



SMU

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September 18, 2020

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

- **Recap: Presentations to SMU's Board of Trustees** – This week, I had two opportunities to represent Academic Affairs during SMU's quarterly meetings with the Board of Trustees.
 - On Thursday, the Board's Committee on Academic Affairs met for 90 minutes; faculty research and creative activity were the meeting's primary focus. Since this was my first opportunity to meet many committee members, I opened the discussion by outlining my history in R-1 institutions: from student, to faculty member, to administrator. Having been fortunate to spend so much of my academic career in R-1 universities, I know firsthand that, with focused effort, SMU can make the leap into this distinctive category. I believe we can do so while maintaining our strong commitment to outstanding undergraduate education, artistic and creative contributions, and world-class professional degrees. To reach our full potential, research must be strengthened, and we are well positioned to accomplish this goal.

With SMU's remarkable rise in undergraduate quality in the past decade, committee members are very familiar with ranking systems such as *US News and World Report* (USN&WR) and the importance of metrics in determining our position. Jim Quick, Associate Provost for Research and Dean of the Moody School of Graduate and Advanced Studies, provided committee members an

overview of the Carnegie Classification system for research universities – the most important standard for determining our progress toward R-1 status. Measures within the Carnegie Classification system focus most heavily on an institution's research expenditures (STEM/non-STEM), the number of science/engineering research staff, and the number of Ph.D.s/other doctorates granted in STEM, social sciences, and the humanities. Carnegie's system places universities into one of three categories: 1) moderate research activity (R-3), 2) high research activity (R-2), and 3) very high research activity (R-1). In 2005, SMU fell within the R-3 category, but has made steady progress over the past fifteen years and is now solidly within the R-2 category. Reaching the R-1 plateau is a lofty, but attainable, goal worthy of SMU's pursuit.

Paige Ware, Associate Provost for Faculty Success, is also new to her role, and this was her first opportunity to engage with the Committee on Academic Affairs. She shared her background in Simmons' Department of Teaching and Learning and illustrated the ways in which research can both inform and elevate the research of faculty colleagues, as well as inform instructional quality for undergraduate and graduate teaching. She also outlined the ways in which her office will support SMU's goals and Strategic Plan (e.g., faculty fellows, research clusters, policy refinement and development, faculty mentoring, etc.)

As I have mentioned in previous newsletters, accurate and transparent data is of vital importance to inform our priorities and investments on SMU's Road to R-1. [Academic Analytics](#) is a tool used by many R-1 institutions to study faculty research productivity and to identify additional opportunities for funding, faculty honorific awards, and/or collaborations. It is also a tool that I found very beneficial in many of the decisions I made as engineering dean and Vice Chancellor for Strategic Partnerships at the University of Missouri in support of faculty research.

Taking publicly available data on faculty scholarship, honorific awards and grants, Academic Analytics developed a prototype of their tool using SMU faculty for the purposes of illustration. I walked through two of SMU's many exemplary departments in terms of faculty research – the Simmons School's Teaching & Learning (a department established in 2005 and focused on research from the onset) and Dedman College's Anthropology (a long-standing department that began its focus on research and doctoral studies in the early 1960s). Academic Analytics also provides powerful analytical models to help my office, deans and department chairs identify ways to support faculty research – through recommending grant opportunities based on previous scholarship, through visualizations of potential collaborations (both on campus and nationally), and through honorific awards based on career achievement. I am hopeful that we can put this tool in the hands of SMU administrators within this 2020–2021 academic year as a key way to promote faculty development and success.

Thursday's meeting concluded with a presentation from Wes Waggoner, Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management, to give committee members an update on fall 2020 enrollment data.

