1. A general description of your university

   a. profile and enrollment
   TAMU is a Tier 1 Research University with over 48,000 students, including over 8,000 Frosh (FISH), approx 9,100 grad students, and in addition, we have around 1,500 of 1,700 Galveston student who are finishing this term on campus following Hurricane Ike. About 4,800 students are foreign, mostly graduate students. As a group, Aggies are incredibly loyal to the school and very much embrace the core values of integrity, leadership, selfless service, excellence and respect.

   b. new programs and degrees
   Several new University Studies major/minor programs have been approved. Certificate programs are on the rise; we have recently approved Certificates for ‘Transportation Planning’, ‘Leadership Education-Theory and Practice’ and ‘Entrepreneurial Leadership’. A fast-track program for a BS/MS in math is now available. A PhD degree in Agribusiness and Managerial Economics was approved by the Coordinating Board in March, 2008. It is an intercollegiate degree involving the Colleges of Business and Agriculture & Life Sciences.

   c. major construction and renovation
   1. Under Construction: Life Sci Bldg 96.9 M, Mitchell Physics, 82.5M, LARR, 12.5M, Vet Res Bldg Add. 20M, TIPS, 47.8M, TTI HQ19M, Indoor Ath 35.6M, Reed Exp. 23M, SS Utility plant 13.5M Total = $330.6 Million
   2. Advanced planning: ETED 103.5M, NMR 13M, LibArts Bldg 46M, Vet Imaging 4.5M, Agr Hdq 110M, Univ Apts 35.6M, dorms 80M Total = $392.6 million
   3. Major Renovations underway: Reed Mcd 11.5 M; in planning, MSC 122M, YMCA 12M Total = 145.5M

2. A description of your faculty assembly/council/senate

   a. its composition
   We have 100 Senators elected to three year staggered terms which by apportionment (every 3 years) now means approx. 1 per 24 faculty (instructor up). Each college and Unit (Library, Qatar and Galveston) is guaranteed at least 2 seats. Officers are Speaker, Speaker-elect and Secretary-Treasurer who with 7 other elected members, constitute the Executive Committee. No more than two members of the EC can be from the same college.

   b. highlights of recent and current business
   1. Resolution passed near unanimously against Chancellor’s plan of having a “universal” 20 question questionnaire used by students in 3 or greater credit courses where top 3% of scorers would get a $10,000 cash prize. Dissenters felt it did not go far enough.
   2. Contributions to rules governing use of background checks and time and effort reporting to comply with revised system-level requirements.
   3. Open forum hosted on the System rule for background checks.
   4. Some concern that the new “rolling contract” for non-tenured Academic Professional Track Faculty includes only those with a “terminal degree”.
3. A list of the major issues relating to the faculty, faculty governance and shared governance at your university.
   a. Failure to be involved in hiring of new VP-student affairs. Retiring Marine Lt. General Joe Weber was hired to replace Dr. Dean Bresciani without a formal search.
   b. Faculty and Senate input was sought in a national search for Provost, culminated with the hiring of Dr. Jeff Vitter. The Faculty Senate Executive Committee was also a part of the search for a new Vice-President for Research. An offer was made but declined so the search has reopened with Faculty a part of the committee. Faculty are also involved in searches for a new Vice Chancellor and Dean for Agriculture, and new Deans for Architecture, Veterinary Medicine and Geosciences. As per a Senate rule that was approved several years ago, faculty members from each College make up at least half of each search committee.
   c. Initiatives in background checks, research funding reorganization, SETs and other rules from the System Office are all “top-down”
   d. The new Provost is very pro shared-governance: faculty input is key in his effort to develop an “Academic Master Plan”.

SPECIAL TOPICS
Accountability – What role are faculty playing or to what extent are faculty involved in accountability initiatives on your campus?

The faculty were involved in the first round of setting baseline “achievement standards” for measures of success in the various curricula. Most were pretty benign such as 70% graduate within X years, that most secure jobs or admission to post graduate schools within a year, etc. The College of Engineering recently went through ABET certification and the Vet College has a similar national standards review. All programs are subject to external review by teams made up of highly respected individuals from peer institutions. The reviews include both research and teaching (grad and UG) programs. They also and provide many opportunities for Faculty input. A common Faculty criticism is that administration does not follow through with the recommendations made by the review team

The Senate is responsible for approving all new degrees, courses and course changes through recommendations of its Undergraduate Curriculum and Graduate Council reporting committees. Our Core Curriculum Committee recommends those course they feel should be included as an option for satisfying core (Coordinating Board) and TAMU graduation requirements (International/Cultural Diversity). Writing intensive courses are recommended by the W-course committee. Last May the Senate passed a motion form the Core Curriculum Council outlining the general education expectations for all graduates with assessment to be managed by the Office of Institutional Assessment. The Senate passed rules aimed at improving course syllabi, but strongly recommended rather than required the inclusion of learning objectives

All courses are subjected to student evaluations at the end of each term, but the questions and mechanisms differ among colleges and even departments. After review by the unit head, the evaluations are returned to the professor.
Is your campus using the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) or a similar system? If so, how are they implementing it?

Because we are a member of NASULGC, will be involved. Most of the “voluntary” information on costs of attendance, characteristics of the University etc. are already available on-line, but not via the VSA website. However at this point I’d say neither the Faculty or Administration is convinced that any of the three proposed methods for measuring, reporting and using data for inter-college comparisons of student learning outcomes based on freshman vs. senior cohorts are either valid or meaningful. Vice President Paul Meyer is in charge of our institutional assessment program and has updated the Senate EC twice in the last 18 months. He has indicated that our WEB presence via the VSA site will be available before the start of next semester.

b. ORP – With respect to the new IRS regulations, how is your university handling the change in authorized agents for ORP’s?

The System “eliminated” any new contributions to those ORP providers who did not agree to new Federal Regulations concerning reporting of deposits. They also tried to justify reducing the number of providers on the grounds that with so many options, it was too confusing for the low-wage employees so they weren’t participating in the optional tax-deferred part! (Never mind they likely were in low brackets and had no discretionary dollars.) The HR decision makers were absolutely shocked at the outrage expressed in a presentation made to the Senate over the fact that they made all decisions without consulting any faculty. Some individuals (especially from Business College Senators) expressed anger over the loss of tax deferred annuity plans that were apparently doing significantly better than those that remain. There was fairly widespread belief that there must be some sort of “payoff” involved rather than the concept being pushed that allowing fewer companies to participate would improve the responsiveness to the needs of the non-faculty employees.