20 May 2019

Dear Colleagues:

As we reach conclusion of the spring semester, I write to continue my tradition of 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 the following sections:

- Partnering to Advance the Academic Excellence of SMU: An Update on *Continuing the Ascent*
- Faculty Awards, Promotion, Tenure
- Continuation of Faculty Development Resources
- Leadership Transitions
- Commencement
- Concluding Remarks

**Partnering to Advance the Academic Excellence of SMU: An Update on *Continuing the Ascent***

Based on SMU’s 2016-2025 *Strategic Plan: Launching SMU’s Second Century*, the SMU community has held ongoing conversations about the “Academic Quality and Stature” of the University.

During April of 2018, *Continuing the Ascent: Recommendations for Enhancing the Academic Quality and Stature of SMU* was released. That document provided a series of recommendations and further articulated our aspirations to advance the university’s overall academic excellence to the level of a premier research and teaching university with global impact.

As you will remember, *Continuing the Ascent*’s recommendations were organized around four main themes: (1) The quality of undergraduates and their educational experience, (2) the quality of faculty research and creative impact, (3) the quality of graduates and their educational experience, and (4) innovative strategic partnerships. My updates in this section
align with these themes which we referred to in *Continuing the Ascent* as the “Architecture of Academic Quality.”

**The Quality of Undergraduate Students and Their Educational Experience**

In support of *Continuing the Ascent’s* recommendation to enhance the undergraduate student experience by developing a unified support system for retention and graduation, Professor Sheri Kunovich, Associate Provost for Student Academic Engagement and Success, spent her first year as Associate Provost developing a plan aligned with the university’s goals for student engagement and success.

A key component of SMU’s 2021 Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) reaffirmation activities will be the creation and implementation of a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). According to SACSCOC accreditation standards, the QEP “reflects and affirms a commitment to enhance overall institutional quality and effectiveness by focusing on an issue the institution considers important to improving student learning outcomes and/or student success.”

Associate Provost Kunovich’s efforts toward student engagement, success, and retention flow from SMU’s *Strategic Plan* as well as *Continuing the Ascent* and align directly with SACSCOC objectives for a QEP with regards to improving student success. Professor Patty Alvey, Associate Provost for Institutional Planning and Effectiveness, and others in the Provost’s Office and the Division of Student Affairs, have contributed to the deliberations on the QEP.

As such, SMU’s QEP for the 2021 SACSCOC reaffirmation process will be oriented toward further enhancing student success metrics in a manner that is synergistic with Associate Provost Kunovich’s plan for student success and retention. More specific information about the QEP will be shared with the campus community during the next few months.

Another significant aspect of *Continuing the Ascent* involves enhancing the quality of our undergraduates and their educational experience through a vigorous review, as requested by the Faculty Senate upon my arrival as Provost in 2016, of the university’s general education curriculum.

For the past 50 years, SMU has worked hard to develop and maintain a progressive curriculum. SMU’s 1963 Master Plan articulated an educational philosophy that is distinctively SMU’s and has persisted throughout the various curricular iterations. According to the Master Plan, SMU’s educational philosophy “is that professional studies must rise from the solid foundation of a basic liberal education. . . .”

After two years of hard work and faculty engagement by the [General Education Review Task Force](#), we have developed a progressive and innovative new curriculum that positions our graduates for success in their careers and personal lives for decades to come. The new Common Curriculum was approved by SMU’s Board of Trustees in February 2019.

Regarding undergraduate admissions, I also offer an update regarding the Cox School of Business’s [Business Direct program](#). After a period of extensive campus-wide discussion, I have approved the Cox School’s proposal to expand its Business Direct program so that the
main point of entry for students majoring in Cox will be as first-year students, with a modest number of internal transfers at the end of the first year. We believe this change will enhance the overall student experience at SMU through earlier degree plan advising and increased academic exploration. The change also enables the University to strengthen alignment of its strategic undergraduate enrollment plans and the Cox degree programs, which will guide the proportion of Cox undergraduates in our student body and enable Cox to forecast the number of its undergraduates with greater precision.

The initiatives described above are but a sampling of the many efforts underway to recruit and retain an outstanding undergraduate class. While work remains to recruit our next class, the Class of 2023, preliminary indicators give us considerable reason for excitement. As of May 2nd (a key date for admissions tracking), student deposits are in line with last year’s (the largest entering class) and student quality, as measured by ACT scores, project to continue rising for our first-year students.

Faculty, Research, and Creative Impact

A majority of Continuing the Ascent’s recommendations pertain to the quality of faculty research and creative impact. In this section, I will provide an update on several key projects designed to further enhance our faculty’s ability to make an even more significant impact.

