

SEARCH PROFILE:

ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT AND DEAN OF STUDENTS



**STEPHEN F. AUSTIN
STATE UNIVERSITY**

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SYSTEM
NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS

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Stephen F. Austin State University welcomes applications, inquiries, and nominations for the position of Associate Vice President (AVP) and Dean of Students. Following the restructuring of the Divisions of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs, the AVP and Dean of Students will join the new Division of Enrollment and Student Engagement, led by the inaugural senior vice president for enrollment and student engagement Dr. Kent L. Willis, who began his service with the university on January 13, 2025.



ABOUT STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY

Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA), the newest member of The University of Texas System, began over a century ago as a teachers college in Texas's oldest town, Nacogdoches. Today, it has grown into a regional institution comprising six colleges – business, education, fine arts, forestry and agriculture, liberal and applied arts, and sciences and mathematics. Accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, SFA provides the academic breadth of a comprehensive university with the personalized attention of a liberal arts college.

SFA kicked off the 2025 fall semester with its largest first-time undergraduate class ever. The university also celebrated its first increase in total enrollment since fall 2018.

ENROLLMENT HIGHLIGHTS:

- 7% increase in total headcount
- 9% increase in semester credit hours
- 16% increase in first-time transfer students
- 31% increase in first-time undergraduate students
- 12% increase in first-time undergraduate applications
- 25% increase in admitted first-time undergraduate students
- 21% increase in first-time transfer applications
- 18% increase in admitted first-time transfer students

Nestled in a pine tree sanctuary, the main campus encompasses 421 acres that include 36 academic facilities, nine residence halls, and 68 acres of recreational trails that wind through six gardens. With the inclusion of its off-campus Todd Agricultural Research

QUICK FACTS

Fall 2025 enrollment was 11,178 with the following demographic breakdown:

- 37% male
- 63% female
- 21% Hispanic
- 15% African American
- 1% Asian

Over 41% of undergraduate students are the first in their families to achieve a four-year college education. Approximately 39% of AY 2023-2024 undergraduate students received a Pell grant.

Within SFA's student population, 96% are Texas residents and 90% come from within 200 miles of Nacogdoches. In fact, most students (82%) originate from three areas: East Texas (37%), Houston (27%), and Dallas (18%). SFA serves more than 9,000 undergraduate students, who comprise 87% of the total student population.

Center, DeWitt School of Nursing Complex, and aviation program hangars, SFA is spread across 1,210 acres of land in Nacogdoches County.

SFA continues to make substantial upgrades to campus infrastructure and technology to encourage academic innovation. Recent additions include the Naymola Basketball Performance Center, the Cole STEM

ABOUT STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY (CONT.)

Building with innovative makerspaces and cutting-edge technology, and a significant expansion of the Griffith Fine Arts Building, completed in 2023, that added a recording studio, sound stage, audio and video editing rooms, and an art gallery, among several other state-of-the-art features.

Most recently, SFA opened a 20,000-square-foot dining hall that offers flexible spaces for dining, outdoor seating, and campus events, including culinary expos. The building showcases southern yellow pine mass timber construction harvested within 500 miles of campus, underscoring the university's commitment to sustainability and community engagement. Looking ahead, the Arthur Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture will soon move into an \$85 million, state-of-the-art complex, and a new \$40 million facility will house the Greg Arnold Center for Entrepreneurship—an interdisciplinary hub for collaboration, innovation, and student venture creation. These projects reflect a bold vision for the future, one further reinforced by a recently announced campus master plan that calls for more than \$1 billion in facility enhancements and improvements over the next 15 years.

In addition, live performances, cultural programs, and special events occur throughout the year. The Micky Elliott College of Fine Arts presents nationally acclaimed artists, award-winning plays, and lively choreography through a lineup of concerts, performances, and exhibitions. The University Series, Children's Performing Arts Series, and a wide range of art, music, theatre, and dance events provide an outstanding cultural experience for students and the East Texas community.

SFA's athletic teams compete in 18 intercollegiate sports – six men's, 10 women's, and two co-ed – in the Southland Conference at the NCAA Division I level. Steeped in tradition, SFA athletics enjoy unwavering support from SFA students and the Nacogdoches community. The university's vibrant and passionate student fan base, known as the "Purple Haze," has its own special traditions during football and basketball seasons that create a unique and exciting atmosphere. With a history of notable achievements in football, basketball and track, and national championships in softball and women's bowling, the Lumberjacks and Ladyjacks are part of the fabric of the full SFA experience.





THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SYSTEM

SFA takes great pride in being part of The University of Texas System, known for its exceptional academic success, breakthrough research, and international reputation for excellence and innovation. It includes 13 other educational institutions throughout the state, including eight universities and five health institutions. For 140 years, The University of Texas System has improved the lives of Texans – and people all over the world – through education, health care and research. With an enrollment of more than 256,000 students at academic and health institutions across the state, as well as an operating budget of \$29.1 billion, the UT System is one of the largest public university systems in the nation and the world.

