

“FORGING OUR VISION TO ELEVATE SMU’S ACADEMIC QUALITY: SHARED COMMITMENT AND COLLECTIVE SUCCESS”

**PROVOST STEVEN C. CURRALL
ADDRESS TO THE GENERAL FACULTY AT
SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY
24 January 2018**



I am delighted to share my thoughts with you today! I begin with a rhetorical question... As you reflect on your contributions at SMU as a scholar, artist, and/or instructor, what is your long-term vision for the impact of your career?

Of course, as a scholar, you are striving for continued productivity through journal articles or books. You are likely seeking greater funding from external agencies or foundations. And, you may be seeking to patent your inventions so they can have an impact through commercialization.

As an artist, you continue to promote your work through ever more visible exhibitions or performances.

As an instructor, you are striving to expand the intellectual, social, cultural, or spiritual growth of your students. You are aiming to educate young people (or not so young people!) to be prepared for success in their vocations, as volunteers, as family members, and as citizens.

But, my main message today is not simply about what we each do individually. My message today is about the excitement and meaningfulness that each of us experience by being a participant in a mission bigger than ourselves. I am referring to how we each contribute to building an institution that lasts beyond our publications, our art, our performances, or even the students' lives we touch and after each of us has departed this world.

Perhaps not surprisingly, I am referring to what each of us can do to build a long legacy by making SMU an even greater institution as a premier research and teaching university with global impact.

Indeed, I am referring to how we can channel our intellectual energies not only to advance our personal careers, but also how our energies combine synergistically and collectively to make SMU a greater university.

Let us not rely on the atomistic view of ourselves as simply individuals who happen to be co-located on a common, beautiful campus. Let us strive for more than that!

Together, we are forging a more impactful and visible SMU, which will also benefit the community outside SMU such as our city, region, state, nation, and world.

But, why is this my message today? Why now? Because the SMU community is at an opportune time in its history!

As you know, during the past several months our campus has been engaged in a dialogue about how to further strengthen academic quality at SMU.

So, I have not come to announce the conclusion of our process but, rather, to give you an update regarding our progress.

Let us take a moment to reflect on this opportune time for SMU and where the University is in its history and evolution.

Having commemorated the centennial of the opening of SMU in 2015, the University's leadership turned its attention to SMU's second century by reflecting on a series of foundational themes involving the University's future impacts in research, creative activity, and on society.

Those deliberations resulted in the University's strategic plan entitled, "*Launching SMU's Second Century, Shaping Leaders for a Changing World, 2016-2025 Strategic Plan,*" which was unanimously approved by the Board of Trustees in December of 2015.

Launching SMU's Second Century was announced at a time of extraordinary momentum for the University. For example:

SMU's Second Century: A Time of Extraordinary Momentum
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- During the autumn of 2017, SMU set a new bar for incoming class standardized test scores (average ACT score of 30; 94th percentile)
- In 2017, two SMU faculty members won Guggenheim fellowships, one SMU faculty member was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Science, and another SMU faculty member was elected to the National Academy of Engineering
- In 2014, SMU's research expenditures set a record high for the university (~\$32 million)
- SMU's new supercomputer, "ManeFrame II," came online in 2017
- The SMU campus has grown to 107 buildings on 234 acres
- In 2016, SMU concluded its largest ever comprehensive fundraising campaign

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During the autumn of 2017, SMU continued its upward trend in student academic quality by setting a new bar for an incoming class in terms of standardized test scores (average ACT score of 30; the 94th percentile).

In 2017, two SMU faculty members won Guggenheim fellowships, one SMU faculty member was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and another SMU faculty member was recently elected to the National Academy of Engineering.

In 2014, SMU's research expenditures set a record high for the university (~\$32 million).

SMU's new supercomputer, "ManeFrame II," came online in 2017 and has a peak performance surpassing all but 16 high-performance computer clusters currently housed at other U.S. universities.

The SMU campus has grown to 107 buildings on 234 acres and has been recognized as one of the most beautiful campuses in the nation.

In 2016, SMU concluded its largest ever comprehensive fundraising campaign.

