Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts with you today.

Today’s General Faculty meeting is a particularly meaningful event for me because it marks an official beginning of my work together with the SMU Faculty to propel our University to even greater heights of academic excellence!

It is customary for the Provost to deliver a report on academic matters to the Faculty at this meeting. Indeed, I will provide some updates on academic matters later in my remarks. Today, though, I will devote the lion’s share of my remarks to providing you with:

- A snapshot of my background.
- My plans for a listening tour to learn about SMU.
- A few words about my dreams and aspirations for SMU, which are informed by my personal values.
By way of background, I am first and foremost a faculty member.

Although my role at SMU involves certain organizational responsibilities, at the foundation of my orientation is my experience as a faculty member for nearly three decades.

I elected to pursue an academic career because during my graduate school days I became fascinated with the intellectual discovery of scholarly research and the academic freedom to study any topic I wished.

For me, scholarship was like a great puzzle that reveals itself through innovations in theorizing and testing hypotheses. Scholarship is a journey without a final destination, which is what makes it so exhilarating.

At its core, a university is about learning. As faculty members, we are perpetually learning about our fields of study. Being a faculty member involves not only the intellectual discovery process, but also the sharing of knowledge with our students, academic colleagues, industry leaders, policy makers, and leaders of non-profit organizations locally, nationally, and around the globe.

Faculty are the lifeblood of the university. One of the most appealing aspects of my work here at SMU is the opportunity to work with faculty colleagues from across the university, in humanities and physical sciences, social sciences, engineering, visual and performing arts, education, theology, business, and law.

For me, this aspect of the Provost’s job is the most exciting!

My personal commitment to liberal arts education at SMU reflects my own liberal arts education as an undergraduate. I loved studying architecture, literature, biology, chemistry, political
science, music history, and religion. In my younger days, one of the most formative experiences I had was learning to play the saxophone, which helped me develop the intellectual discipline that later served me well in my academic career.

My first refereed journal article was in a humanities journal. My own academic career has been intentionally interdisciplinary. I am a psychological scientist. A recurring topic of study in my scholarship has been the psychology of trust in the workplace. I hope to draw upon my research to earn trust and credibility in your eyes!

With my psychology background, I have held appointments at previous institutions in departments of psychology, business, and statistics. In engineering schools my more recent interest in the psychology of innovation and entrepreneurship has led me to hold an endowed chair, as well as to serve as a department chair and a vice dean.

I have already been deeply impressed with SMU’s commitment to interdisciplinary. For example, I am proud to hold academic appointments in three academic units at SMU.

My experience includes both private and public universities, both in the United States and overseas. In fact, SMU is the sixth university where I have been privileged to serve as a faculty member. I spent nearly one-half of my career at Rice University. My last six and one-half years have been at the University of California, Davis, serving as both the Chancellor’s Senior Advisor for Strategic Projects and Initiatives and as a Dean. Prior to California, I spent nearly four years at University College London.

The “Auspicious” Future of SMU

In reflecting on a title for my remarks today, I sought an adjective for SMU that conveyed my confidence about the future of our University.

The word “auspicious” means “conducive to success.” Indeed, SMU is auspicious because of its great promise and its unflinching drive to be better.

SMU need not mimic another model of a university. Recently I read President Turner’s Inauguration Address, and I agree with him that we must make SMU the best that it can be as SMU, not as a shadow reflection of some other institution. And SMU is indeed becoming its best self.

I believe that SMU is extraordinarily auspicious because, in my global experience in higher education, at both private and public universities, in both the United States and abroad, SMU is like no other university in its promise to ascend the ranks of higher education.
That’s a big statement. What is the basis for my view? Five strengths of SMU come to mind:

1. First, there is a demonstrated tradition of excellence in faculty, staff and students. We see this in the rising SAT and ACT scores of our applicants and the growth in faculty named to national honors.

2. Second, SMU is a comprehensive university with strong programs across a diverse set of academic disciplines. This academic breadth opens up opportunities for cross-disciplinary studies and research, a necessity for preparation of our students in our increasingly complex world.

3. Third, SMU was born out of faith-based inspiration and also embraces the values of religious diversity and inclusion, academic freedom, and open dialogue.