UT institutions are powerful drivers of economic and social mobility in Texas, producing more than 63,000 graduates annually, including more than one-third of the state's undergraduate degrees and more than 60% of the

state's medical degrees. Almost half of all undergraduate degrees are awarded to students who qualified for a Pell grant based on financial need while enrolled at a UT institution. The UT System is one of the largest employers in Texas, with more than 122,000 faculty, health care professionals, researchers, support staff and student workers.

More than three-fourths of undergraduate students secure jobs in Texas within a year after graduation, providing a skilled workforce and fueling the state's economy. In fact, UT students who entered the Texas workforce between 2002 and 2019 had cumulative earnings through 2020 of \$350 billion.

With the Texas population expected to grow dramatically in the years to come, the UT System will continue to lead in driving prosperity, innovation, and health for the people of the Lone Star State.



DIVISION OF ENROLLMENT AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

SFA's Division of Enrollment and Student Engagement is organized into five units: Enrollment, Student Health & Well-Being, Student Engagement and Enrollment Administration, Campus Services and Operations, and Dean of Students.

Housed within these units are admissions, financial aid, counseling, health and wellness services, student outreach, disability services, student involvement, development and support, student conduct, campus recreation, the Baker Patillo Student Center, campus services and events, testing services, housing and residence life, community outreach and planning, business management, operations and services, and contracts.

The division is led by Dr. Kent L. Willis, an SFA alumnus and native of Grapeland, Texas—a small East Texas farming community—who brings deep regional roots and a lifelong passion for expanding college readiness. His vision is to position SFA as a model for the impact that regional public universities can have on their students and communities.

With a career spanning senior leadership roles at California State University, Fresno; The University of Texas at Tyler; and the UT Health Science Center at Tyler, Dr. Willis is recognized for launching innovative initiatives in student success, enrollment management, and engagement. He holds a Ph.D. in Educational Management from Hampton University, a fellow of the Executive Leadership Academy through the Center for Studies in Higher Education at UC Berkeley and is an active national voice in student development. Dr. Willis serves on the national advisory committee for the Coalition for Student Wellbeing and is a frequent contributor to conferences and scholarship focused on student engagement and success.





LEADERSHIP AGENDA FOR THE ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT AND DEAN OF STUDENTS

Reporting to Dr. Kent L. Willis, Senior Vice President for Enrollment & Student Engagement, the Associate Vice President and Dean of Students will serve as a key leader in shaping an integrated, relationship-rich student experience at SFA. The Dean of Students oversees the areas of Student Conduct, Student Involvement, Student Development and Support, Campus Recreation, and has advisement/oversight of the Student Government Association.

The Dean of Students will work closely and collaboratively with Dr. Willis, division leadership, and staff in fostering an appreciation for the holistic student experience and creating a resourceful support system that contributes positively to overall student success and well-being. The new Dean of Students will also work across the campus to advance this vision of student success defined by holistic development, readiness for life and career, and meaningful connections across the university. This role offers an opportunity to join a forward-thinking leadership team dedicated to making a transformative impact at SFA and throughout the East Texas region.

SFA offers a close-knit, family-like environment where students, faculty, and staff truly know and support one another. That sense of connection is something that sets SFA apart and creates a meaningful place to work and lead. This is also an exciting period of growth and transformation for the university. The opportunity to step into a leadership role during this time means being part of shaping the future of SFA while still honoring its strong traditions and values. For the right leader, this balance of community, tradition, and forward-looking change makes SFA a unique and rewarding place to join.

SFA seeks a visible and approachable leader who fosters trust, collaboration, and inclusivity, listens genuinely, communicates transparently, and will personally engage with stakeholders across campus and in the community. The Dean of Students will be a champion for students, working across departments to coordinate and integrate student affairs priorities. The new Dean of Students will work alongside division staff to enhance the partnership with academic affairs, engaging faculty and staff across the campus as essential partners in the implementation, evaluation, and improvement of programs and policies to better ensure comprehensive student support services that aid in student success.

The position requires a leader who prioritizes fairness, belonging, and the unique needs of the diverse student body that SFA serves and recognizes that academic continuity, emergency preparedness, and crisis response planning are integral to the student experience. The new Dean of Students should lead decisively and empathetically, particularly during times of crisis or when making decisions related to sensitive student matters, keeping student safety, well-being, and development top of mind. It is expected that the Dean of Students will work with division staff to evaluate and, where necessary, update established protocols, structures, and systems to effectively manage student crises and emergencies in a fair and equitable environment.