SMU's *Second Century*: A Time of Extraordinary Momentum, cont'd

A time of extraordinary momentum for the university. Examples:

- In 2017, SMU launched its Cultural Intelligence Initiative
- Since 2012, Dedman College faculty have received ~\$70 million in research awards
- The Lyle School of Engineering initiated the Darwin Deason Institute for Cyber Security
- The Dedman Law School secured more than \$10 million in funding to launch two new academic centers, the Tsai Center for Law, Science and Innovation and the Deason Center for Criminal Justice Reform
- The Cox School received a \$10 million gift from Hal and Dianne Brierley to establish the Brierley Center for Customer Engagement

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In 2017, SMU launched its Cultural Intelligence initiative as an innovative way to address aspects of difference in gender, race, politics, religion, and socio-economic status and to equip SMU's community with practical and effective tools for collaborating and communicating in today's complex cultural environment.

By the way, I have some news about the Cultural Intelligence Initiative (CIQ). When we announced the Cultural Intelligence in November, we promised that we would give the entire campus the opportunity to help us create and refine our educational content.

I am happy to announce that the very first component of the initiative, *Hidden Scripts* will enter the pilot phase beginning in February. Each month throughout the semester, CIQ@SMU will offer this component to 10 members of our university on a first come, first serve basis. This will be your opportunity to learn more about the hidden scripts that impact our daily interactions while also providing important feedback to our CIQ team.

Since 2012, Dedman College faculty have received ~\$70 million in research awards from a range of sources including all major federal agencies, industry, and private foundations.

The Lyle School of Engineering initiated the Darwin Deason Institute for Cyber Security to address one of the biggest issues facing our nation and the globe today, and for the foreseeable future.

The Dedman Law School secured more than \$10 million in funding to launch two new academic centers, the Tsai Center for Law, Science and Innovation and the Deason Center for Criminal Justice Reform.

The Cox School received a \$10 million gift from Hal and Dianne Brierley to establish the Brierley Center for Customer Engagement, an innovative initiative bringing thought leadership to a critical area of business.

SMU's Second Century: A Time of Extraordinary Momentum, cont'd
A time of extraordinary momentum for the university. Examples:

- The Meadows School's National Center for Arts Research (NCAR) is the leading provider of evidence-based insights enabling arts and cultural leaders to overcome challenges and increase impact
- The Perkins School of Theology has significantly increased outreach including a master's degree entirely in Spanish, MoU's with several feeder schools, and special lectureships drawing thousands of participants
- Simmons has added a second building - Harold Simmons Hall - which houses their Teacher Development Studio
- In 2015-2016, the University's \$17 million renovation of Fondren and DeGolyer Libraries created the Caren H. Prothro Learning Commons, the Fondren Foundation Centennial Reading Room, the Hillcrest Foundation Exhibit Hall, and the Collaborative Café

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The Perkins School of Theology has significantly increased outreach including a master's degree entirely in Spanish, memoranda of understanding with several feeder colleges and universities, and special lectureships and other programs drawing thousands of participants from the region.

Simmons has added a second building - Harold Simmons Hall - which houses their Teacher Development Studio. The studio has enabled research expansion and development related to teaching and learning through the use of avatars and virtual reality.

In 2015-2016, the University completed a \$17 million renovation of Fondren Library and the DeGolyer Library to create the Caren H. Prothro Learning Commons, the Fondren Foundation Centennial Reading Room, the Hillcrest Foundation Exhibit Hall,

the Collaborative Café, and two new classrooms resulting in a 40% increase in Fondren Library use.

Therefore, SMU's current momentum affords an extraordinary opportunity, indeed an obligation, to further leverage this momentum to propel the University's strategic plan and to ensure that the University's progression continues upward.

Although SMU is already the most prestigious (i.e., highly-ranked) university in North Texas, the University is uniquely positioned to capitalize on its accomplishments to further serve the community by becoming even more visible nationally and globally.

Like SMU, other universities around the country have entered particularly noteworthy eras of achievement. Consider some examples such as Notre Dame, the University of Southern California, and Northeastern:

- Notre Dame has increased their research expenditures by nearly 150% since 2006.
- USC strengthened its commitment to, and investment in, the university's research mission – particularly in postdoctoral education, interdisciplinary fields, and in consideration of their connection to the metropolitan Los Angeles area
- Within a decade, Northeastern jumped nearly 100 spots in the *USN&WR* rankings

If they can do it, SMU can do it! So, to recap, we have the strategic plan. We have significant momentum. Now, what is next?

