Dear Colleagues:

As the conclusion of the spring semester approaches, I write to continue my tradition of sending periodic newsletters to the SMU community. (An archive of previous newsletters and communications is available here.)

In this edition of the newsletter, the updates fall into five major sections:

- **Recent report:** *Continuing the Ascent: Recommendations for Enhancing the Academic Quality and Stature of Southern Methodist University*
- Faculty Awards, Promotion, Tenure
- Continuation of Faculty Development Resources
- Updates on Searches to Fill Leadership Appointments
- Commencement

**Continuing the Ascent: Recommendations for Enhancing the Academic Quality and Stature of Southern Methodist University**

During the past 18 months, the SMU community has engaged in an extended and vigorous dialogue about our aspirations to advance the University’s overall academic quality. We have explored how to even more successfully fulfill our role as a premier research and teaching university with global impact.

On 27 April 2018, President Turner and I distributed *Continuing the Ascent: Recommendations for Enhancing the Academic Quality and Stature of Southern Methodist University* to the SMU community. This document presents a series of broad-ranging recommendations that will propel the University in our quest for greater prominence and academic quality.

Informed by *Launching SMU’s Second Century, Shaping Leaders for a Changing World, 2016-2025 Strategic Plan*, and through a series of task reports and an extensive campus-wide dialogue, *Continuing the Ascent* focuses on 14 University-wide recommendations that SMU should implement over a reasonable timespan, such as ten years, to enhance the University’s overall quality and stature. Those recommendations will be addressed during the remaining seven years of *Launching SMU’s Second Century* and will then span the initial years of its successor.
During the February 2018 SMU Board of Trustee meeting, we presented those 14 recommendations to the full Board. During the May 2018 SMU Board of Trustee meeting, select recommendations were reviewed in greater detail with the Board’s Committee on Academic Affairs, a review pattern I will continue for subsequent Board meetings.

We are already making good progress in terms of planning for and allocating financial resources to address Continuing the Ascent’s recommendations to enhance the academic quality and stature of SMU.

In terms of planning efforts, I wish to highlight one example. In Continuing the Ascent, we recommend creation of a unified support system for retention and graduation by forming an Office of Student Success and Retention to enhance the quality of undergraduate students and their educational experience.

During late March, I commissioned a Task Force on Student Success and Retention to advise me as to the organizational structure and scope of services this office should provide, as well as to provide an inventory of existing student success and retention programs on campus. Because student success, retention, and graduation operate at the intersection of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, I consulted with Dr. Kenechukwu (K.C.) Mmeje on the charge to the task force. Also, three Student Affairs staff members are participating in the task force. In the charge to the task force, I asked the group to identify current areas of collaboration between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, to describe any challenges to collaboration, and to recommend opportunities for improvement as well as possible new joint initiatives.

Before the end of May, I will meet with the task force to review their recommendations. Their input will be key to further deliberations prior to implementation.

In terms of financial resource allocations consistent with Continuing the Ascent, as discussed in the 26 March 2018 memo from Dr. Turner and me, SMU allocated for fiscal year 2019 nearly $5,100,000 from financial savings that were previously captured through SMU’s Operational Excellence (OE) initiative (formerly “OE2C”), with an additional $200,000 for fiscal year 2019 funded from other resources.

Examples of new fiscal year 2019 financial allocations from OE funds that advance the University’s academic mission are:

- Central University Libraries: 15% increase to collections budget
- Central University Libraries: New Head of Library Systems staff member
- Undergraduate Teaching Equalization Fund: Support for Dedman College’s delivery of required courses in the University Curriculum
- University Research Council Grant Funds: Nearly 30% funding increase
- Innovation Seed Fund: Phase I investment of $2,000,000 to elevate SMU’s intellectual footprint and attract sustainable philanthropic and/or grant revenue
• Academic Information Technology: Provide greater support to faculty with three new positions for high performance computing, data science, and internet of things (e.g., research equipment) software developer
• Campus Classroom Technology: Nearly 30% increase for classroom technology upgrades
• Office of Research: New Research Grant Management Specialist staff member
• Office of Research: New Research Grant Compliance Coordinator staff member
• Office of Graduate Studies: New Director of Doctoral Student Enrollment staff member
• Office of Graduate Studies: Nearly 100% increase in funding for graduate student academic fellowships

Because OE funds are to be reinvested in academic programs and activities, the University is planning for a multi-year strategy for optimal allocation of those funds. Further investments in academic quality will be made in subsequent years. We will inform the faculty and staff throughout the process.

Faculty Awards, Promotion, Tenure

Faculty Awards

With the 2018 Commencement ceremony approaching, the campus is in a celebratory spirit. Along those lines, we have much to publicize regarding faculty awards and fellowships.

The winner of this year’s Faculty Career Achievement Award is Professor Billy Abraham of the Perkins School of Theology. With a career spanning 50 years, 30 of which have been at SMU, Professor Abraham has dedicated himself both to the academy and to the Methodist Church. He has demonstrated remarkable achievement in pursuit of the interrelated goals of knowledge creation and dissemination. In addition to receiving this honor, the Billy Abraham SMU Faculty Career Achievement Scholarship has been created and will be awarded to a student who will enter Perkins this autumn. We look forward to many additional years of service from Billy.

