

Weekly Update | February 23, 2024

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 provost@smu.edu. Suggestions received before noon on Tuesday will be reviewed and considered for publication in that week's Friday newsletter. Others will be held until the following week. Previous newsletters are available [here](#).

Today's update falls into five categories: 1) Spring 2024, 2) Academic Excellence, 3) Road to R1: Research and Scholarly/Creative Excellence, 4) Inclusive Excellence, and 5) News and Noteworthy.

Spring 2024

Recap: Board of Trustees meeting

This week, I had two opportunities to provide Academic Affairs updates to members of SMU's Board of Trustees.

Committee on Academic Affairs

In Thursday's committee meeting, my update covered two topics. I began with a detailed analytical review of SMU's performance in *US News and World Report's* 2024 ranking of colleges and universities. I concluded with examples of how SMU is harnessing generative AI for research and in the classroom.

Full Board Meeting

In this morning's meeting, I shared a consolidated version of my presentation to the Committee on Academic Affairs that focused on *US News and World Report's* 2024 rankings and SMU's approach to generative AI.

Search update: Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences Dean

As mentioned in previous newsletters, the search is underway for the next Elisabeth Martin Armstrong Dean of Dedman College. This week, I sent formal invitations to members of the search committee. We are confirming the group's composition and will announce the members next week.

Thank you to all the search committee members for participating in this important search, and thank you to Robin Poston, Dean of the Moody School of Graduate and Advanced Studies and Associate Provost for Graduate Education, for serving as the search committee chair. Chuck O'Boyle, of [C.V. O'Boyle and Associates](#), will support the search as our external consultant.

The search committee will have its first meeting on March 7. We will continue to share updates regarding this search in upcoming newsletters.

Call for applications: Caroline M. Jones Memorial Scholarship

Applications are now open for the Caroline M. Jones Memorial Scholarship for full-time undergraduate students returning for the 2024-2025 academic year. This scholarship was established to honor Miss Caroline M. Jones, a staff member who served SMU for over 30 years with an endowment built from memorials given in her name by many staff, faculty, and alumni. The scholarship winner will receive \$10,000 over two semesters (fall and spring) to cover the costs of tuition, fees, room and board.

Interested applicants can [learn more and apply here](#) by March 25, 2024.

Updates from the Office of Financial Aid Services

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) simplification

As you may have heard, FAFSA is going through its largest overhaul in years and these changes may affect students applying for or receiving aid through the 2024-2025 FAFSA submission process. [StudentAid.gov](#) has detailed information about FAFSA's Simplification Project and the SMU [FAFSA Update and Award Information webpage](#) has more information on how these changes might affect student applications and aid disbursements.

For any troubleshooting issues with the 2024-25 FAFSA application, students are encouraged to visit the [2024-25 FAFSA Issue Alerts webpage](#) which lists all open and resolved issues as well as workarounds.

U.S. Department of Education announces one-time adjustment to payments that count toward income-driven repayment and public service loan forgiveness programs

Student loan borrowers have an opportunity to have their student loans canceled or receive more credit towards cancellation if they are on an [Income-Driven Repayment \(IDR\) Plan](#) or pursuing the [Public Service Loan Forgiveness program](#). As a non-profit 403(b) organization, staff and faculty at SMU are eligible for Public Service Loan Forgiveness.

The U.S. Department of Education will apply the account adjustment to most federally-held student loans. However, consumers who have certain types of loans must first consolidate their loan into a Direct Consolidation loan to maximize the effect of the account adjustment and must do so [no later than April 30, 2024](#). To continue earning credit towards loan forgiveness after April 30, 2024, enroll in an IDR plan at, [studentaid.gov/idr/](#).

Academic Excellence

Scholar programs' Interview Day

Faculty and staff play a critical role in helping us select which of our remarkable students will be offered one of SMU's three most prestigious scholarships, and I want to thank those who have volunteered their time to participate in this year's Interview Day. We kindly ask that you extend a warm welcome to our prospective scholars who will be on campus February 29 and March 1.

President's Scholars & Mustang Scholars

This year's Interview Day for the Mustang Scholars and President's Scholars distinguished scholarship programs will be Friday, March 1, 2024, with a dinner reception on Thursday, February 29.

Any questions can be directed to Angela Jeon-Huh, Ed.D., Assistant Dean of Scholars Programs at ajeonhuh@smu.edu.

Hunt Scholars

The Nancy Ann and Ray L. Hunt Leadership Scholars Program, housed in the Hegi Family Career Development Center, will have Interview Day on March 1.

Please direct any questions you may have to huntscholars@smu.edu.

University Testing Center using new proctoring software to streamline student and faculty testing experience

The University Testing Center (UTC) is excited to announce new proctoring software, *NetSupport School*, that allows Canvas tests to be administered in a locked-down browser. *NetSupport School* offers several new abilities that previous software did not. The new software can facilitate real-time surveillance of students taking Canvas tests with the [Respondus LockDown Browser \(LDB\)](#) on UTC computers.