To continue our progress, we are in the process of coalescing around a shared understanding of academic priorities that will enable us to fulfill the strategic plan over a long-term, such as 10 years.

That shared understanding of priorities is what we have pursued during the past several months, through our campus-wide dialogue about academic quality.

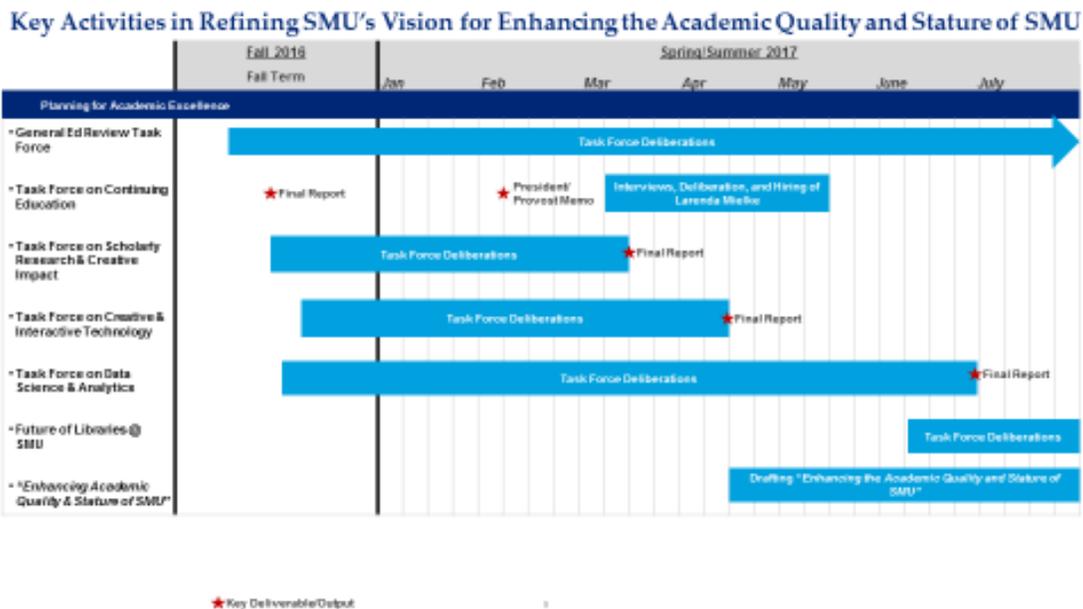
We are making progress toward further articulating our priorities by ensuring that everyone in the SMU community has had an opportunity to provide their input.

So, a key aspect of the feedback process has been to ensure that members of the SMU community recognize that this is "our" collective vision of the future of the University

and not simply the University administration’s, or the faculty’s, vision being delivered for implementation.

So, where do we currently stand regarding this process of setting academic priorities? I will update you on three topics:

1. The process and deliberations we’ve taken to advance SMU’s overall academic excellence.
2. Information about the preliminary priorities emerging from the campus dialogue.
3. Next steps in the process and ways we will further converge as a community to implement our priorities for enhancing SMU’s overall quality and stature.



During the past 18 months, Task Forces delivered reports related to our goal of enhanced academic quality and stature. With these reports as part of the input, my office prepared an accompanying discussion document entitled “Enhancing the Academic Quality and Stature of SMU – Analyses and Opportunities.”

The “Academic Quality” discussion document went through an extensive review process with the President and SMU’s senior leadership team this summer with over 300 comments and suggestions reviewed and addressed.

Our community dialogue has combined a series of in-person and electronic avenues for promoting discussion.

Summary of SMU Community Dialogue

The campus-wide dialogue on "Academic Quality" is following an inclusive process to obtain feedback from across the University community. We have provided a series of in-person and electronic opportunities to solicit questions, comments, and suggestions.