- This morning, I presented a consolidated version of Thursday's presentation to the full Board of Trustees, focusing on the importance of research as SMU strives to reach our full potential and concluding with a brief enrollment update.
- **For SMU, we will pursue R-1 status while maintaining our commitment to undergraduate education, creative activity, and professional degrees** – With such a heavy focus on our R-1 aspirations, I recognize that some non-tenure track faculty, faculty in the creative arts, and/or faculty in the professional schools might wonder if their contributions might be underacknowledged. SMU's distinction, in many ways, is built upon the work that each of you has provided over the course of your careers. SMU's notoriety, earned through your outstanding contributions, has both a direct and indirect impact on the University's overall reputation, which is a key factor in many ranking systems. Additionally, the service you provide in delivering high-quality instruction to our students at the undergraduate and graduate level is a service to the local, regional and national communities in shaping world changers. We do not see the road to R-1 as leading to a choice between mutually exclusive goals, but rather as offering an orientation toward innovation and aspirations that we all share, as they are manifested in the unique contributions of every single discipline on campus. Pursuit of the R-1 path will not preclude this kind of continued excellence and striving across all areas.
- **2020–2021 priorities for undergraduate education** – SMU's R-1 aspirations will not detract from our focus on world-class undergraduate instruction. Indeed, as many of you have shown, sharing your new discoveries and innovative research is of great benefit in the classroom and inspirational to our students. I'll conclude this section by highlighting a few initiatives that will advance during the current academic year.
 - USN&WR rankings – USN&WR released their 2021 ranking of national universities Monday. SMU is ranked 66 and has set a goal to be within the top 50 universities. Members of my team, most notably Michael Tumeo, Director of Institutional Research, is conducting an analysis to determine SMU's performance this year and to provide recommendations on how to advance to our goal. I will provide additional updates in subsequent newsletters once we have had time to study the data.
 - “SMU in Four” – Student success, as measured by retention and graduation, is a key measure in the USN&WR rankings and is an area of focus within SMU's 2016–2025 Strategic Plan. To promote and measure improvement in the areas of undergraduate student retention and graduation, Sheri Kunovich, Associate Provost for Student Academic Engagement and Success, is leading the “SMU in Four” initiative.

As a part of the 10-year SACSCOC reaffirmation process, SMU was required to submit a [quality enhancement plan](#) (QEP) to identify areas for the improvement of either student learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning. SMU has submitted the “SMU in Four” program to SACSCOC as the University’s QEP, and Sheri has established a broadly representational group of University constituents to implement this important program successfully.

- Common Curriculum – SMU’s new [Common Curriculum](#) (approved in 2019) is for undergraduate students entering in fall 2020 or later. The Common Curriculum is the twenty-first century reboot of the classical university education, challenging students to know the past, understand the present, and build the future. My thanks to Peter Moore, Associate Provost for Curricular Innovation and Policy, and Dayna Oscherwitz, Assistant Provost for General Education, for their outstanding leadership and incredibly hard work launching the new curriculum for undergraduates this fall.

Fall 2020

- **Spring schedule and calendar** – For spring 2021, our goal is to create a schedule that supports the best learning opportunities for students and which is informed by our experiences this fall. Key data points will include: faculty/student surveys, attendance data, student inquiries, and monitoring student choice/waitlists as they sign up for spring classes.

Deans, associate deans, department chairs, and departmental/building schedulers have submitted a base schedule this week that is curriculum-focused and includes both SMUFlex and Virtual options for all required courses and for classes with multiple sections. They will consult with and engage faculty to assign instructors to the base schedule by September 25. Adherence to the standard M-W-F/T-R class grid and promoting the spread of courses throughout the day to cover all available time slots is of vital importance so that we can provide a wide range of classroom options.

This week, I launched a calendar committee consisting of key faculty and staff to explore options for the spring 2021 calendar that will promote campus health while maintaining the strength of teaching and learning. This committee will provide me with two or three scenarios for the spring 2021 calendar by October 5, to inform a final decision, which will be announced shortly thereafter.

