21 December 2018

Dear Colleagues:

As the autumn 2018 semester draws to a close, I write to continue my tradition of periodic newsletters to the SMU community. (An archive of previous newsletters and communications is available here.)

In this edition of the newsletter, the updates are arranged into five major sections (click on the link to move directly to a specific section):

- Campus-wide Updates on *Continuing the Ascent: Recommendations for Enhancing the Quality and Stature of Southern Methodist University*
- SMU’s Proposed Common Curriculum
- Faculty Achievement and Faculty Development Resources
- Recent Administrative Appointments
- Concluding Remarks

**Campus-wide Updates on Continuing the Ascent**

Resulting from a campus-wide dialogue during 2017-2018 regarding how to advance SMU’s overall academic excellence to the level of a premier research and teaching university with global impact, President Turner and I distributed *Continuing the Ascent: Recommendations for Enhancing the Academic Quality and Stature of Southern Methodist University* to the SMU community in late April 2018. *Continuing the Ascent* presents 14 broad-ranging recommendations that are designed to help meet objectives of several goals of the University’s 2016-2025 Strategic Plan. The purpose of both is to propel the University in its quest toward even greater heights in the higher education landscape.

During autumn, I met with faculty and staff from all of SMU’s College/Schools (Cox, Dedman College, Dedman Law, Lyle, Meadows, Perkins, and Simmons) and the Library staff to review *Continuing the Ascent*’s organizing framework and to provide an update on initial progress and financial investments we have made toward achieving the document’s 14 recommendations. Each College/School meeting involved a productive and vigorous dialogue about the future of the University.

I was delighted with the strong faculty and staff turnout at each of the events. For example, approximately 100 faculty and staff attended the Dedman College event. Kelly Compton, Chair of the SMU Board of Trustees’ Committee on Academic Affairs, was also present at the Dedman College meeting.
SMU’s Proposed Common Curriculum

Supporting Goal 2 of the Strategic Plan, *Continuing the Ascent*’s recommendation #3, pertains to “enhancing the quality of undergraduates and their educational experience.” A university’s curriculum is one of the most dynamic ways to influence the quality of undergraduate education, and throughout my time as Provost we have been reflecting on the approaches for ensuring that SMU has an efficient, progressive, and compelling curriculum.

In 2016, and in response to a request from the Faculty Senate, I launched a General Education Review Task Force and charged the members to conduct a study of the current University Curriculum (UC) and to present a proposal for a newly revised and refreshed general education curriculum. The task force began meeting in autumn 2016 and completed its work in autumn 2018.

One of the task force’S first accomplishments was the creation of a mission statement for general education which builds on the University’s current mission statement which is based upon SMU’s Master Plan of 1963. It states that “Intellectual and professional excellence rises from the solid foundation of a liberal education. Our purpose is to educate students to become aware, ethical, engaged human beings and citizens. General education provides the foundation for students to discover, develop, and pursue the passion that leads to a meaningful life.”

The task force released a first draft proposal for changes to the University’s general education curriculum in October 2017. During spring 2018 the task force met with nearly every department on campus and listened to concerns. During the summer of 2018, the task force made a series of final modifications and released its recommendation for what we are calling the “Common Curriculum” (a reference to an earlier general education curriculum at SMU, the Common Educational Experience) in September 2018. During the final week of October, the Faculty Senate conducted the vote on the Common Curriculum. Just over fifty percent of the faculty voted in October (410 faculty) and of those who voted, 294, or 72%, voted in favor.

I wish to thank the task force’S chairs, Peter Moore and Mickey Quiñones, as well as all the members of the task force for their extraordinary work on this very important topic. Also, thank you to the Faculty Senate for their ongoing partnership in refreshing the University’S curriculum. I am particularly grateful for close collaboration with Professor Dayna Oscherwitz, President of the Faculty Senate, on the curriculum and many other topics of our mutual interest.

In terms of next steps, we will continue to engage members of SMU’S Board of Trustees, most notably members of the Committee on Academic Affairs, to provide them with the details and information they will need as they review the new Common Curriculum, which we anticipate submitting for their possible vote of approval in February 2019.
Facility Achievement and Faculty Development Resources

Faculty Hiring, Promotion, and Tenure

Fifty permanent, full-time instructional faculty were hired in autumn 2018, including three professors, twenty-eight assistant professors, and nineteen non-tenure track faculty.