1. Provost Town Hall Forums
 - November 13th and 16th in Crum Auditorium
 - ~200 faculty and staff participants
2. Dean-led Discussion Groups
 - 8 Sessions between 11/30/2017 and 1/16/2018
 - ~150 faculty and staff participants across all sessions
3. Opportunities for electronic feedback
 - Online discussion board (SMU id/password required)
 - Dedicated e-mail address:
(academicquality@smu.edu)
 - Online feedback form (anonymous)



Participants gather in Crum Auditorium for the Provost's Town Hall Forum on 11/13/2017

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For example, I held two town hall events in November that were open to all faculty and staff. During the two town halls, nearly 200 participants shared dreams and ideas for the future of the University.

Additionally, our deans have held eight smaller group gatherings of 30 or fewer faculty and staff. More than 150 people signed up to participate in these discussion groups, and we have received very positive feedback from community members about this exercise.

At the invitation of Paul Krueger (Faculty Senate President and Professor of Mechanical Engineering), I recently made a presentation before the Senate to address questions and to receive their ideas and suggestions.

The Senate's Student Policies Committee and the Committee on Research and Graduate Education have also provided written responses to the draft "Academic Quality" document.

In partnership with SMU Trustee Kelly Compton, Chair of the Academic Affairs Committee of our Board of Trustees, we have also engaged SMU's Board for their thoughts and perspectives.

And now, after an extensive period of meaningful and thoughtful community engagement, we are surfacing an initial suite of bold possibilities.

Initial Options for Priorities Emerging from the Campus Dialogue

SMU's community members provided feedback during autumn 2017 until mid-January 2018. Priorities are emerging that will shape the final version of the "Academic Quality" document delivered in spring 2018.

<p style="text-align: center;">Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulation of metrics relating to 'academic quality' • Areas of strength and differentiation • Library, digital, and computational infrastructure • AAU trajectory 	<p style="text-align: center;">Faculty Affairs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening faculty candidate pools • Cluster hires • Enhanced faculty evaluation process • Maintain salary competitiveness 	<p style="text-align: center;">Research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target of \$50M research expenditures • Increased staff support for Research Administration • Expanding number of post-docs 	<p style="text-align: center;">Curriculum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove obstacles to interdisciplinary study • Introduce new "core curriculum" in 2019 • Embed Cultural Intelligence into SMU's faculty, staff, and student culture
<p style="text-align: center;">Graduate Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore creation of Graduate School • Staff support for graduate studies 	<p style="text-align: center;">Bold Ideas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seed funding for bold ideas • East Campus Innovation District • Regional/national partnerships • SMU as Dallas' source of intellectual capital and engine for economic prosperity 	<p style="text-align: center;">Student Retention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff support for student retention efforts • Deepen co-curricular and curricular synergies through the Residential Commons 	<p style="text-align: center;">Student Recruiting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undergraduate: Average ACT scores – 31/32 • Full financial need scholarships for select students • Improve graduate student quality

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As you can see from the slide, we have grouped emerging themes around eight major areas of emphasis: Strategy, Faculty Affairs, Research, Curriculum, Graduate Education, Bold Ideas, Student Retention, and Student Recruiting.

In terms of **strategy**, we can emerge from this process with greater understanding and alignment on the metrics that define academic quality within higher education and what this means for SMU. We also have more clarity on SMU's differentiators and how those might inform future investments.

For **Faculty Affairs**, we see a range of opportunities – strengthening faculty candidate pools, cluster hires, and an enhanced faculty evaluation process are just a few examples – that would help SMU elevate both our quality and stature.

Across our campus dialogue, we have achieved even greater consensus that doing more in the area of **Research** will be required for us to reach our aspirational goals. Strategic staffing increases within the office of Research Administration and an expansion of post-docs are two investments that could help us meet and, ultimately, exceed our target for \$50 million in annual research expenditures. Additionally, and repeatedly, we have heard from across the community the need to make strategic investments in SMU's libraries in support of SMU's research ambitions.

The new **Core Curriculum** will be introduced in 2019 thanks to the important work being done by the General Education Review Task Force, and we will need to remain vigilant and creative in removing obstacles to interdisciplinary study. Cultural Intelligence is also a differentiator for SMU and has the potential for real and lasting impact across SMU's faculty, staff, and student culture.

