

SMU



Elizabeth G. Loba, Ph.D.
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Office of the Provost

September 3, 2021

Dear Faculty and Staff:

Thanks to each of you for the ways you advance our educational mission in support of our students. These weekly updates will serve as a tool to keep you informed and engaged with SMU's Academic Affairs division as, together, we work toward a safe and healthy fall semester. 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) Fall 2021, 2) Research and Scholarly/Creative Excellence, and 3) News and Noteworthy.

Fall 2021:

- **Review and sign SMU's revised Pledge to Protect** – Earlier this week, Dr. K.C. Mmeje, Vice President for Student Affairs and I sent a [message](#) to the campus community encouraging everyone to review and sign this year's "[Pledge to Protect](#)."

The goal of this year's pledge, developed by SMU's Community Action Network (SMU CAN), is to keep our campus healthy and in-person. Signing is quick, easy, and voluntary.

- **Message to students regarding Hurricane Ida** – Over the past several days, Hurricane Ida has brought unspeakable devastation – first to New Orleans and the surrounding areas and concluding with cataclysmic floods across New York and New Jersey. In the aftermath of this storm, millions have been left without electricity and water and have limited clarity on when their situation will improve.

For community members impacted by this tragic storm, we offer our sympathy and support. Students who need assistance – or community members acting on their behalf – should utilize SMU’s Caring Community Connections (CCC) [program](#).

- **Maintaining academic success for students** – The Student Senate was invited to talk with Faculty Senate this week about recommendations from students who are urging professors to communicate their plans for helping students maintain academic continuity if they need to isolate or quarantine. The CTE has built a [brief reminder](#) of five key ways that faculty support students when they are absent for any excused absence, whether medical, university-sponsored, religious observance, or otherwise.

While faculty are not required to make recordings or make Zoom accessible, both of these options are new additions to the repertoire of ways in which faculty can support students’ ability to keep pace with their academics for the variety of reasons that students miss. I would like to echo the sentiments of many faculty I have heard from who urge us to find –and communicate to students—the specific ways they will support students who need to be absent.

Students have also expressed that knowing in advance that faculty will provide one of these solutions reduces their academic anxiety and increases the likelihood that they will be willing to miss class when they feel unwell. If possible, please announce through your CANVAS course what method you are likely to use. Connections with faculty are frequently pointed out as one of the single most important ways that students at SMU feel welcome and supported.

- **Additional syllabus language regarding mental health resources available to our students** – Vice President for Student Affairs Dr. K.C. Mmeje has prepared the statement below for inclusion in syllabi to help communicate important mental health resources to our students.

Mental Health Resources: On-Call and Ongoing Counseling Services

Throughout the academic year, students may encounter different stressors or go through life experiences which impact their mental health and academic performance. Students who are in distress or have concerns about their mental health can schedule a same-day or next-day appointment to speak with a counselor by calling [Counseling Services](#). Counselors are available at any time, day or night for students in crisis at this number: 214-768-2277 (then select option 2). They will be connected with a counselor immediately. Students seeking ongoing counseling should call the same number (214-768-2277, then select option 1) during normal business hours to schedule an initial appointment.

Please consider adding this important information to your Canvas announcements this fall. Pending Faculty Senate review and approval, it will also be available on the [SMU Required Syllabus Statements website](#).

- **Vaccinations available through the Dr. Bob Smith Health Center** – To receive vaccinations, appointments are required and can be booked through the [health portal](#) or by calling 214-768-2141.
 - Third Doses for the immunocompromised: Third vaccination doses are available for moderately to severely immunocompromised individuals ([as defined by CDC and FDA guidelines](#)) who are fully vaccinated with either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines.

- **Voluntarily Report Your Vaccine to SMU** – Community members are requested to report their COVID-19 vaccination status through the Dr. Bob Smith Health Center. Having accurate vaccination information helps to inform SMU’s COVID response.
 - If you were vaccinated on campus, your information will automatically be uploaded into your health record under *immunizations* (no action is necessary).
 - However, if you were vaccinated off campus, please upload that information directly to the [SMU Health Portal](#), even if you already voluntarily shared your status through the vaccine reporting tool last spring.

The process is quick and easy. Please take a few minutes to report your vaccination status today.

- **Supplemental masks available through Deans’ offices** – Faculty in need of additional masks to provide when students forget them should consult their respective Dean’s office. Supplemental masks have already been delivered to the schools/college for distribution on an as-needed basis. Deans’ offices have the ability to arrange for delivery of additional masks by submitting a [service request](#).

