and remove it while explaining to us all why it got there, how it was (possibly) used for admittance, and by whom.
- Publish a plan for ethnic and racial equity for TAMU and how TAMU’s portion of the \$100M set aside by the Chancellor, President and Regents will be utilized to achieve decided goals.

Inclusion (again)

- “Diversity” in itself is divisive – and we are seeking a condition where all diverse parts, assimilated and integrated, equal a whole greater than the sum of those parts – our Aggie strength.
- The Diversity of our current student body - welcomed properly - and oriented, familiarized and integrated into the Texas Aggie culture, values, traditions and history of service to State and Nation, is what “inclusion” at TAMU is all about!

Suggest: This needs to be reflected in the TAMU guidance from the TAMU President on down, and promoted, explained, and perpetuated by the Texas Aggie leadership principals.

TAMU Expressive Activities Guidelines

The current document is accessible on the TAMU website for all to read. It is centered on and garners its authority from First Amendment rights for free speech and assembly. We embrace these precious rights. However, we believe the guidelines to be in dire need of a review and update considering what they currently are but also recognizing what occurred on campus since last June 2020. The second part of that review process should be about who and how often someone actually goes and looks at “campus expressions” to make judgements on compliance.

We are not suggesting that Aggieland needs to have watchdog mentality, but someone needs, for example, to periodically go look at expressive signs in view pasted from the west side windows of the Academic Building to determine if they pass muster with the rules – and then do something about it. There are many other examples of activities and things in this category.

Suggest: The President and his senior leaders conduct a review of the guidance and update it for clarity and organization. And, since it mentions faculty rights (and thus behavior indirectly), check that part to ensure completeness in accordance with State employee standards.

The Sully Statue

Since 10 June, the SRG has not only taken a stand on the Sully Statue in support of the Chancellor, but we also have since often provided our rationale as to why our namesake is worthy of having the Texas Legislature's 100-year-old statue stand in Academic Plaza. We had just sponsored a refurbishment to the statue prior to its being vandalized and damaged.

There is no question that if it had not been for Sullivan Ross, we would not have a great TAMU (nor Prairie View University) today – he saved us. And as a former two-term, beloved and successful Texas Governor post Reconstruction, he had the magnetism and reputation to get that done. He also undeniably set us on a path to “transcendence” (discussed above) based on honor and the call to duty. That is what we are built on still this day and is the basis for our being great!

The DEI Commission had a task to also look into “Representations” (monuments and statues on campus). We suppose that the Report will surface in some fashion soon. But in the meantime, the Chancellor has spoken that it is not going to move. Something needs to be done ASAP to remove the fence from around it. If security needs to be added, then sobeit.

Suggest: That action needs to be taken to make it happen now. And while we are at it, please bring Simpson Field up to date with the complete list of plaques and trees which honor the WWI Texas Aggies who gave their lives defending us.

The Gaines Statue

It was reported this week of 18 January 2021 that the Gaines statue project was progressing and would be in place on campus sometime later this year. We commented in SRG Bulletin Five on 21 August 2019 the following:

“The University has long supported this initiative, the Foundation is the account manager, the \$350K funding goal has been reached, the Chancellor donated \$100K, and the TAMU President, in his Ten Steps, said it will happen. One can make up their own mind about all of this. We, The SRG Board of Directors have no problem with the statue. But what goes on its plaque needs to be accurate and supportable. A claim that he was “The Father of AMC” is not.”

Suggest: The TAMU President check the proposed citation for the Gaines Statue plaque to ensure it is factual. It should be noted that we the SRG offered a draft narrative for consideration. Following is what we recommended as acceptable to the SRG which was excerpted from Texas Legislative proclamation: *“Matthew Gaines was a freedman who endured the burden and pain of slavery. From Washington County Texas, he*

was duly elected as one of three first Black men to the Texas Senate. There, he championed education for his people in a desegregated system as well as for all Texans. He was one who cast votes to enable the establishment of A&M College under the Morrill Act during Reconstruction in 1871. Based on the injustice he suffered in his past, and his later service to his constituents and State, TAMU pays tribute to him and recognizes him with gratitude.”

Faculty Comportment standards

We have written about faculty comportment (or the lack thereof) since last summer. Recently, two members in the College of Liberal Arts were disciplined. Article One rights to free speech were laid aside during the investigation with the focus being on behavior in the classroom.

This is a good indicator that we are now paying attention and we thank the Provost and President for sure. But there are more than just two, and leadership attention to this needs to continue. This also gets to the “One Party Campus” issue and its resultant threat to free speech on campuses (because the one sided “speech” is from the left only thru intimidation from faculty and students). That kind of environment threatens our freedom and security.

Here is an excerpt from what Joel Ross said about this in his 20 January 2021 Newsletter:

“Unfortunately, Silicon Valley and the media are very left wing with thousands of kids now as employees who were indoctrinated in university, so they excuse the BLM actions, looting and riots, but condemn and shut down speech from the right. This all began on campus several years ago, and the refusal of university presidents to stop it in the beginning has led to where we are now. That is how all of this began. We have a whole generation now of indoctrinated kids who are now in corporate jobs, or teaching in K-12, and in media and publishing jobs, and so we now have little kids being indoctrinated in elementary school, and CEO’s of corporations being afraid to push back, just as university presidents were afraid.”

We have asked about and for TAMU comportment standards. We are well aware of what “TAMU Expressive Activities” say about it. However, we believe that there is much lacking in the guidance, standards and an oversight system that holds professors accountable to standards for assigned subject material.

Suggest: The new President and Provost should review these matters and put resultant policies forth to not only faculty, but parents, students and former students so we can all understand what is expected as stakeholders.

The Athletic Department’s Understanding of Who the Aggie Network Really Is

Since June 2020, there have been statements issued by the Athletic Director (AD), in support of our Texas Aggie 600 student athletes, about social justice. To our knowledge, he has never defined exactly what this means albeit we have asked. Speaking for the vast majority of our SRG membership, we want to know because we have a keen interest in getting problems fixed. Meanwhile, there have been unfortunate instances where insults and threats have been cast from a very few athletes to former students.

We also want to know how he (AD), his coaches, and our athletes familiarize and know about “The Other Education” described above, and how that translates into benefits to our Athletic Department? That happens because “donors” (to whom he refers when asking for fiscal support) are Texas Aggie Former Students who understand “it” for sure and that is why they generously give back. Former students are also “The Aggie Network,” also often mentioned, who are organized members of The Association of Former Students and who “donate” the majority of funding for athletic facilities, fields and courts, scholarships, and also fulfill the recruitment promises made after Aggie athletic careers have ended.

We have looked into the orientation program data and the process needs review so we Aggies are all on the same page! The process of this “inclusion” in the Athletic Department cannot be something drastically different than all other Aggie students receive toward this end. After all, the 12th Man concept and tradition applies to ALL of us on the same team.

Suggest: Everybody has a boss, and the AD has one too at TAMU. So perhaps the new President and his direct report leaders including the AD can get together and work this out toward an Aggie resolution.

You can reach us at: SRGpresident@aggienetwork.com

Opt-In Reminder: Anyone (Ags and non Ags, SRG Ags and all other Ags too) can “opt in” 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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Interim President Junkins: junkins@tamu.edu

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