In terms of **Graduate Education**, the creation of a Graduate School is an idea that has garnered broad support – especially as a means to recruit high-caliber students and to foster the overall graduate student experience. We have also heard repeatedly the importance of providing additional stipends and benefits to graduate students.

The conversations we are having around **bold ideas** continue to be among the most inspiring. Seed funding to support SMU’s faculty in their pursuit of high-impact research opportunities and an East Campus Innovation frequently captured the imaginations of many. And our faculty and staff alike agree that the link between SMU and Dallas affords us tremendous opportunities and responsibilities.

Finally, staff and programming support in the areas of **Student Recruiting and Retention** have dramatic potential to improve our students’ experiences as well as SMU’s quality and stature.

So, I recognize that our University community has faced considerable challenges in recent years as have other institutions of higher education in this country. I heard this from many of you throughout my first-year’s listening tour in 2016 and I heard you again throughout our 2017 campus dialogue on academic quality.

But, I am encouraged that, despite the very real challenges we have faced, the SMU community has come together to have a meaningful and candid discussion about SMU’s academic priorities and aspirations.

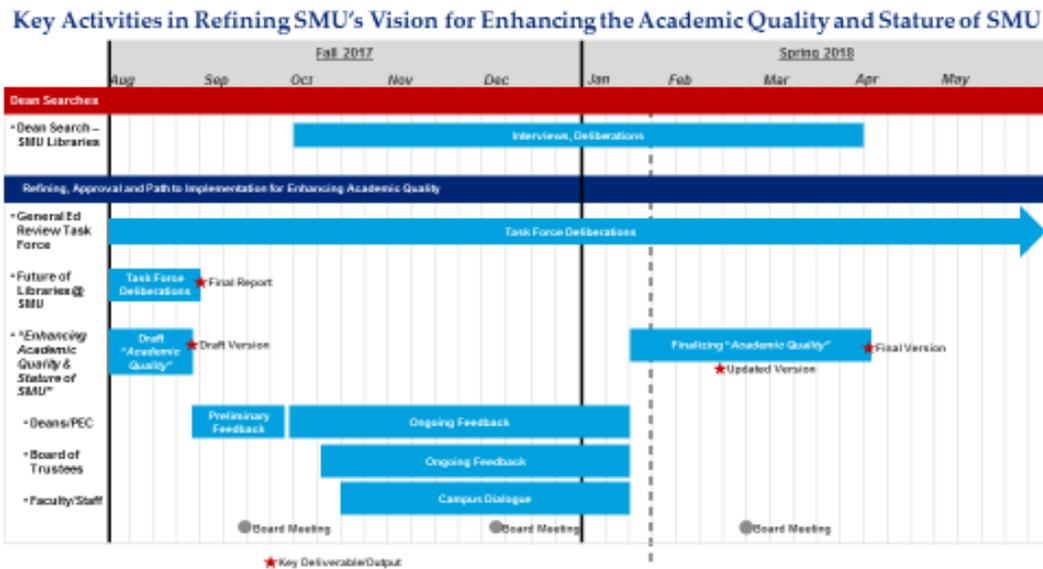
And as a result, we are now even better positioned to transition into a period of strategic investment in SMU’s academic mission – into initiatives that will have a greater return and will be more sharply focused on enhancing the University’s academic quality and stature.

So, as we think about our future together, we are convinced that, with the possibility of shared commitment, comes the reality of collective success.

Ongoing conversations and new ideas will continue to inform our deliberations throughout the next phase: implementation.

A project of this size and scope will inevitably come in phases. The planning horizon we have in mind is 10 years. We will begin by focusing on several areas of impact to bolster our overall academic quality and stature. As SMU’s reputation increases, this will enable us to implement increasingly more impactful ideas.

We are using your feedback to inform a condensed version of the “Academic Quality” document, which we will also review with the full Board of Trustees during their February meeting and release to the broader community later this spring.



So, while many have expressed their excitement and enthusiasm about the process to date, many too have shared their concerns about whether SMU now has the commitment to execute.

You are probably thinking, all this planning and discussion is great. But, when will the University announce investments in its priorities?