- **COVID-19 testing resources for faculty and staff** – With the return of students, the Dr. Bob Smith Health Center will be unable to accommodate testing for SMU employees beginning on September 7. As offered last year, [SMU is still providing access to convenient COVID-19 testing for employees and their families through Virtual Care for Families locations around the DFW area.](#)

COVID-19 testing will be available to students, employees, and their families this holiday weekend at the Dr. Bob Smith Health Center on **Sunday, September 5**, and **Monday, September 6**, from noon to 2:30 p.m. No appointment is necessary; SMU ID is required (employees can use their own SMU ID for spouses and dependents). Tests will be administered at the white tent adjacent to the parking area on the north side of the Health Center. Signs will be posted.

- **Reminder: SMU announces temporary mask requirement** – Effective August 12, SMU has implemented a [temporary mask requirement](#) in indoor spaces on campus including classrooms, event and meeting spaces, and common areas in all buildings and residential halls, regardless of vaccination status. This requirement is a temporary precaution during the delta variant surge to supplement our other pandemic protocols.

We will continue to require masks indoors for at least the first few weeks of the fall 2021 semester. After that, we will review the situation on a weekly basis using our assessment tool to measure the impact of the pandemic on our campus while taking into consideration the most up-to-date health guidance from local, state and federal authorities. Factors such as the number of cases at SMU and in the county; infection and vaccination rates; local hospitalizations; and campus isolation capacity will help determine when the mask requirement should be lifted.

- **Reminder: Consult Mustang Strong for the most up-to-date source of information regarding SMU's COVID-19 response** – Please continue reviewing the [Mustang Strong website](#) for information on SMU's COVID-19 response. Here, you can find answers to frequently asked questions, access the latest [campus announcements](#), review information on receiving and reporting the [vaccine](#), and monitor the latest data on [confirmed COVID-19 cases on campus](#).

Road to R1 and Scholarly/Creative Excellence:

- **Faculty hiring deliberations** – Last week, Deans received notification from my office concerning approved faculty searches as well as the data my office needs to be able to approve additional requests.
 - **Cluster hires** – As mentioned in multiple newsletters this past spring, our hope is that being able to hire additional, interdisciplinary clusters of faculty in strategic areas of strength, coupled with SMU's emerging capabilities in data science and high-performance computing, will set SMU apart in these fields.

Informed by task force reports submitted from 2016 – 2018, interviews with more than 80 faculty in fall 2020, decanal recommendations developed in January 2021, faculty town halls convened in spring 2021 and following the recommendation of faculty-led task forces working over the summer, SMU will advertise cluster hires in fall 2021 across two areas of strategic research excellence: 1) 21st Century Technology and Education, and 2) Earth Hazards and National Security.

These clusters will enhance areas of established research strength at SMU and will serve as a model for future cluster hires to support our research and scholarly/creative ambitions.

Dedman College and the Simmons School of Education are using existing resources and funding lines within each of their schools to accomplish this first round of strategic cluster hiring to augment areas in which our SMU faculty are already engaged in these two high-impact research areas.

Tom DiPiero, Dean of Dedman College; Stephanie Knight, Dean of the Simmons School of Education and Human Development; and Jim Quick, Dean of the Moody School of Graduate and Advanced Studies and Associate Provost for Research, are meeting this week to develop a plan to manage the search process for these two interdisciplinary clusters. We will provide additional updates in the near future.

While our first two faculty cluster hires are in fields most directly linked to the Carnegie Classification System, we recognize the value and importance of incorporating the arts, humanities, social sciences and professional schools into our ongoing and future conversations around academic excellence and resource allocation for later rounds of cluster hires. We have scheduled a town hall on October 14 to focus on these topics. Be on the lookout for an invitation to participate as well as additional information in subsequent newsletters.

- **Additional faculty lines** – Departments authorized to search for additional faculty lines this fall will receive notification from their Dean. As a reminder, we are introducing [changes](#) to the faculty search and recruiting process effective August 1. These changes were developed in close consultation with Samantha Thomas, Executive Director for Access and Equity and Title IX Coordinator; Maria Dixon Hall, our Chief Diversity Officer; and Paige Ware, Associate Provost for Faculty Success. These efforts are aligned with the university response to the recognition both by [Black Unity Forum Action plan](#) and by academic leadership at SMU; we need to strengthen systematically our recruitment efforts with robust outreach and communications to consistently bring top talent to our university.
- **Workload policies** – SMU is committed to developing and approving department-level and unit-level workload documents that make our SMU policies clear and transparent at the unit level, which will be a critical step in helping us reach our research and creative impact goals for R1 and our BUF goals around greater transparency and equity.

