



SMU

Elizabeth G. Lobo
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Office of the Provost

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Dear Faculty and Staff:

These weekly updates will serve as a tool to keep you informed and engaged with SMU's Academic Affairs division as, together, we work to advance the goals of SMU's strategic plan and continue to move SMU forward and upward. If you have suggestions for what we should include in future communications, please send your ideas to this [email address](#). Previous newsletters are available [here](#). Today's update falls into three categories: 1) SMU's Road to R-1, 2) Fall 2020, and 3) News and Noteworthy.

SMU'S Road to R-1

- **Faculty engagement remains key to further refining and implementing our strategy** – Over the course of the fall semester, I have hosted six Q&A sessions with over 60 faculty members to gain a better understanding of SMU's current trajectory and gather recommendations for refining and implementing the strategic initiatives that will support SMU's goal of R-1 status. Attendees for this first group of meetings came at the suggestion of SMU's senior leadership team. I plan to continue these meetings over the course of the semester and would also like to expand my understanding by meeting with individual academic departments. If there are any departments that are interested in such a conversation, please coordinate with your department chair and send a message to this [email address](#).

In some of these meetings, faculty participants cited a series of faculty-led task forces that were charged with developing recommendations to support SMU's academic goals and priorities. I have been pleased to learn just how extensively faculty members have committed their time and talents to providing recommendations. I would encourage you to visit this [webpage](#) and review the multiple task force charges and responses that have been developed by our faculty in recent years. I am still in the process of reviewing them, but recognize the significant time and effort represented by these outputs. I also understand that, particularly for those faculty who spent considerable time developing and refining our strategy, there is now an eagerness to transition

into implementation so that we can begin to reap the benefits of your careful and time-consuming planning.

I would ask you all for just a bit more patience as we lay the necessary foundation, particularly in terms of data and processes, required to reach our full potential as a R-1 institution, but I would also ask you to reflect on our success implementing many of the task force recommendations. Within the past year, we have:

- Released a new Common Curriculum, informed by recommendations from the General Education Review Task Force.
 - Established a Data Science Institute, based on the recommendations of the Task Force on Data Science and Analytics.
 - Launched the Moody School of Graduate and Advanced Studies, inspired by the work of the Graduate School Task Force.
- **Rankings** – In last week’s [email](#), I shared a detailed analysis, thanks in large part to the outstanding work of Dr. Michael Tumeo in the Office of Institutional Research, on what we are learning about the importance of the *U.S. News & World Report’s* (USN&WR) peer assessment score to our ranking. When comparing SMU’s peer assessment scores to institutions ranked in the 50s in USN&WR’s 2021 rankings, we have two challenges:
 - Raters (Presidents, Provosts and Deans of Admission) do not view SMU’s academic quality to be equivalent to other institutions within the ranking group we aspire to surpass.
 - Raters appear to be less familiar with SMU as an institution, or at least the academic quality of SMU, than institutions ranked just ahead of us.

Faculty members certainly have built a strong reputation for SMU with their active engagement in conferences, performances, symposia, and invited talks, and we will support more opportunities for additional national and international visibility and collegial collaboration. Plans are also currently beginning with SMU’s Marketing and Communications (MarCom) team to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to boost awareness of the outstanding faculty, students, and programs that we have at SMU. We also have the potential to influence SMU’s perception nationally in other ways, through invitations to collaborate with scholars, researchers, and performers across institutions, and by accepting invitations from the SMU media relations team to speak to journalists, especially from national outlets. Media relations is also ready to help you (contact news@smu.edu or 214-768-7650) with both preparation and assessment of context when a media request comes directly to you. Promoting your work, and your affiliation with SMU, on social media, and seeking research/creative collaborations with colleagues at aspirational peer institutions is also very helpful.

- **Faculty development opportunity: National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity (NCFDD)** – This is a reminder that all SMU faculty and graduate students are encouraged to take advantage of SMU’s institutional membership with the NCFDD. The NCFDD is an independent professional development, training, and mentoring organization that offers support to its members in the form of webinars, collaborations, and weekly emails. As an institutional member of the NCFDD, all interested SMU faculty or graduate students may take advantage of the services offered by visiting www.FacultyDiversity.org to register for a free membership to access the center’s online resources, which include workshops, webinars, and seminars on topics related to faculty life, such as increasing writing productivity, managing time, cultivating mentors, securing external funding, and maintaining work-life balance. If you have questions about participation or would like to speak with faculty who have participated in the past, please reach out to Paige Ware at pware@smu.edu.
- **Council of Deans retreat recap** – This Thursday, I hosted the annual full-day Deans’ Retreat. Deans began the morning session by discussing their top two to three strategic priorities for the 2020–2021 academic year. After reviewing priorities and discussing opportunities for synergy, we reviewed a draft, performance-based funding model that I hope to implement within Academic Affairs in time for the 2021–2022 academic year. In my previous experience, I have found performance-based funding models to provide an effective and transparent way to incentivize strategic investment and operational excellence. I will share additional specifics, once the Deans and I have established a comprehensive model.

We completed our morning session with a conversation, facilitated by Associate Provost for Faculty Success Paige Ware, on strategies for examining SMU’s faculty Workload Policy, most notably in support of our R-1 aspirations. Working with deans, the Faculty Senate and faculty members over the next year, I am hopeful that we can develop department-specific guidelines to bring greater transparency and equity to our faculty workload policies to the benefit of all SMU faculty.

