**Fall 2018 Faculty Senate Report**

President Turner, Provost Currall, Deans, and members of the faculty, I wish you all a Happy 2019. At the request of many of the faculty, I will, as I did in the Fall, frame my remarks today through a discussion of a film; this time Jean-Pierre Jeunet’s *Un Long Dimanche de fiançailles* or *A Very Long Engagement*. **(go to slide 2)** *A Very Long Engagement*, adapted from a novel of the same name, is set in the period immediately following World War I; it tells the story of Mathilde, an orphan, who suffers after effects of a childhood battle with polio. Mathilde falls in love with and becomes engaged to her childhood friend, Manech, the son of a neighboring lighthouse keeper. **(go to slide 3)** Soon after their engagement, Manech is sent to fight in the trenches of the Somme. Soon thereafter, Mathilde receives word that Manech has been killed, but she refuses to accept that he is dead, because she doesn’t feel that he is. Two years later, Mathilde’s seemingly irrational belief is given weight when she receives a letter from a former soldier suggesting that Manech may still be alive. **(go to slide 4)** Mathilde journeys to meet the author of the letter, who gives her a box of mementos from the war, clues that Mathilde then uses to search for Manech. **(go to slide 5)**

Mathilde’s quest takes her from Brittany, to Paris, to the battlefields of the Somme. She hires a private detective and together, they interview soldiers, family members, and witnesses. Mathilde visits military archives and pores through government records. She ultimately learns that Manech had indeed survived. In the confusion of battle, injured and unconscious, he was mistaken for another soldier. That man’s mother, in denial about the death of her own son, had claimed Manech as hers; Manech, suffering from had amnesia, did not know any better, so had spent two years living as someone else. **(go to slide 6)** As the film ends, Manech and Mathilde are reunited, but forced to discover one another all over again.

*A Very Long Engagment* masquerades as a war film, but it is actually a love story about the power of faith and hope. The film reminds us that surface realities are often less important than the truths they mask, and if the backdrop of the film is one of war and loss, the main narrative is one of rebuilding and reconciliation. Beyond the film, World War I altered the political landscape of Europe. Because dynastic monarchies were seen to have been the root cause of the war, many countries, in the aftermath, overthrew those monarchies and replaced them with democratic governments. Similarly, the technologies deployed in the war, such as airplanes, synthetic rubber, and ultrasound, led to a century of innovation. The film foregrounds these changes and reminds us that the war was devastating and painful, but the world that emerged from it was transformed.

One message we might draw from the film, then, is that periods of change can be painful and difficult, but they may, despite that, leave us in a better place. The film, in fact, invites this reading by presenting the post-war filmic present of the 1920s in glorious color, in contrast to the gray and sepia tones of the war and the period preceding it. While no one in our lifetimes has ever experienced anything like World War I, the SMU community certainly knows something about transitions. This is an institution in the process of reinventing itself, and the changes we have experienced in that process have sometimes been uncomfortable. However, as we look at where we are, and where we are going—at our rising rankings, our improved student body, the new endowments and investments in research, the caliber of the faculty—it is difficult to make the case that these changes have not been for the better.

If the film speaks of the difficulty and the rewards of change, it also suggests that there is a right way and a wrong way to accomplish change. **(go to slide 7)** Mathilde conducts her quest in parallel with a woman named Tina Lombardi, the fiancé of another soldier who was killed in the war. Tina, unlike Mathilde, works entirely alone, and instead of reconciliation she seeks revenge. Tina recognizes the flaws in the world, but her unilateralism leaves her isolated, and her desire to settle scores rather than effect positive change means that nothing lasting comes of her efforts. The film makes it clear—through Tina’s death by guillotine—that this method of seeking change is doomed to fail. Mathilde, in contrast, is highly collaborative. She recognizes that accomplishments are collective endeavors. Moreover, the change she seeks is a healing change, it is about coming together to improve the world. **(go to last slide)**

Anyone is a position of leadership must rely others to achieve his or her goals. In this spirit of collaboration, this past year, I and members of the Senate, the Senate Executive Committee, and the standing Senate Committees have worked with faculty members and members of the administration to identify and address opportunities for improvement and change. Although you have a full written report included in your program today, I would like to highlight some of the Senate’s activities. This Fall, members of the Senate Executive Committee joined Provost Currall for a discussion about the future of innovation and engagement at SMU. We worked with Associate Vice President for Facilities Michael Molina to help improve the function of SMU facilities and to draw attention to spaces on campus in need of renovation and repair. Members of the Senate Student Policies Committee have worked closely with Vice President of Student Affairs K.C. Mmeje to search for a new Dean of Students. The Academic Policies Committee worked closely with Assistant Provost Vicki Hill to review post-matriculation transfer credit policies. The Senate Athletics Committee has worked closely with Rick Hart and the Athletics staff and with Associate Provost Sheri Kunovich, to make sure that university policies governing student athletes are consistent and fair. Finally, building on earlier action taken by the Senate, the Senate Executive Committee, in conjunction with Associate Provost Peter Moore, conducted a faculty vote on the proposal for a new Common Curriculum.