Faculty will now be able to use Canvas and classroom versions of tests with LDB, rather than creating new test versions. This should result in less confusion on test day.

With its expanded features *NetSupport School* streamlines the student and faculty testing experience while enhancing the UTC's commitment to test integrity and security.

For more information please contact the UTC at 214-768-6064 or universitytestingcenter@smu.edu.

New issue of SMU Journal of Undergraduate Research (JoUR) released

The Office of Engaged Learning's and SMU Libraries' collaborative project, the SMU Journal of Undergraduate Research (JoUR), has released its newest issue [now available online](#). JoUR is a double-blind, peer-reviewed journal that features undergraduate research and gives undergraduate students exposure to the academic publishing process.

The latest release of SMU JoUR is Issue 1, Volume 8 and was published under Editor-in-Chief Joshua Ange.

Success Fest to encourage undergraduate students to complete their Degree Planner

Peer Academic Leaders (PALs) and the University Advising Center (UAC) will be hosting "Success Fest," an event to promote the use of Degree Planner amongst SMU undergraduate students, on February 28, from 2–4 p.m. in the Hughes-Trigg Varsity. The event will offer students incentives such as food from Grilled Cheese Co. and the opportunity to win Amazon gift cards.

To gain entrance to Success Fest, students must show proof of a completed Degree Planner. There will also be PALs and advisors in the Hughes-Trigg Chamber to help students complete their Degree Planner on the day of the event. Additionally, the UAC will host Degree Planner workshops on February 26 and 27, from 11:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m. in Hughes-Trigg room 130. Students are also able to book one-on-one appointments with the PALs if they prefer a more individualized tutorial on Degree Planner.

To learn more about Success Fest, Degree Planner and the importance of students engaging with this degree attainment support tool, [click here](#).

Road to R1: Research and Scholarly/Creative Excellence

Simmons School of Education and Human Development researchers publish book on project-based instruction in STEM

Simmons School of Education and Human Development researchers Anthony Petrosino, Ph.D., Associate Dean of Research; Candace Walkington, Ph.D., Annette and Harold Simmons Centennial Chair; and their colleague Denise Ekberg have published a new book entitled *Frameworks for Integrated Project-Based Instruction in STEM Disciplines*. Their book takes a deep dive into integrated project-based instruction (PBI) for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math curriculums and how to apply PBI in the classroom. PBI, a teaching method that has grown in popularity, can help teachers make STEM subjects more understandable for their students.

Lyle School of Engineering faculty member works with collaborators at UT Austin to develop a less expensive method to identify disease-causing pathogens

Lyle School of Engineering's Department of Mechanical Engineering Professor MinJun Kim, Ph.D., Robert C. Womack Chair in Engineering and collaborators at UT Austin developed a less expensive way to detect nuclease digestion. Nucleic acid detection is the primary method for identifying pathogens that cause infectious diseases such as COVID-19.

The study, published in the journal [Nature Nanotechnology](#), shows that this low-cost tool, Subak, is effective and 62 times less expensive to produce than the traditional methods of identifying nuclease activity. In the instance of COVID-19, millions of PCR tests were run worldwide every day during the pandemic to test for the disease, showcasing the importance of reducing testing costs.

Inclusive Excellence

Bridwell Director Anthony Elia featured in PBS Documentary on Harlem Renaissance

This month, PBS has released a short documentary from its [American Masters Shorts](#) documentary series about the Harlem Renaissance for Black History Month. The documentary, titled *Searching for Augusta Savage*, follows the life of the groundbreaking sculptor and artist, who fought adversity, discrimination, racism, and sexism over her long life, and eventually met a local scientist and businessman H. Karl Knaust with whom she became close friends. Bridwell Director, Anthony Elia, was invited to participate in the documentary as the grandson of Mr. Knaust, whose family currently owns the home of the late Harlem Renaissance artist, which has been turned into a museum.

The documentary is [now available on the PBS website](#) and will be premiered next week at the [New York Public Library's Main Branch](#) and then at the [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#). The documentary will be featured on local PBS outlets later this spring.

In March look for news about screening and discussion sessions at Bridwell Library.

News and Noteworthy

Lyle School of Engineering graduate student team wins American Airlines Advanced Analytics Hackathon

Lyle School of Engineering's Department of Operations Research and Engineering Management doctoral students Mo Khalafi, Vala Rahmati and Leyla Tavassoli along with master's student Nirupama Valluru from the University of North Texas comprised the first-place team in the American Airlines Operations Research and Advanced Analytics Hackathon event. The event focused on solving a current data science and machine learning problem and took place at American Airlines headquarters, on Saturday, February 17.



Sincerely,

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