Four faculty members won the Altshuler Distinguished Teaching Award:

1. Maribeth Kuenzi – Associate Professor of Management, Cox School of Business
2. Owen Lynch – Associate Professor of Corporate Communication and Public Affairs, Meadows School of the Arts
3. Meghan Ryan – Gerald J. Ford Research Fellow and Professor of Law, Dedman School of Law
4. Brandilyn Stigler – Associate Professor of Mathematics, Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences
Four other faculty members won the Ford Research Fellowships:

1. Klaus Desmet – Ruth and Kenneth Altshuler Centennial Interdisciplinary Professor, Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences
2. Adam Herring – Emily Rich Summers Endowed Professor in Art History, Meadows School of the Arts
3. Minjun Kim – Professor, Robert C. Womack Chair in Engineering, Lyle School of Engineering
4. Elfi Kraka – Professor and Chair, Department of Chemistry, Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences

**Faculty Promotion and Tenure**

Twenty-five faculty members received either tenure, promotion and tenure, or promotion in rank this year. The academic departments have announced, or will do so soon, successful promotion and tenure cases. Please join me in congratulating our colleagues on their outstanding accomplishments.

**Faculty Development Resource: National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity**

SMU is renewing our institutional membership with the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity (NCFDD). This institutional membership symbolizes the University’s ongoing commitment to faculty development – particularly for under-represented minorities.

The NCFDD is an independent professional development, training, and mentoring organization that offers support to its members. Our NCFDD membership aligns with Goal One, Objective One of SMU’s *Launching the Second Century* strategic plan to “strengthen the University’s ability to recruit, appoint, promote, and retain a distinguished, gifted, and diverse faculty.”

As an institutional member of the NCFDD, all interested SMU faculty or graduate students may take advantage of the services offered by visiting [www.FacultyDiversity.org](http://www.FacultyDiversity.org) to register for a free membership to access online resources. Online resources include workshops, webinars, and seminars on topics related to faculty life, such as increasing writing productivity, managing time, cultivating mentors, securing external funding, and maintaining work-life balance.

**Leadership Appointments**

During this spring term, I have had the exciting opportunity to conduct searches to fill two administrative appointments reporting to the Office of the Provost: (1) Dean of SMU Libraries and (2) Associate Provost for Student Academic Services.
Dean of SMU Libraries

In December 2017, SMU launched a search for a new Dean of SMU Libraries. We have conducted multiple rounds of interviews with a terrific group of candidates. This month, we have entered final phases of the search in anticipation of making an offer and filling the position by summer 2018.

I wish to extend hearty thanks and congratulations to the search committee. For his outstanding service as chair of the committee, I also wish to thank Dean Tom DiPiero of the Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences.

Elizabeth Killingsworth has kindly and admirably served as Dean ad interim, of SMU’s Central University Libraries since summer 2017.

Associate Provost for Student Academic Services

Upon completion of her term in May 2018, Julie Forrester, Associate Provost for Student Academic Services, has expressed a desire to return to her faculty position in the Dedman School of Law. She has been a vital member of the Provost’s Office team throughout her tenure, overseeing a broad range of student-centered offerings as well as chairing SMU’s search committee for the inaugural Associate Provost for Continuing Education. I will sorely miss Julie’s many contributions to the Provost’s Office.

During late March, my office announced a call for nominations and applications, for which we received an outstanding candidate pool. I anticipate filling this appointment by summer 2018.

Commencement

Each spring, Commencement is a special opportunity to celebrate and recognize academic life at SMU. I sincerely thank each of you for the unique roles and contributions you have made to shaping the lives and minds of our students and to preparing them to be world changers. The description and schedule of events for May 2018 Commencement are available here.

This year, 1,890 students will participate in SMU’s all-University Commencement Ceremony, to be held on May 19th in Moody Coliseum.

Randall L Stephenson, CEO of AT&T, will be the featured Commencement speaker.

At Commencement on May 19th, Professor Barry Barish, Ph.D., the 2017 recipient of the Nobel Prize in Physics and Linde Professor Emeritus at the California Institute of Technology, will receive an honorary SMU degree.
Dr. Barish's work and contributions to the field of science will be the focus of a reception and public presentation at SMU on Friday, May 18th, prior to his receiving an honorary degree at the Commencement ceremony on the 19th. Professor Barish's public presentation on May 18th is free and open to the public. Click here for more information and to RSVP.

Also, on May 18th, the Baccalaureate Service will be held at 8:00 p.m. in McFarlin Auditorium. Dean Craig Hill, of the Perkins School of Theology, will be the speaker.

I encourage you to participate in these important and meaningful celebrations, which are at the heart of SMU's academic life. I look forward to seeing you at Commencement on May 19th.

Lastly, I am deeply grateful for your individual contributions and commitment to SMU's quest for even greater academic excellence. Echoing my remarks from the spring 2018 address to the general faculty, in addition to what we are each able to accomplish individually, let us reflect on the excitement and meaningfulness that we experience by being participants in a mission bigger than ourselves, namely, SMU's quest to create new knowledge and positively impact the lives of young people. It is a privilege to be a member of the SMU community and to help build a long legacy by making SMU an even stronger premier research and teaching university with global impact. As we jointly strive toward this lofty pursuit, I look forward to doing so in collaboration with you.

All best wishes for a productive summer and preparation for the next academic year. Should you have any questions or suggestions, please contact me by email at provost@smu.edu.

Sincerely,

Steven C. Currall, Ph.D.
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
David B. Miller Endowed Professor
Professor of Management and Organization
Professor of Psychology
Professor of Engineering Management, Information, and Systems