4. Fourth, as a private university, SMU can shape its own future and it has the opportunity to be agile in responding to the hyper-turbulent higher education landscape. As we have recently seen, generous donors to SMU have propelled us into the company of only 34 other private universities in the nation to have raised $1 billion or more in philanthropic funding.

4. Lastly, with its location in Dallas, SMU is embedded in a dynamic global city that both fuels the University and benefits from it. The support of city leaders in establishing SMU was critical in shaping its character and has resulted in a university that is enlivened by the energy, ambition and, yes, “unbridled” spirit of our region.

Because of the confluence of these factors, SMU is like no other university in its potential to grow its visibility and impact, to better serve our high-achieving students, and to support the scholarly contributions that you continue to make to your fields and to society.

It is worth reiterating that the Centennial Campaign has contributed mightily to our academic programs.

As you may know, the campaign raised resources for more than 600 new scholarships, 50 additional endowed academic positions, 66 new academic programs or initiatives, and 18 new or renovated capital projects.

This success has demonstrated SMU’s ability to inspire donors. Our faculty should feel pride in this. No matter where those dollars are targeted – and I know that most gifts are restricted to specific purposes – it is the quality of our faculty and students that has created a climate for generous giving to take place.

As our faculty, you have made the University worthy of trust, confidence and investment by donors who are among the most exacting in the world because of their own successes. And through the years you, as faculty have had many of them in your classrooms, teaching them to embrace high aspirations and expectations. They are giving back based on what you have given
to them. They want SMU’s progression of excellence to continue for today’s and tomorrow’s students.

**Framework for Listening and Learning**

Although I have followed the progress of SMU through the years, I have not arrived with a ready-made prescription for the academic progress of the University.

I will start by listening.

To equip myself to be a partner with you and all our faculty colleagues, I seek to educate myself about SMU. I am excited about plans to spend more time with faculty members across the campus to listen and learn about SMU during the spring semester and beyond.

I am keen to work with Professor Reinelt and other leaders of the Faculty Senate, indeed, with all faculty at SMU, to learn about what is possible in the future.

Part of the framework I will be using to listen and learn is to study each College/School at SMU by engaging a vigorous dialogue with the Dean followed by an all-day visit when I will have the opportunity to meet with faculty, staff, and students of the College/School. Of course, my learning about SMU will continue for many years to come, but this will give me a start.

I will listen carefully to the wisdom of the faculty and rely on your knowledge and experience. Together I am confident that we will achieve even greater academic preeminence for SMU during the years to come.

During the listening tour I want to hear your dreams and aspirations for SMU. Where do our greatest opportunities lie? You know the opportunities for SMU and what will be required to capitalize on them. A key aspect of my mission is to support faculty excellence and ensure that your scholarship, teaching, and service coheres with the future of the entire campus.

An example of a topic high on the priority list is the continuing work with Professor Peter Moore and other faculty and academic leaders on the new University Curriculum to strengthen opportunities for student involvement in study abroad and in pursuit of multiple majors.

I know that one important goal of the new Strategic Plan is to expand interdisciplinary collaborations, research, and innovation. I will draw upon my background to work with you on achieving this goal, encouraging programs and projects that cross over and transcend traditional boundaries of academic disciplines.

I look forward to working with the deans on two other initiatives that, to any Provost, will be a joyful undertaking. One is recruiting new faculty to fill the many new endowed chairs and professorships that have been created through The Second Century Campaign.
Another will be applying the cost savings from OE2C to academic uses. I am aware that the OE2C effort has called for difficult and painful decision-making University-wide. SMU is not a business. We must, however, be responsible stewards of our financial resources to protect and increase resources for academic purposes. I will collaborate with the faculty and the deans to identify areas to be strengthened with new resources.

We know that the climate for higher education grows more complex each day. Changing demographics represent challenges as well as opportunities for increasing diversity and inclusiveness. Competition for students, faculty and resources has never been greater. Rising costs of education limit access and create challenges among prospective students and their parents – is our education worth the cost? All of these factors will require our best thinking together.