- **Faculty/student survey for early impressions on fall 2020** – Last week, we gave faculty and students an opportunity to provide feedback on their experiences during the first weeks of the semester. Work is underway with members of my team and the Faculty Senate (notably, Johnitha Johnson, Meredith Richards, and Elizabeth Stringer) to analyze the data. This team has met and determined steps for analyzing the data so that we can share a detailed report by the end of next week. We will continue to provide monthly opportunities to provide ongoing feedback through this survey mechanism to establish a rhythm of seeking – and acting upon – your feedback. Please

look for the report next week and for additional feedback opportunities in October and November as we continue to monitor how the fall 2020 semester is unfolding under these unique circumstances.

If you have any questions about the survey, please reach out directly to either Associate Provosts [Sheri Kunovich](#) or [Paige Ware](#).

- **MERV-13 filter project update** – I’m pleased to inform you that, as of today, we have received shipment of the final thirteen MERV-13 filters needed to complete installation in all buildings across campus. Thank you to the Office of Facilities Planning and Management for seeing this important task to completion, in spite of the considerable supply challenges. Moving forward, the plan will be to change these filters on a quarterly basis to promote the highest possible air quality.
- **Counseling services available to students** – As students begin focusing more intensely on course assignments and exams, we typically observe an increase in referrals to our [Caring Community Connections \(CCC\) Program](#). This week, SMU’s Counseling Services Department sent the following [email](#) to students reminding them of available resources. Faculty and staff are encouraged to [report](#) student issues or behaviors where there are needs or concerns of any kind. Note: If reporting a student concern about COVID-19, be sure to check the “COVID-19 concern” box in the form’s “Medical Issues” section.

News and Noteworthy

- **Faculty Fellows application process: next steps** – The application process is **closing today** for the inaugural cohort of Provost’s Faculty Fellows. Thanks to those who have already applied and to any interested full-time faculty members (our preference is for tenured and/or non-tenure track faculty) still interested, please [apply](#) by end of day today. Over the next few weeks, Associate Provost Paige Ware and a selection committee of leadership from the Provost’s Office will be reviewing applications to make final determinations. Look for an announcement later this month/early October.
- **Faculty-in-Residence application process: next steps** – The Office of the Provost and the Vice President for Student Affairs would like to thank those faculty who submitted applications for the two open Faculty-in-Residence (FiR) positions. The FiR selection committee will conduct an initial review of applications and preliminary interviews. Based on their work and recommendations, Vice President for Student Affairs K.C. Mmeje and I will interview with all finalists in order to make selections. The successful candidates will begin a three-year appointment in the fall 2021 semester.
- **Call for faculty to serve on the Faculty Athletics Admissions subcommittee this year** – Sheri Kunovich, Associate Provost for Student Academic Engagement and Success, is seeking faculty with interest in serving on this team to support student athletes admitted to SMU. The time commitment is approximately 20 hours over the

course of the fall and spring semester. Those interested, particularly faculty who themselves competed in NCAA athletics as undergraduates, should email [Dr. Kunovich](#).

- **Progress update: SMU's response to Black Unity Forum action plan** – The Black Unity Forum submitted its consolidated action plan on August 31. President R. Gerald Turner has assured the Forum of a response by September 30. Working in collaboration with my leadership team (deans and associate provosts), we submitted an initial list of Academic Affairs' responses to the items within the Black Unity Forum's action plan. The University's other vice presidents followed a similar process to develop responses for their respective areas. Consolidation efforts are now underway to provide a comprehensive response to the Black Unity Forum's action plan by the September 30 date. In a preview to the Full Board of Trustees, Dr. Maria Dixon Hall, SMU's inaugural Chief Diversity Officer, and the Reverend Richie Butler (Class of 1993) provided a powerful and inspirational report about their personal experiences being Black in America and at SMU.

While many of you are eager for a full update on the Black Unity Forum Action Plan, thank you for your continued patience and support. We look forward to sharing more information in the coming weeks.

Sincerely,



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