Our goal remains to have finalized departmental workload policies approved by late September and posted for your review in early October. Click [here](#) for a preview of recently-approved workload policies.

[News and Noteworthy:](#)

- **SMU research featured in *The Economist*, *Wired*, and *CNET*** – To determine whether Saturn’s moon Titan could harbor life, Tomče Runčevski, Assistant Professor in Dedman College’s Department of Chemistry, has recreated the moon’s icy climate in glass tubes. His group’s work, recently featured in [Wired](#), the [Economist](#) and by [CNET](#) (which has 33.62 million unique monthly visits) yields important insights about Saturn’s moon before the NASA Dragonfly spacecraft launches for Titan in 2027.
- **Provost Faculty Fellows – call for applications** – This week, I sent out the following [call for applications](#) for two additional Provost Faculty Fellows during the 2021 – 2022 academic year: 1) Equity and Inclusion and 2) Faculty Awards and Fellowships.

All full-time faculty members can apply, with a primary focus on faculty who have demonstrated interest and experience in an area that matches one of the areas listed above with priority for instructional (non-tenure track) or tenured faculty.

- **Search process for Director for Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE)** – After two full terms (6 years) as Director of the CTE, Dr. Michael Harris has decided to transition into a new role as Department Chair for Education Policy and Leadership. Among his many accomplishments during his two terms, I would be remiss not to acknowledge and to thank him for his outstanding leadership during an unprecedented and uncharted period of demand on the CTE’s time and resources.

This week, we also announced an [open call](#) for faculty to apply for a three-year (renewable) appointment for the Director of CTE position effective January 10, 2022.

The Director of the CTE reports to the Associate Provost for Faculty Success and includes a team with Dr. Addy Tolliver, Senior Instructional Designer, and Dr. Molly Ellis, Associate Director of Learning Analytics and Student Success.

- **CTE announces Just in Time Teaching Grants** – Last week the CTE and the Office of Information Technology (OIT) finalized processing the fall 2021 Just-in-Time Teaching and Technology Grant applications. The goal of this bi-annual grant program is to reduce faculty’s barriers to acquiring needed materials or technology for their teaching at the start of the semester. The program received a total of 35 applications and funded 16 awards for a total of \$4804.78. Examples of items funded include resin casts of archeological artifacts, outboard electronic components for music production, digital mixing stations and licenses for educational software such as Piazza, ThingLink, etc. The next cycle for Just-in-Time Teaching and Technology Grant applications will begin at the start of the spring 2022 semester.

- **Capital Campaign launch Friday, September 17** – As a correction from last week’s newsletter, SMU’s Capital Campaign 3.0 formally begins on Friday, September 17 with an outdoor kickoff ceremony and picnic.
- **Quarterly update to the Black Unity Forum (BUF)** – We will have our quarterly update with the BUF executive team on Wednesday, September 8. This meeting is a ‘year in review’ and will highlight the work we have completed over the last year in response to the Black Unity Forum action plan. Dr. Maria Dixon Hall, Chief Diversity Officer, Dr. K.C. Mmeje, Vice President for Student Affairs, and I will join President Turner in next week’s meeting.
- **SMU in Four Advising Pillar Update** – Josh Beaty, Director of Student and Advisor Training, will be leading SMU in Four initiatives designed to improve advising across the university. Josh has held a leadership role in student and staff training for more than five years at SMU and is well-known among many SMU advisors. Over the summer, the SMU in Four advising pillar has been preparing to introduce new tools available to major advisors that will improve communication across campus, save time and effort for department faculty and staff, and result in more effective student advising.
- **English professor among researchers memorializing Black individuals whose headstones were removed from a Washington, D.C. cemetery in 1960** – Ezra Greenspan, Edmund J. and Louise W. Kahn Chair in Humanities in Dedman College’s Department of English, is among a team of researchers tracking down the histories of Black individuals whose headstones were removed from a Washington, D.C. cemetery in 1960. According to the [Washington Post](#), Greenspan learned of the project through his work on a biography of abolitionist Frederick Douglass. Douglass’ sons’ headstones were among those removed and placed along the Potomac River to protect against erosion.

Sincerely,



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

World Changers Shaped Here