

## Weekly Update | October 20, 2023

**Elizabeth G. Loba, Ph.D. Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs**

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 toward achieving the goals that fall within our four priority areas through 2025: 1) Academic Excellence, 2) Road to R1: Research and Scholarly/Creative Excellence, 3) 2016 – 2025 Strategic Plan and 4) Inclusive Excellence.

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 2023, 2) Road to R1: Research and Scholarly/Creative Excellence, and 3) News and Noteworthy.

### Fall 2023

#### Search for Perkins School of Theology Dean launched

As mentioned in [Monday's email](#), SMU has begun the search for the next Dean of Perkins School of Theology.

Since January 2023, Bishop Mike McKee has served as Dean *ad interim* of the Perkins School. He agreed to serve in this capacity upon the planned retirement of the previous incumbent, Craig C. Hill, and until a permanent Dean was named. We are grateful for Dean McKee's service during this time of leadership transition.

I have invited members of the SMU community to serve on the search committee with hopes of confirming membership next week. My thanks to Peter Moore, Associate Director of the O'Donnell Data Science and Research Computing Institute (and former Provost *ad interim*) for serving as the search committee chair. I will provide regular updates on the status of the search through the *Weekly Newsletter*.

#### Fall Research Symposium 2023

The Office of Engaged Learning's [2023 Fall Research Symposium](#) will take place in the Hughes-Trigg Student Center, rooms 118-130, on Wednesday, November 1, from 4 – 7 p.m.

This event invites students from select research and service programs to give 10-minute oral presentations on their research. The featured programs for this year include Engaged Learning

Fellows, Summer Research Fellows, Cooper McElvaney Peace and Justice Fellows, Hamilton Scholars, Maguire Public Service Fellows, Mayer Fellows, McNair Scholars, Richter Fellows and Tower Scholars.

All are invited to join for refreshments and to learn about the various projects conducted by these scholars. Schedule information can be found at [www.smu.edu/fallsymposium](http://www.smu.edu/fallsymposium).

### **Open enrollment for 2024 benefits begins**

[Open Enrollment](#) for benefits started Monday, October 16, and will close *at midnight on Monday, October 31*. Open Enrollment is an opportunity for benefits-eligible SMU employees to evaluate current benefits elections and consider changes for the coming year.

Thanks to SMU's Department of Human Resources (HR) for hosting this week's [SMU HR Fair](#) to assist employees in preparing for open enrollment.

## **Road to R1: Research and Scholarly/Creative Excellence**

### **Lyle School of Engineering faculty member and NASA collaborators awarded a patent powered by artificial intelligence that turns NASA's earth science data into useable knowledge for scientists**

Jia Zhang, Cruse C. and Marjorie F. Calahan Centennial Chair in Engineering and *ad interim* chair and professor in the Lyle School of Engineering's Department of Computer Science, was [recently awarded a patent along with NASA collaborators](#) for developing "MATA" – an intelligent, virtual, personalized assistant for Earth science research. MATA, which is the Sanskrit name for the Earth, provides conversational computing that allows users to type or verbally ask questions through a computer or mobile phone.

The technology is specifically designed for searches that are geospatial and time-aware. MATA pulls stored data from dozens of satellites related to hurricanes, floods, dust storms, heat waves, power outages, and more. When a user asks a question, MATA finds the answer by pulling the appropriate data and conducting additional computations as needed. Answers are returned to users conversationally.

Zhang hopes to use the data science infrastructure she developed as the backbone for AI-powered analytics in other fields, such as healthcare applications that support the early detection of diseases.

### **SMU psychology study reveals shyness could impact young children's performance on language tests**

A recent [study from SMU psychologist Sarah Kucker](#) and Liesl Melnick, a graduate student at Eastern Illinois University, published in the [Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research](#), suggests shyness can influence a child's performance in language assessments, depending on the level of social interaction required to complete the test.

The study revealed significant differences in children's performance across a series of tasks requiring differing levels of spoken interaction. Kucker believes acknowledging the impact of shyness will help professionals ensure language assessments are more effective and provide a more comprehensive understanding of a child's linguistic development.

### **Researchers at SMU are turning a video game into a crime-fighting tool**

SMU Researchers and video game designers are using a \$1.187 million grant from the [U.S. Department of Justice's National Institute of Justice](#) to create, sort and analyze an [anti-sex trafficking](#)

[data warehouse](#). Given the size and complexity of the dataset she is developing, project lead and SMU professor Elizabeth Wheaton-Páramo has collaborated with SMU's experts in artificial intelligence/machine learning (AI/ML) and video game development to create a more efficient data analysis process.

Guildhall's deputy director Corey Clark and SMU postdoctoral researcher Steph Buongiorno are harnessing the power of AI/ML through a video game they created specifically for this project. Using information from law enforcement databases, gamers will solve fictitious crimes by sorting out traffickers' names and crime locations from real U.S. Department of Justice press releases.

SMU data and visualization analyst Mateo Langston Smith takes the data from the game and law enforcement databases to build dashboards and graphics that policymakers and police officers will then be able to use to link their cases to others and to help identify possible hotspots.

This world-changing research team also includes Eric Godat, team lead for data science and research services; Lane Duncan, manager for integration services; Ganesh Vardhineedi, data architect; Raanju R. Sundararajan, professor in Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences' Department of Statistics and Data Science; Natalie Nanasi, Director of the Judge Elmo B. Hunter Legal Center for Victims of Crimes Against Women; and Jake Schauer, IT officer at Alvin Police Department.