I chose to speak about *A Very Long Engagement* because it emphasizes the need for collaborative and affirmative strategies for change, and in so doing it insists on the need to hear from those in the background as well as those in the foreground. The Senate this year has been thinking about those in the background. Following from the work of last year’s Ad-Hoc Committee on the status of non-tenure line faculty, I have spent time advocating for a provostial task force to evaluate and optimize the role of non-tenure line faculty at the university, and I have directly asked Provost Currall to form such a task force.

The Senate also re-submitted a budget request to fund health insurance for all Ph.D. and MFA students, and, to strengthen that request, we passed a resolution affirming the centrality of graduate students to the research mission of the university. We also passed a resolution, supporting our pregnant and parenting students and we approved an optional syllabus statement informing these students, and the faculty, that under Title IX, such students may seek institutional support. Similarly, the Senate passed a resolution affirming the efforts of Student Affairs to raise awareness about sexual violence and the victims of that violence. These efforts include the adoption of Green Dot bystander intervention and the creation of a student-designed poster campaign, In that vein, the Senate met, in May, in special session to vote rescind an honorary degree awarded by SMU to Bill Cosby in 1993. This action required a revision of the Senate bylaws to provide guidance about the circumstances in which and the process by which such action may be taken. This was a collaborative action that was undertaken in close consultation with President Turner, SMU General Counsel Paul Ward, and the members of the SMU Board of Trustees.

Just as the past semester has provided opportunities for collaborative efforts to improve the university and the conditions for many of its constituents, the Spring term will also provide opportunities for the Senate to work closely with faculty and with the SMU administration to continue our ascent. Past President Paul Krueger and I have been working closely with Associate Provost Doug Reinelt, Michael Tumeo, Director of Institutional Research, and Assistant Provost Daniel Eady, along with members of the Colonial Group of universities, to create a comprehensive survey of the faculty that will be administered this Spring. The results of this survey will be analyzed by a joint task force, appointed by Provost Currall in consultation with the Senate, and the results of the survey will be used to identify areas of strength at SMU as well as opportunities for improvement. We will, soon, be releasing a timeline for analysis and reporting of results. We will, however, need your help to complete this task, and I ask each and every one of you to take the time to complete the survey. Similarly, because both Provost Currall and the Senate believe in the importance of faculty feedback, faculty in colleges whose deans are up for renewal will be given the opportunity to provide confidential feedback to the Provost.

As I have said, I chose to frame my remarks through the film *A Very Long Engagement* because the film argues for the transformative power of hope and collaboration. Mathilde never waivers in her hope that Manech is alive, and it is that hope and her staunch belief that the world can be improved, that wrongs can be righted, that tomorrow will be better than yesterday, that pushes her on in her quest. That is a powerful lesson about what it takes to change the world. No one, I submit to you, should agree to be President of the Senate or undertake any position of leadership if they do not ground themselves in the hope that things can be made continuously better, and if they do not understand that positive change requires collaborative action.

Those who accept positions of leadership should bear in mind another lesson of the film. Mathilde works hard over years to achieve the impossible, but in the end, her fiancé never knows or recognizes what she has gone through to find him. Those who seek to lead should be willing to put aside any desire for recognition or credit for what they do. Many of the most important victories of a leader occur behind closed doors and remain unknown and untrumpeted. Moreover, leadership is often more about what is started than what is finished, and I think that is necessarily the case. I have finished things this year that my predecessors started, and I have started things that will be finished after my term is up. I have already mentioned that I hope to see a task force on the role and status of non-tenure line faculty. Similarly, following discussions with the university’s department chairs and the Senate Executive Committee, I hope to see the creation of a joint task force on tenure, that will explore ways to improve our tenure and promotion processes. I am hopeful that progress will be made on those two fronts, however, I have only been able to start these conversations, and they will need to be finished by someone else.

In closing, I would ask those of you who care about SMU, and who want to help the university go from strength to strength to consider serving on the Senate. We always need active and engaged Senators, those with the appropriate doses of hope and faith and the right amount of grit to get things done. I also hope you all vote in the Senate elections later in the Spring, and that you stay in touch with your Senators, as they are your voice. I wish you all a very healthy and prosperous 2019, and I hope to see this university continue in its trajectory of excellence.