Frequently Asked Questions

What is the SMU student like? What is the SMU culture? Where do students hang out on the weekends? What is the biggest challenge SMU students face?

We know that there is no such thing as a "typical" student, but there are some common characteristics that we observe in many of our students. The majority of our students are high-achieving, highly motivated individuals who have had a lot of opportunity for success. With that "work hard" mentality can also be a tendency towards a "play hard attitude" that we try to help them harness. We have an active Fraternity and Sorority Life presence on campus, but there also over 200 student organizations on campus for students. SMU is filled with annual traditions that the students love to celebrate, which include Homecoming, Family Weekend, Celebration of Lights, Sing Song, and Relay for Life. One of the biggest challenges that many SMU students face is the pressure to belong, have acceptance from their peers, and feel like they are part of something. Living in Dallas also offers our students many opportunities for internships, jobs, service and cultural opportunities that provide them valuable experiences.

What does the department due to promote balance?

It is recognized that balance can be difficult for the live-on professional with the nature of our responsibilities. It is also recognized that balance looks different for each person, so everyone is encouraged to find their own meaning of balance and work with their individual supervisor to identify ways to create that balance. Additionally, the University places a focus on wellness through the Wellpower program, a wellness initiative that rewards staff for living healthy lifestyles.

What do you like most about working at SMU?

Ask any student, faculty or staff member and they will all have a different answer. SMU has a wonderful balance as a mid-sized, private, liberal arts institution in an urban setting. Although research and publishing is a priority, faculty are committed to teaching and student engagement. Because of the size, it is easy to develop connections and relationships with students, faculty, and staff across the entire campus. There is also an emphasis on collaboration at all levels of the university. SMU is continually changing and growing. We are currently focusing on building new housing, moving to a sophomore year live on requirement and moving to a Residential Commons models for our campus experience.

What are the demographics of SMU students?

The entering class in the fall of 2010 had 63% of students identifying as White/Caucasian. Latino (9.8%), Black/African American (6.4%) and Asian (6.2%) were the next three most common ethnicities or races that our students identify. Forty-three percent of the entering class is from Texas. Forty nine percent of undergraduates are men.

For their academic area of interest, 14% undergraduates were enrolled in the Cox School of Business, 20% in the Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences, 10% in the Lyle School of Engineering, 11% in the Meadow School of the Arts, and 3% in the new Simmons School of Education. This class had an average *SAT of 1267*.

For more information, visit our website

http://smu.edu/ir/Publications/Fact Sheet 2012/Fact Sheet Index 2012.as

What are the challenges of living on at SMU?

They are the same challenges that most live-on professionals face. The most common ones that come up in conversation are around work/life balance. How accessible should you make yourself to students? How do you make time for yourself? Fortunately, this is one of the advantages of living in a large city like Dallas! It is easy to find something fun to do and have an excuse to get away from campus and take time for yourself.

What are my professional development opportunities?

The opportunities available will depend on the experience you are seeking and are only limited by your imagination, ideas, and professional development goals! Throughout the year, on-campus structured opportunities will become available and have included a "Moving into Management Seminar Series" and a "Mid-level Management Institute." Human resources provide a variety of classes that staff can take. Opportunities are also provided to attend webinars sponsored by the Student Affairs division. You can also arrange to complete a collateral work assignment in a different area of Residence Life and Student Housing or another campus department with the approval of your supervisor. Funding is also available, by request, to attend local, regional, and national conferences. SMU staff typically attend the Social Justice Institute, the National Housing Training Institute, NASPA, ACPA, SWACUHO and ACUHO-I to name a few conferences. Staff members have also taken advantage of SMU's tuition benefits to take extra classes or earn another degree.

On-call – Are Professional Residence Life Staff on-call 24/7 or is there a rotation?

We have a rotational on-call system. You are on call for a week at time, Friday to Friday, starting and ending at noon. Weeks are selected at the beginning of each semester in a collaborative process facilitated by the Residential Community Director staff. With 10 Residential Community Directors, each has about 2-3 on-call weeks a semester. Assistant Directors of Residential Life also rotate on call. Each ADRL is on call every 4th week.

Can you describe SMU's religious affiliation?

Founded in 1911 by what is now The United Methodist Church, SMU opened in 1915 with support from Dallas leaders. The University is nonsectarian in its teaching and committed to freedom of inquiry. Most of our students are not from the Methodist faith. The Chaplain's office supports a variety of faith backgrounds including, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and different denominations of Christianity. SMU is a religiously-affiliated university that allows students to develop spiritually in ways that are appropriate to each individual.

How are SMU and RLSH being affected by the current economic situation?

Like the majority of educational institutions, we have definitely felt the impact of the economic crisis. However, our endowments have weathered the slowdown fairly well in comparison to many of our peer institutions. As vacant positions have come open, we have been asked to evaluate whether they are essential and needed. We have not gone through any layoffs or furlough days. President Turner has asked all departments to look at ways to reduce expenditures and limit spending. He continues to provide updates to the SMU community through periodic official statements regarding what is being done and what is expected of SMU employees to help keep the budget balanced.

