We all play roles. Some are conscious, some unconscious. Many are prescribed for us.

Yet, we seek freedom to be ourselves. Sometimes, even those closest to us do not really know who we genuinely are. Since I have spent a good part of my adult years in Iowa, I have always favored this Midwestern story.

It began when a farmer went hunting for a bird to domesticate. He discovered an eaglet. Happily, he placed the newfound eaglet in his chicken coop along with his chickens. Months passed as the eaglet grew. The eaglet ate like a chicken, walked like a chicken, and lived like every other fowl in the coop. Although the eaglet was the queen of the air, she pecked around the farm yard each day.

Once, as the story goes, a naturalist spotted the eaglet in the chicken coop.\footnote{Esteban R. Montilla and Ferney Medina, \textit{Pastoral Care and Counseling with Latino/as} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), p.4. This rendition is my paraphrase.} The naturalist confronted the farmer and said the eaglet would one day rise up and fly into the heavens. To prove this to the unbelieving farmer, the naturalist tried three
methods of liberation. First, the well-meaning naturalist placed the eaglet on his arm, but she did not fly. Secondly, the kind naturalist carried the eaglet to a rooftop. Nothing transpired. Finally, as a last effort, leaving the familiar, the naturalist left the town with the eaglet and climbed a hilltop. There, the eaglet saw a new view, many perspectives, even eagles flying, and she gazed toward the sun and the wide horizon. At that moment, she spread her magnificent wings, breathed deeply of the wind, let out a genuine screech, puffed herself up, and flew toward the heavens.

Some of us have experienced lives of restrictions; some have known false expectations. As we experience freedoms and find our own authenticities, we are carried to a hilltop of metamorphosis, a peak of possibilities.

We are called to rise above the constricting images that people have of us, the stereotypes that confine, the barriers and fences that are constructed around us. To do this, we often need a glimpse of another way, a peek at another way of being, a nudge to fly. This is what the faculty at SMU seeks to offer to you. We are here to let you in on what we have been privileged to learn. We are here to facilitate your own inquiry.

At SMU, you are beginning a journey to become the person you were created to be. Some call this self-differentiation. Some call it the search for the authentic self. Others use the word sanctification: becoming the person God created you to
be. On this journey, we learn that all we can change is ourselves. We cannot “fix” or manipulate our families. However, as we become healthier and more joyful, we are able to be genuinely connected to our families. You see, that is the irony: as we “leave home” in this way, we actually come home to ourselves.

As President of the SMU Faculty Senate, I represent 740 faculty at SMU. We faculty **ARE NOT** here to be hall monitors, tyrants of testing, **only** givers of papers and pop tests.

We are here

To help you envision new vistas of knowledge,

To assist you in expanding intellectual horizons,

To commend nourishment of your spirit,

To support development of resiliency and character,

To encourage care for body-mind-spirit,

To watch you become the person you were created to be,

To celebrate as you step into yourself.

SMU is not enclaved like a chicken coop or a bubble. It is a grounded community with a clear view of a hilltop where one can master knowledge, character, and skills for living. Now students, your years at SMU begin near the Hilltop. It is time! So, stretch your wings, breathe deeply of your worth, and begin to fly!