In fact, SMU is already making profound investments in academic programs and infrastructure. For example, the University has made a five-year \$85 million commitment to data science and computing. One major component of this effort is the \$27 million new Ford Research and Innovation Center, which will begin construction next door to the Simmons School later this year.

Looking forward, in addition to those and other investments, and always being prudent in managing the University’s limited financial resources, during the next two months, President Turner and I will announce new financial investments geared directly toward enhancing the academic quality and stature of SMU. So, stay tuned!

As we look to the future, we hope that our faculty and staff will have their heart and soul behind our renewed trajectory.

This is key because each of us will be asked to coalesce around the renewed vision and align our efforts with the University's strategic goals and metrics that we will be pursuing during the next several years.

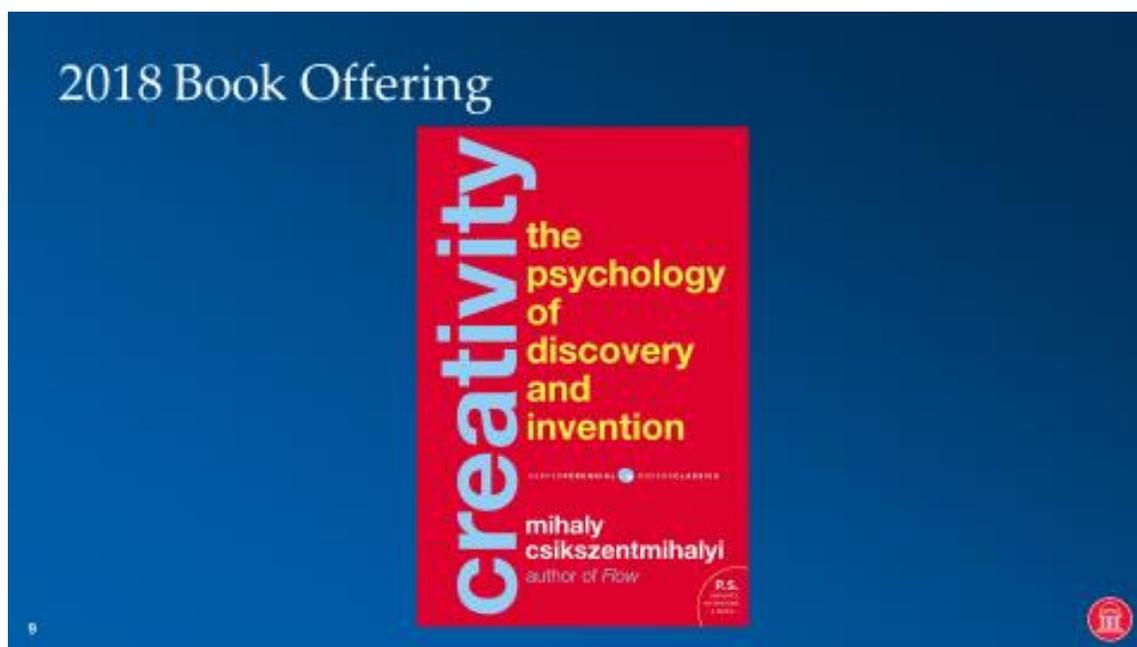
In helping to jointly craft a shared vision for ever-higher aspirations for our academic excellence, I hope that we all will be inspired by the University's exciting new trajectory. Together, we take SMU to new heights!

So, I spoke earlier about the joy of our work as scholars, artists, and instructors and how our work combines synergistically to form collective success for SMU.

Let us channel our intellectual energies not only to advance our personal careers but also to combine our energies synergistically and collectively to make SMU a greater university.

Indeed, let us each contribute to a long legacy of helping to make SMU a premier research and teaching university with global impact!

As you contemplate how to channel your intellectual energies in even more creative and innovative ways, and in keeping with tradition at this event, I wish to share a book with you that will equip you with new ideas and approaches to your work:



It's entitled *Creativity: The Psychology of Discovery and Invention* by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. I hope that you enjoy the book.

Thank you for joining us at the January Faculty Meeting! Best wishes for a productive semester! Please come forward and collect your copy of the Creativity book.