How does the department use assessment in the work that they do?

Assessment is an area of focus for the entire department. One of the Assistant Directors for Residential Life has assessment as a primary work responsibility. We also have an Assessment Committees at both the departmental and divisional levels.

What diversity or social justice initiatives does your department support?

The Diversity Action Team (a departmental committee) coordinates many of our social justice initiatives. This team has created a Bias Incident Reporting protocol for the department. They have also developed the Every Mustang Will be Valued campus campaign. Recent opportunities have centered around exploring race relations and history in Dallas as well as training the department on recruitment and selection bias.

Additionally, both professional staff and RA training addresses topics of social justice or diversity. We have made efforts to infuse diversity throughout training rather than just have a session or two. Diversity is an included area for the Community Development Model. You can read our statement of inclusion on our website http://smu.edu/housing/residentehandbook/.

What benefits are available for partners and family (could my partner get a parking pass, gym pass, etc.)?

RLSH does allow family to live with live-in staff, including spouses, children and partners. With the exception of fish, pets are not allowed at this time.

Southern Methodist University extends all benefits to a same-sex domestic partner of an SMU employee that is available to the spouse of an SMU employee. Please see the <u>SMU Human Resources</u> website to eligibility for domestic partnership.

Partners are able to purchase a parking pass at the employee rate and can join the Dedman Center for Lifetime Fitness at a discounted rate. There is a child care center and preschool on campus available for faculty, staff, and students.

Spouses and recognized domestic partners are also eligible for partial tuition benefits (see the HR website for more information.) School aged children of live in staff can attend the <u>Highland Park</u> schools, an "exemplary" school district.

How does RLSH 'fit' within the institutional mission?

The RLSH mission statement begins by stating: "To advance the goals and objectives of the University...." All of our work is completed with this perspective kept in mind. One of the primary goals of the University is "to strive for quality, innovation and continuous improvement" in supporting student development and quality of life. Most of our priorities respond to these goals in our efforts to provide a quality and comfortable living environment with the educational and developmental piece interwoven into our direct interactions with our residents.

What kind of place is Dallas? Texas?

You will find an amazing amount of Texas pride. Texans love to celebrate their state and its history. The Metroplex, as the Dallas-Fort Worth region is called, is a truly unique urban center. Professional sports teams are neighbors with a world renowned arts and museum district, and just up the road you could stop at the rodeo or watch a cattle drive! Dallas prides itself on its shopping and your choices easily rival other large cities like Chicago, New York, and Los Angles. Dallas is a social city with countless dining and entertainment destinations. From Tex-Mex to fine dining to BBQ, we guarantee you will find something, no matter what you like! Once you start peeling back the layers, you also realize there is a rich cultural diversity in the area that many visitors do not expect to encounter. If you're more of a nature lover, you can quickly leave the urban sprawl behind and explore Hill Country and the area's many parks and lakes. Learn more about Dallas or Texas.

How is the partnership between academic/student affairs?

There are many examples of collaboration and partnerships throughout the division. Specifically within the RLSH department, there are many examples that could be shared. One of the most significant is the development of the Residential Commons program. By August of 2014, there will be 11 Faculty in Residence as well as 22 Faculty Affiliates. The Provost has been an active partner in developing and supporting this initiative.

Each year, the First Year Common Reading Discussion, led by faculty and staff, is held in the residential communities, and RLSH staff also read each year's book to share the experience with students, which can aid conversation and programming.

Do you have a live on requirement for students?

Currently first year students are required to live on campus. We are able to house about 500 upper-class students. We are in the process of building five new residential communities, for a total of 1250 new beds that will open in August 2014. We will be adapting our current facilities at the same time. In 2014 we will institute a two year live on requirement and move fully into a Residential Commons model with live in faculty and classes in our communities. This is a very exciting change for us. We have been very pleased with all of the support we've received from students, faculty, staff, and parents for this change.

What is the Residential Commons program?

The Residential Commons (RC) will transform student housing campus-wide with an integrated academic and residential experience. The Commons will bring live-in faculty and staff members, resident assistants and other student leaders together to create communities of support. Faculty members associated with each commons will have the opportunity to interact informally and mentor students.

Each commons will develop unique traditions, gatherings and meaningful activities that build community and long-term bonds among residents. Each student will have a close-knit, living and learning environment where a rich intellectual, social, and community life can flourish.

There will be 11 Residential Commons and this will be a common experience of all of our first year students. We will make this transition in the fall of 2014. For more information see www.smu.edu/residentialcommons.

How do you use Social Media to engage students?

Social media is an ever growing part of life. We recognize that social media is one of the most significant ways our students communicate. Many of our communities have a Facebook page used to communicate important information, start discussions, share photos and build community. We also have Facebook pages for our student staff and RLSH 'Alumni'. We have used Twitter to replace paper on call logs and offer more real time updates.