Senior faculty were formerly at institutions such as Carnegie Mellon University, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Pennsylvania State University, and Argonne National Laboratory. New assistant professor hires received Ph.D. degrees from institutions such as Harvard University, London School of Economics, University of Southern California, Courtauld Institute of Art-London, Georgia Institute of Technology, Cornell University, University of Pennsylvania, and the Max Planck Institute.

Among the new tenured and tenure-track faculty hires, there are 45% females, 55% males, and 41% from underrepresented minorities (3% Black or African American, 6% Hispanic, and 32% Asian).

National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity

SMU has renewed 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 underrepresented minorities. Thanks to those of you who are already utilizing this membership. For those who have not yet taken advantage of the organization’s impressive developmental resources, we encourage you to do so.

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 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.

Campus Cultural Intelligence Initiative

CIQ@SMU continues its incorporation into the daily life of our campus culture. Since May 2018, over 500 faculty, staff, and students have engaged in at least one of the initiative’s cultural intelligence courses. “Hidden Scripts,” a course on implicit biases, was offered at
least twice a month with 140 campus members participating as well as the President’s Executive Council, all Academic Deans, and the Student Affairs Leadership team.

Featured in the September 2018 Special Issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* on diversity in Higher Education, Dr. Maria Dixon Hall’s op-ed entitled, “Hard Questions, Hard Answers,” introduced SMU’s innovative approach to the national academic community ([https://www.chronicle.com/article/Hard-Questions-About/244563](https://www.chronicle.com/article/Hard-Questions-About/244563)). Interest in SMU's framework to address intercultural interactions led to invitations to Dr. Dixon Hall to lecture and collaborate with Texas Tech, Sam Houston University, the University of Puget Sound, and the University of Missouri-Columbia.

**Recent Administrative Appointments**

**Associate Provost for Student Academic Engagement and Success**

Sheri Kunovich became the Associate Provost for Student Academic Engagement and Success in July 2018. In her role, as was the case with her predecessor, Sheri will continue to provide leadership for the following programs: (1) Student academic support, (2) SMU’s student scholars (e.g., President’s Scholars, Hunt Scholars, and Hyer Society), (3) national student awards programs, (4) the Altshuler Learning Enhancement Center (ALEC), (5) Disability Accommodation and Success Strategies (DASS), (6) Academic Development of Student Athletes (ADSA), and (7) SMU in Plano.

In addition, Sheri has assumed leadership responsibility for the following: (1) University-wide co-curricular programs such as Engaged Learning, undergraduate research, Big Ideas, and SMU’s incubator, and (2) to lead SMU’s efforts to develop a comprehensive and coherent strategy for undergraduate student success and retention.

Aligning all of these offerings under one Associate Provost position enables Sheri and those in her office to provide the leadership necessary to address several of the 14 recommendations in *Continuing the Ascent*, including Recommendation #3 – “Develop a unified support system for retention and graduation.”

**Dean of SMU Libraries**

Holly Jeffcoat is the new Dean of SMU Libraries. She was formerly the Associate Dean of Libraries at the University of Connecticut where she was responsible for leading information technology, patron services, planning and core library operations. Holly assumed the role of Dean at SMU in August of 2018.

As Dean of SMU Libraries, Holly oversees DeGolyer Library, SMU’s principal repository for special collections in the humanities, the history of business, and science and technology; Fondren Library Center, including the Norwich Center for Digital Services; the Hamon Arts Library; Bridwell Library, which supports theological education and
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scholarship; the Business Library; and human resources needs for the libraries. She serves as *ex officio* member of the SMU Libraries Executive Board and the Friends of the SMU Libraries.

Her vision for the newly established SMU Libraries includes creating a customized and responsive scholarly information and research environment in support of SMU’s pursuit of becoming a premier research and teaching university. In the near future, she will oversee an inclusive and ambitious visioning and strategic planning process that aligns with SMU’s broader strategic plan.

**In Conclusion**

This is an exciting and promising time for SMU! I thank each and every one of you for everything that you do daily to contribute to the University’s impact in research, education, and community service.

Your feedback is important. Should you have any questions or suggestions for my office, please contact us by email at provost@smu.edu. All best wishes for the Holiday Season.

Warm Regards,

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