



SMU

Elizabeth G. Lobo
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Office of the Provost

February 8, 2021

Dear Colleagues:

The last several years have caused America to face continuing issues with matters of social justice and equity. The coronavirus pandemic and racial unrest caused by the death of George Floyd culminated in a tumultuous summer, and the fall political cycle has exacerbated the divisions in communities.

In response to these concerns, the Black Unity Forum, a consortium of student, faculty, staff and alumni groups, came together to develop an action plan in the summer of 2020 aimed at helping our campus become a more welcoming and inclusive environment - in particular for our Black students, faculty and staff. After several months of deliberations with Black Unity Forum members and campus leadership, the University provided a response to the action plan on September 30, 2020.

SMU's success in addressing the challenges, hardships and inequities, as elaborated this fall by members of the Black Unity Forum and experienced by many within our community now and in the past, will require commitment from our entire SMU community. SMU appointed Dr. Maria Dixon Hall as the University's inaugural Chief Diversity Officer in August 2020. We are grateful for the ways she has already – and will continue to – engage and lead our community toward a more just and equitable future at SMU.

As a next step in our journey, I am pleased to announce the formation of a new University-wide interdisciplinary task force to explore and to inform SMU's approach to greater social justice and equity – not just in the near term, but to promote lasting change in our community.

To meet this goal, I am charging the task force as follows:

- Promote collaboration among professors, students, staff and the community to envision what social equity looks like on our campus, in Dallas and beyond, and to articulate SMU's role in shaping that vision.
- Review SMU's existing social justice and equity initiatives to identify potential synergies.
- Develop multiple strategic frameworks for SMU's social equity offerings, discuss strengths and challenges for each option and provide a recommendation on the most impactful approach.

- Identify near term sources of funding and provide a prospectus on opportunities for longer term external funding at the regional, state and national level for supporting possible initiatives, such as a center or institute.
- Explore and identify intersections between local entities and the University that would provide public service and educational opportunities for our students.
- Generate a projected five-year programmatic calendar.

I have asked Jessica Dixon Weaver, Associate Professor in the Dedman School of Law, to lead the task force. Professor Weaver is a leader in the field of family law and has a long history of being an advocate for the underserved in the Dallas community. She has strong ties with Dallas leaders and has served in numerous leadership roles within the academy, the Law School and the city.

We are excited to bring together those of you who already serve the community to promote social justice and equity. In response to our call to be world changers, SMU has the opportunity to be a hub for deep consideration of these difficult questions related to equity and justice and to serve as an incubator to develop future leaders. We look forward to seeing the synergy of great minds and innovative ideas culminate in a series of recommendations and actions for SMU to take to set us on the path.

If you are interested in finding out more information about the task force or to submit your name for consideration to serve on the task force, please send an email to provost@smu.edu by March 1, 2021.

Sincerely,



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