The institution's growing enrollment presents both excitement and strain, including stresses on existing support systems, facilities, and funding structures. This is an opportunity for a creative and innovative leader to step in, scale up resources, strengthen retention, and preserve the personal touch that defines the campus culture. There is enthusiasm for the university's master plan and the chance for the new Dean of Students to shape how new spaces and initiatives advance student success.

LEADERSHIP AGENDA FOR THE ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT AND DEAN OF STUDENTS (CONT.)

In addition to the opportunities described herein, duties of the job include:

- Serving as the university's senior conduct officer, ensuring student conduct cases are adjudicated with due process and fairness.
- Assisting the Senior Vice President for Enrollment and Student Engagement (SVPESE) in developing, implementing, and assessing best practice-based division-wide projects, policies, and programs.
- Overseeing the response to student-related emergencies, critical incidents, and mental health issues; reviewing and updating the division's emergency operations plan.
- Working closely with Residence Life, the University Police Department, Lumberjacks Care, and other stakeholders to address student conduct issues, concerns, and complaints.
- Collaborating with the Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT), following up with appropriate interventions, and overseeing the tracking process for cases.
- Overseeing the tracking process for student conduct cases and sanction tracking via the student conduct database.
- Updating the Student Code of Conduct, as needed.
- Providing leadership and guidance to ensure programs and services meet the strategic direction and needs of the university, including developing coordinated short- and long-term goals and assessing their success.
- Working to enhance student involvement, retention, well-being and overall success.
- Hiring, training, supporting, supervising, evaluating, and holding accountable direct reports.
- Developing and managing assigned budgets.
- Developing strong interpersonal relationships with students, faculty, staff, parents/family members, and external stakeholders; addressing and following up on concerns in an effective, timely, and professional manner.
- Providing guidance, where applicable, in the review, development, and interpretation of procedures and policies related to students.
- Drafting or reviewing reports and other written materials needed by the SVPESE, including overseeing the completion of the Drug Free Schools Biennial Report and annual Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention Program (DAAPP).
- Representing the SVPESE/division on university and divisional committees.
- Directing and coordinating other special projects/performing other related duties as assigned.

REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS:

- Master's degree in student affairs administration or a related field.
- Progressively responsible experience in student affairs or related work at the college or university level, including budgetary and personnel management.

DESIRED EXPERIENCE AND ATTRIBUTES:

- Ph.D./Ed.D. in education, counseling, or a terminal degree in a related field is preferred.
- Demonstrated capacity to work with, and exhibit an appreciation for, a diverse community of learners who bring to SFA the various perspectives of their circumstances, cultures, and backgrounds.
- Demonstrated experience as a strategic, innovative, and collaborative leader, with the ability to develop and implement short- and long-term plans and initiatives to meet established goals and advance a vision that aligns with broader institutional priorities and budgeting.
- Demonstrated commitment to student development and well-being, and to connecting, engaging, and communicating with students.
- Demonstrated ability to articulate and advocate student needs to the larger university community.
- Crisis management and response experience.
- Prior work experience in student conduct administration and experience with behavioral intervention teams.
- Conflict resolution skills with the ability to analyze situations, identify feasible solutions, and present recommendations in a concise, logical, inclusive, and systematic manner.
- Demonstrated capacity to foster a healthy organizational culture, including the ability to inspire and motivate others.
- Ability and willingness to be an engaged and enthusiastic campus presence.
- Knowledge of student discipline, safety, conduct, risk management, and Title IX policies and procedures, as well as emerging best practices and trends in these areas in higher education.
- Familiarity with challenges currently facing higher education around the use of AI.
- Exemplary interpersonal, oral, and written communication skills.



APPLICATIONS, NOMINATIONS, AND INQUIRIES

SFA is being assisted by Academic Search. Inquiries, nominations, and applications should be emailed to SFADeanofStudents@academicsearch.org. Applications must include a cover letter that addresses the expectations and responsibilities discussed in the leadership agenda above, a CV, and a list of five professional references with full contact information and a note indicating the nature of your working relationship with each. No references will be contacted without the explicit permission of the candidate. This position is open until filled, but only applications received by **November 12, 2025**, can be assured full consideration.

Further information about SFA is available at www.sfasu.edu.

Stephen F. Austin State University, an Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action Employer and Educator, is committed to excellence. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to sex, race, creed, color, age, national origin, religion or physical or mental disability as required by law. If, because of an impairment or disability, you need accommodation during any part of the employment process, please contact Human Resources at 936-468-2304.

ABOUT ACADEMIC SEARCH

Academic Search is assisting Stephen F. Austin State University in this work. For more than four decades, Academic Search has offered executive search services to higher education institutions, associations, and related organizations.

Academic Search was founded by higher education leaders on the principle that we provide the most value to partner institutions by combining best practices with our deep knowledge and experience.

Our mission today is to enhance institutional capacity by providing outstanding executive recruitment services, executive coaching, and transition support, in partnership with our parent organization, the American Academic Leadership Institute.

