

## Weekly Update | September 22, 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

#### **2024 U.S. News and World Report national universities rankings**

Earlier this week, [I sent a letter](#) to our campus community addressing the *U.S. News and World Report* 2024 national university rankings. SMU has also [published a news release](#) that examines these new rankings in more detail.

Regardless of rankings, SMU remains committed to providing a rigorous and holistic academic experience to all students, and we will continue to focus on student outcomes across the entire student lifecycle: recruiting, retention, graduation and employment, ensuring all Mustangs are able to succeed while on campus and throughout their careers.

#### **2023-2024 New Leadership Seminar Series begins this week**

Each year, the Office of the Provost hosts a seminar series that provides, in a collegial weekly gathering over lunch, the opportunity to engage in conversations with campus leaders and colleagues. This year, the series will be focused on "Leading as Endowed Faculty." In their unique roles, endowed chairs and professors have access to visibility and resources that allow them to

augment their scholarship in ways that enhance the reputation of us all through conferences, keynote speakers, invitations, and travel. We hope to create an opportunity for cross-university dialogue that acknowledges their unique and strategic roles in strengthening our collective reputation.

Congratulations to this year's participants. You can review the full roster for our 2023-2024 Emerging Leaders at the [following link](#).

### **Providing academic feedback to students throughout the semester**

On Monday, Sheri Kunovich, Associate Provost for Student Academic Engagement and Success, [sent a letter to faculty](#) detailing information about Early and Mid-Term Progress Reports (EPRs and MPRs). I encourage faculty who teach undergraduate classes to provide your students feedback throughout the semester, particularly in time with EPR and MPR reporting cycles. This feedback is beneficial both to our students and to the staff who work so hard to foster and promote student academic success.

### **SMU in Four year-two-progress presentation on October 12**

On Wednesday, the [SMU in Four](#) team invited the SMU community to join them for their year-two progress presentation on [SMU's Quality Enhancement Plan](#). The presentation is scheduled for Thursday, October 12, from 3:30 – 5:00 p.m. in the Hughes-Trigg Student Center, Ballroom A. During this presentation, you will receive updates on early-alert mechanisms, undergraduate academic advising, technology enhancements, and gateway and introductory courses. Additionally, the SMU in Four team will share informal student retention and graduation numbers along with goals for year three of this five-year initiative. [RSVPs are encouraged, and walk-ins are welcome.](#)

### **Reminder: AT&T Data Science event to be held in Moody Hall**

On Wednesday, September 27, at 6:00 p.m. in the Moody Hall auditorium, [AT&T](#) will be presenting an event about the emerging field of data science. SMU faculty, students, and staff are invited to attend.

For the past two years SMU and AT&T have partnered on the University's [AT&T Data Science Scholars Program](#) (DSSP), an eight-week Data Science program followed by an eight-week internship with AT&T. For more information about the event or DSSP, please contact Tim Angell, Director for Corporate Engagement, at [tangell@smu.edu](mailto:tangell@smu.edu).

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

### **Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences Professor awarded \$3.5 million from the National Institutes of Health (NIH)**

Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences' Department of Chemistry Professor John Buynak and his team have received a \$3.5 million, 5-year grant from the [National Institutes of Health](#) to design and synthesize new antibiotics to fight some of the deadliest and most

clinically-challenging infections of the 21st century – drug-resistant strains of bacteria that cause tuberculosis and leprosy.

These new antibiotics called ‘atypically substituted’ drugs, are a modified version of a class of antibiotics known as carbapenem antibiotics, which weaken the cell wall of mycobacterial strains, causing bacteria to burst and die. [Professor Buynak’s research](#) has shown that these modified drugs are more effective at killing mycobacterial strains and less likely to negatively affect normal bacteria and cause unnecessary side effects when compared to current carbapenems.

### **The Deason Criminal Justice Reform Center awarded grant from the U.S. Department of Justice**

SMU’s [Deason Criminal Justice Reform Center](#) has received a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice’s (DOJ) [National Institute of Justice’s Research and Evaluation on the Administration of Justice: Advancing Access to Justice 60 Years after Gideon Program](#) for \$800,000. The center will utilize these funds to continue work on their project, *Building Better Indigent Defense Systems*, which looks to answer the question “do more structured defense delivery systems—such as staffed public defender offices and managed assigned counsel programs — do a better job at providing eligible people with appointed counsel?” Employing the center’s research-for-reform model, this study will generate actionable recommendations for policymakers and indigent defense leaders.

Congratulations to Andrew L. B. Davies, Director of Research at the Deason Criminal Justice Reform Center, on achieving this milestone.

### **SMU’s research website has a new look**

Over the past several months, departments from across campus have collaborated to support the redesign of SMU’s main research webpage: [smu.edu/research](http://smu.edu/research). Working in partnership, staff representatives from Development and External Affairs, the Office of Information Technology, the Office of Research and Innovation, and the Office of the Provost have created a new series of webpages that will appeal to a variety of audiences, including current and prospective industry partners, external faculty and academic leadership, current and prospective faculty, and other SMU community members including SMU staff and students.

Thank you to all those who helped make this project a reality giving SMU a hub to share our vision for research excellence, to display some of the leading-edge research being conducted at our University, and to provide a portal through which industry partners are able to connect with us for research proposals.

### **Reminder: Call for Proposals – University Research Council Travel and Research Grants**

Full-time research-active faculty, both tenure track and teaching/professional (non-tenure track), as well as Faculty Emeriti are invited to submit proposals to the University Research Council (URC) Research and Travel Grant Program for AY 2023-2024 by 5:00 p.m. on

October 11, 2023. Two proposals will be selected to receive grant funding – travel grants may be awarded up to \$10,000 and research grants may be awarded up to \$15,000.

Additional information is available here in the [original announcement](#) and on the [URC website](#). Please contact LaGail Davis in the Office of Research and Innovation at [lagail@smu.edu](mailto:lagail@smu.edu) if you have questions.

## News and Noteworthy

### **Big iDeas Pitch Contest allows undergraduates the chance to win funding for their start-up companies**

Next week, SMU undergraduates will have the opportunity to compete for \$1,000 cash prizes to invest in their own start-up company. Throughout the year, the Office of Engaged Learning's [Big iDeas program](#) hosts entrepreneurship competitions and provides training and coaching for entrepreneurial projects. Their fall signature event, the Big iDeas Pitch Contest, is happening next Friday, September 29, from 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. in the Hughes-Trigg Student Center Ballroom. The pitch contest gives undergraduate students the opportunity to present their best business idea in 90 seconds to a panel of judges with a chance to win seed money that could help turn their pitch into reality. Students who are interested in pitching can [sign up here](#).

### **SMU Continuing and Professional Education (CAPE) celebrates 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Frances Anne Moody Hall**

Last Wednesday, SMU Continuing and Professional Education (CAPE) celebrated its 70<sup>th</sup> year of providing short courses, certificates and customized programs that help SMU meet our upskilling goals in the Dallas community and beyond. CAPE currently engages 140+ instructors and subject-matter experts to offer more than 120 programs/courses to 1,500+ students annually. Congratulations to CAPE on 70 years of service and thank you to all the faculty and staff who provide this valuable opportunity to our students.

Sincerely,



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

**World Changers Shaped Here**