One issue of great interest to me is diversity. I am eager to work with the President’s Commission on the Status of Racial Minorities, the President’s Commission on the Status of Women, and other diversity efforts. We must ensure that SMU strengthens outreach and access to prospective students and faculty, addresses related financial issues, and provides a welcoming environment on campus and in the classroom for all who become part of our SMU family.
Diversity in composition of our faculty, staff, and students is necessary but not sufficient for creating a vibrant academic community. We must strive for a true community. Thus, one of the themes I wish to emphasize as Provost is the idea of our University as a “community.”

**Diversity of Faculty and Students Since 2006**

**Faculty**
- 47% new hires were female
- Under-represented minorities increased to 29%
- Percent who are tenured/tenure track: 72% of African Americans, 66% of Hispanics and 74% of Asians

**Students**
- Under-represented minority undergraduates increased to 27%
- International undergraduates increased to 7.9%
- Increasing geographic diversity: Undergraduates from Texas reduced

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**Centrality of the University “Community”**

“If I were allowed only one word to describe the distinctive method by which the university pursues its multiple tasks of learning, discovery, and service, it would the word ‘community.’”

"The fundamental reason for the existence of the university is the benefit of shared dialogue... Dialogue, moreover, must be multidirectional – discipline to discipline, faculty to faculty, faculty to student, student to faculty, campus to community, and public to professional.”

Frank H.T. Rhodes, former President of Cornell University, in *The Creation of the Future: The Role of the American University.*
The student experience is being enriched by the Residential Commons.

### Fostering Community: The Residential Commons

- Examples of intended outcomes:
  - Affiliate with Commons before orientation and after graduation
  - Increase student engagement and retention
  - Opportunities to work with faculty members inside and outside of the classroom
  - Junior and senior students mentoring first-year students through leadership activities
  - Decrease in unproductive behavior

### Academic Updates

Let me now turn to some brief updates on academic matters. One of our strategic objectives is to recruit, retain, and graduate gifted students. During the past 10 years, since 2006, we are improving on that score.

### Recruit, Retain, Graduate Gifted Students

- SAT 1275-1300 by 2015 **Achieved**
  (average 1,302 in 2013; 1,309 in 2015)
- 75% 6-yr Graduation Rate **Achieved**
  (consistently above 75% since 2011; 78.9% in 2015)
- Increase Applicant pool to >12,000 **Achieved**
  (12,082 in 2013; 12,992 in 2015)
- Acceptance rate of <50% **Achieved**
  (48.9% in 2015)
In admissions we continue to see excellent progress.
Our research expenditures are growing. Yet we still face challenges. Jim Quick, Associate Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies, and I will be working closely on new ideas to increase our scholarly and research footprint.
On accreditation, Professor Patty Alvey, Director of Assessment and Accreditation, and I are working closely to bring our processes and data into alignment with today’s best practices at other universities.

Regarding accreditation, we must move to modern practices that reduce redundancy and work load while providing useful information back to departments and to the university.

We need a continuous process where energy and information fuels the next process in the cycle. Moving forward, we will be working to bring SMU forward with efficiency in assessment and reporting.

Another part of our effort to become even more successful academically is our Center for Teaching Excellence.

**Center for Teaching Excellence**

Recent accomplishments:

- Hired instructional designer
- Migrated course evaluations to a new system. Surpassed previous semester response rates while eliminating grade withholding policy
- CTE offers:
  - Training programs for new faculty and teaching assistants
  - One-on-one mentoring
Lastly, I wish to share with you a book that I believe you will find interesting. It’s *The Road to Character*, by the New York Times columnist David Brooks. Brooks stated, “I wrote this book not sure I could follow the road to character, but I wanted at least to know what the road looks like and how other people have trodden it.”

And, not only is it an interesting discussion by Brooks, it is relevant to our ongoing dialogue about our aims to both enrich the intellectual lives of our students and our efforts to foster the growth of personal character. That we can have a dialogue about the impact of SMU on character development reinforces one of the many aspects of SMU that I love, namely, that our faith-based roots make discussions of character not unfamiliar!

In conclusion, I am thrilled to be a member of the SMU community and I look forward to getting to know you, and to working with you to strengthen our academic excellence at SMU! Thank you for allowing me to serve as your Provost!