Our afternoon session began with an update from Chief Diversity Officer Dr. Maria Dixon Hall on SMU’s response to the Black Unity Forum’s action plan. Following that discussion, we were joined by SMU Trustee Dr. Tom Burish, former Provost at Notre Dame, for a conversation about the steps he took to transform and expand Notre Dame’s research mission. We concluded with updates from Dr. Michael Tumeo on USN&WR metrics and Dr. Michael Robertson on plans for SMU GO.

- **SMU faculty receive \$18 million from the U.S. Department of Defense** – Congratulations to Professor Brian Stump, Albritton Chair of Geological Sciences in the Roy M. Huffington Department of Earth Sciences in SMU’s

Dedman College, and his research team for their \$18 million award from the U.S. Department of Defense. This award will allow Dr. Stump and his team to continue their global observations and research using acoustic and seismic waves to better understand when nuclear tests, large earthquakes, and other major events happen. This is the largest research award in SMU's history!

Fall 2020

- **Flu shots are available in remote locations as well as in Expressway Towers** – Minimizing your chance of contracting influenza this year is one of the most important steps you can take to stay healthy and help prevent our community's COVID-19 medical resources from becoming depleted. Flu shots are available to all at tents on campus set up by the Dr. Bob Smith Health Center, but with the next shipment of vaccines delayed, staff and faculty are encouraged to help preserve the supply for students by getting your vaccine at the Urgent Care drive-thru tent at Expressway Tower. Visit this [website](#) for additional information.
- **Campus health and safety update** – As of today, we have 70 student cases and 7 employee positive COVID-19 cases. Our operational level remains in the “moderate” category. Remember that our operational level is reviewed each week and any necessary updates are made each Monday afternoon on the [Mustang Strong website](#). Thank you for your continued flexibility and vigilance in these challenging times.
- **New COVID-19 case count dashboard** – This week, SMU released a refreshed, interactive [dashboard](#), developed in response to campus feedback, to keep community members informed about key information such as case counts, infection rates, and isolation capacity. Thanks to all the members of the collaborative team that helped develop this new resource.
- **Spring 2021 calendar** – In response to my charge, the [Spring 2021 Calendar Committee](#) has developed options for the spring 2021 calendar that will promote campus health while maintaining the strength of teaching and learning. The committee presented four options for consideration: 1) as-is, 2) sprinkled spring break, 3) late start, and 4) early finish, and recommended options No. 2 and No. 3 for final consideration. I circulated these options last week with the PEC, Deans, Faculty Senate leadership, and Associate Provosts for review and, based on their feedback, presented a recommendation to the PEC for review and approval this week. We plan to announce plans for the spring 2021 academic calendar next week.
- **Spring schedule** – Taking lessons learned from fall 2020 scheduling and with greater time for feedback from the colleges/schools, Associate Provost for Curricular Innovation and Policy Peter Moore and his team have begun to run

an updated version of the algorithm used in the fall to build the spring 2021 schedule, which will be released on October 19.

- **September faculty/student survey analysis and October surveys coming soon** – The first fall 2020 student and faculty surveys were administered September 8–11 during the third week of the fall semester. These surveys provided an opportunity for students and faculty to offer feedback on their experiences of the first two to three weeks of the fall semester. You can review either an [executive summary](#) of findings from both September surveys or a more detailed analysis of either the [faculty survey](#) or the [student survey](#).

As a reminder, the Provost’s Office will provide monthly surveys in October and November so that faculty and students can keep providing feedback as we continue to monitor unfolding circumstances and address issues that the surveys reveal. Faculty, see this [email](#) that went out on Thursday, October 8, for an invitation to participate in the October survey. Your feedback is critical and I thank you in advance for taking the time to complete these monthly surveys.

- **Reminder: rapid support for SMUFlex & fully virtual faculty** – The Office of Information Technology’s (OIT’s) Online Production Services team, in close partnership with the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) and SMU Libraries, is immediately launching two “ASAP” support programs for faculty currently teaching in either SMUFlex or fully virtual modes. We have launched two separate Slack channels for you to join a community of other faculty and support partners (CTE, OIT, SMU Libraries, and more!)—join now to be part of a developing support forum for fall 2020 and beyond.
 - Faculty Teaching [Fully Online](#)
 - Faculty Teaching [SMUFlex](#)
- **December Commencement** – The Presidential Commission on Welcome Back Events and Academic Ceremonies are developing recommendations and contingency plans for SMU’s December commencement ceremony. We hope to be able to provide an announcement as soon as next week concerning SMU’s plans for December’s ceremony.
- **Spring operations plan** – Using the [Fall Operations Plan](#) as a starting point, SMU’s Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is developing a refreshed plan to guide and inform decisions for the spring 2021 semester. The group is drafting content this month and estimates a completed draft by the Thanksgiving holiday.

News and Noteworthy

- **Provost Faculty Fellows program** – I appreciate the interest in the inaugural program, which is designed to offer faculty opportunities for leadership experiences and to expand collaborations with the Provost’s Office as we build along five priority areas for this academic year. Please join me in congratulating the inaugural group, who will begin participation this month:
 - Johnitha Johnson, Teaching and Learning: Equity and Inclusion
 - Gordon Law, Advertising: Strategic Communication
 - Renee McDonald, Psychology: Research Enhancement & Scholarly Impact
 - Scott Norris, Math, and Mark Fontenot, Computer Science: Undergraduate and Graduate Student Success
 - Carolyn Smith-Morris, Anthropology: Institutional Planning and Data Analytics

Sincerely,



Elizabeth G. Loba, PhD
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Southern Methodist University
<https://www.smu.edu/provost>



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