## **Papers of Don Meredith, SMU alum and Former Dallas Cowboys Quarterback, now available to researchers at SMU Archives**

Joseph "Dandy" Don Meredith (1938-2010) was born and raised in east Texas and was SMU's starting quarterback for three seasons. During his college football career, he reset all of SMU's passing records and was selected as an all-American in 1958 and 1959. After college, Meredith went on to play for the Dallas Cowboys during the team's first decade and until his retirement in 1969. In 1970 Meredith was chosen by CBS to join with sportscasters Howard Cosell and Frank Gifford to form the *Monday Night Football* broadcast team. This combination was a massive ratings success and eventually pushed Meredith into acting. From the mid-70s until his death, he performed in more than a dozen films and television shows, from *Police Story* to *King of the Hill*.

SMU Libraries is pleased to host the papers of Don Meredith and to make them available to researchers at the SMU archives. These papers contain 11 linear feet of material, including legal documents, photographs, scrapbooks, and his personal copy of Willie Nelson's "The Party's Over" on vinyl. [Click here](#) to learn more about the collection.

## **News and Noteworthy**

### **Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences Professor to receive the Thomas O. Enders Distinguished Dissertation Award**

Antoinette Williams-Tutt, lecturer for French language courses and advisor for the international film studies minor in the Department of World Languages and Literatures at Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences, is set to receive the [Thomas O. Enders Distinguished Dissertation Award](#) from the [Association of Canadian Studies in the United States](#) (ACSUS) for her dissertation entitled, "Where Do We Go from Here? Québécois Identity in The Road Novel from 1964 to 2008."

The Thomas O. Enders Distinguished Dissertation Award is awarded to a nominee's dissertation which represents original work that makes a significant contribution to the nominee's discipline and to the study of Canada.

Professor Williams-Tutt will attend the [ACSUS Biennial conference](#) in November both to receive the award and to present a 20-minute lecture on the dissertation. Professor Williams-Tutt will also receive an honorarium of \$5,000, a certificate of citation, and a two-year complimentary membership in ACSUS.

## **The director for the Systems Engineering Program at Lyle School of Engineering will represent SMU on International Council on Systems Engineering (INCOSE) boards**

Director of Lyle School of Engineering's Systems Engineering Program, Diana Easton, will represent SMU on the [International Council on Systems Engineering's](#) (INCOSE) [Corporate Advisory Board](#) (CAB) and [Academic Council](#) (AC). According to INCOSE, "the CAB provides strategic guidance to technical leadership, leading to the development of Systems Engineering products and standards to meet their needs" and the "Academic Council members form the branch of the Corporate Advisory Board facilitating discussion and exploration of issues relevant to academia and setting a path for achievement with strategic collaborations within INCOSE."

Congratulations to Professor Easton on these appointments. We are pleased that you will be representing SMU and Lyle School of Engineering in Systems Engineering and the larger field of Operations Research and Engineering Management on the global stage.

## **Two Perkins School graduates to receive Perkins Distinguished Alumnus Award**

Rev. Dr. Thomas J. Pace III (M.Div. '82) and Rev. Dr. Clayton Oliphint (M.Div. '88, D.Min. '96) have been selected as [recipients of the 2023 Perkins Distinguished Alumnus/a Award](#). This award recognizes Perkins graduates who have demonstrated effectiveness and integrity in service to the church, continuing support for the goals of Perkins and Southern Methodist University, outstanding service to the community, and exemplary character.

Pace and Oliphint will be honored at the 2023 Distinguished Alumni Award Banquet on Monday, November 13, from 5 p.m. – 7 p.m. in the Great Hall of Elizabeth Perkins Prothro Hall on the SMU campus. [Tickets are available online](#).

## **Continuing and Professional Education (CAPE) encourages SMU employees to enroll in classes with new discount program**

SMU Continuing and Professional Education (CAPE) now offers SMU staff and faculty members 50 percent off tuition in some of its most popular professional development courses and certificate programs, including Data Visualization and Storytelling, Graphic Design, and Project Management. SMU full-time employees may register at the discounted rate for CAPE programs and courses offered in person on the SMU campus or online. CAPE also can design customized learning programs to meet department or division needs.

Lunch and Learn information sessions will be scheduled in the near future. Learn more about available programs and other details at [www.smu.edu/cape/employee](http://www.smu.edu/cape/employee).

## **SMU hosting multiple art exhibits across campus**

Multiple art exhibits are currently on display across campus. Below is a small sample of the range of possibilities available throughout the fall:

The Meadows Museum at SMU is showing "[Spanish Light: Sorolla in American Collections](#)" through January 7, 2024 in honor of Spanish painter Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida (1863–1923) and the centennial anniversary of his passing.

The Hawn Gallery at the Hamon Arts Library is housing the exhibit "[What We Keep: The Objects of Immigrants to America](#)" by artist and SMU alum Jane Chu. Chu's works will be on display through December 15, 2023.

The SMU Human Rights Program and Human Rights Council will be hosting "[Art & Soul: Student Art Exhibition & Fundraiser](#)" to support the SMU Human Rights Program. Works by current students and

alumni will be available for purchase from 7 p.m. – 9:30 p.m. on November 11, 2023, at Artstillery, 723 Fort Worth Avenue, Dallas, TX.

Meadows School of the Arts is currently presenting the art exhibition “*HOME? Humanizing the Homeless / Portraits & Signs*,” created by Meadows School of the Arts’ Professor William Baronet from the Division of Advertising and photographer Leah den Bok. The exhibit will run for four weeks in the William B. Jordan Gallery at Owen Arts Center. In conjunction with the exhibit, Project Unity in partnership with Meadows School is hosting the [Together We Dine](#) event. The event will offer a thought-provoking conversation over dinner based on key themes explored by the exhibit: humanity, home and hopefulness. All are welcome to join by [registering here](#).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elizabeth G. Loba', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke at the end.

Elizabeth G. Loba, PhD

Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Southern Methodist University

<https://www.smu.edu/provost>

**World Changers Shaped Here**