During the past year, and in consultation with the Deans and members of the task force on Data Science and Analytics, we have been considering the proposal to establish a Data Science Institute at SMU that will facilitate interdisciplinary programs, collaborate with other institutes and centers on campus, expand research funding, and develop educational and research linkages with regional organizations. In coordination with Associate Vice President for Research and Dean of Graduate Studies Jim Quick, bylaws to govern the new Institute have been drafted, and we are currently finalizing plans to determine proper sequencing and resourcing required to launch the Data Science Institute.

One of Continuing the Ascent’s recommendations was to create a seed fund for bold and innovative ideas in research and creative activity to elevate SMU’s scholarly and creative footprint and attract sustainable philanthropic or grant revenue. Through the use of funds freed up under Operational Excellence for the Second Century (OE2C), SMU has created a seed fund of a minimum of $2,000,000 for bold ideas in research and creative activity to elevate SMU’s intellectual footprint. Earlier this month, two RFPs were distributed to the campus community inviting teams of SMU faculty to develop proposals. We hope faculty members will take advantage of this extraordinary opportunity.

With support from Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs, Doug Reinelt, deans and department chairs are to be congratulated for recruiting another outstanding class of tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty. More than twenty permanent, full-time instructional faculty have been hired to begin in autumn 2019. Additional faculty searches are still in progress.

Senior faculty were formerly at institutions such as the University of Cambridge, Louisiana State University, Cornell University, and University of Florida. New assistant professor hires received Ph.D. degrees from institutions such as Harvard University, Yale University,
University of California – Berkeley, Texas A&M University, University of Michigan, New York University, and University of Illinois.

The Quality of Graduate Students and Their Educational Experience

Among Continuing the Ascent’s recommendations to enhance the quality of graduate education at SMU was the proposal to launch a SMU Graduate School to coalesce university-wide efforts such as admission standards for doctoral programs, support for doctoral students, and degree completion.

Under the leadership of Jim Quick, and following the recommendations of the Graduate School Task Force, a Graduate Council has been established. The Graduate Council comprises faculty and staff leadership from each of SMU’s college/schools that offer Ph.D.’s. This spring, the Graduate Council has been deliberating to articulate and codify the shared guidelines for students pursuing a Ph.D. at SMU. These guidelines will be published this summer in the upcoming graduate catalogue. The publication of the guidelines in the graduate catalogue this summer signals the launch of the Graduate School at SMU.

This year at SMU Global and Online (SMU GO), Associate Provost for Continuing Education Larenda Mielke and her team have focused on the integration of technology and personnel capabilities throughout campus, building the university's foundation of intellectual property for the sustainable delivery of online learning.

With these new capabilities, the online Master’s of Science in Data Science (MSDS) program has continued to improve and grow, and the first SMU-powered online master's degree, in Cybersecurity, with the Lyle School of Engineering is being produced while recruiting activities are underway for the first student cohort that will start the program in January 2020. Also, the Cox School, in collaboration with SMU GO, has launched an online MBA program.

Strategic Partnerships

The more vibrant the intellectual and academic ecosystem in North Texas, the more SMU’s academic programs are elevated through shared research and artistic collaborations, cooperative grant proposals to federal and state agencies, joint degree programs, and employment opportunities for SMU graduates. The final quadrant of Continuing the Ascent’s “Architecture of Academic Quality” contains recommendations for deepening the university’s innovative strategic partnerships.

There is no shortage of examples of innovative strategic regional partnerships at SMU. On September 7th of this year, we announced our partnership with Dallas Independent School District and Toyota to create a new and innovative Pre-K to 8 STEM school in West Dallas. The aim of this partnership is to inspire and prepare students for the next generation of STEM jobs through curriculum that is project-based and business-aligned. Toyota USA Foundation granted $2 million to Simmons School of Education and Human Development to develop curriculum, provide professional development for teachers and coordinate with nonprofits operating in the area. The school will begin a phased opening with PreK to 1st
grade and 7th to 8th grade students in autumn 2020. Thanks to Dean Stephanie Knight and the Simmons faculty for their leadership on this partnership.

In August, SMU announced the merger of the Meadows School’s National Center for Arts Research with DataArts, a respected resource for in-depth data about nonprofit arts, culture and humanities organizations throughout the U.S. This is an additional major investment in big data and research for SMU. The newly named SMU DataArts (now a SMU center) will integrate the combined strengths and capabilities of both groups, with a mission to empower arts and cultural leaders with high-quality data and evidence-based resources and insights to help them overcome challenges and increase their impact. Thanks to Meadows’ Dean Sam Holland and Zannie Voss, NCAR’s Director and Professor and Chair of Arts Management and Arts Entrepreneurship, for their leadership on this initiative.

The Bush Institute-SMU Economic Growth Initiative was launched in summer 2018. This initiative involves Dedman College’s Department of Economics and the Bush Institute in close collaboration on economic policies. In January 2019, the initiative hosted a symposium entitled “Policies to Promote Inclusive Urban Growth,” which was attended by over 300 faculty members, policy makers, and business and non-profit leaders. The event convened over 20 leading thinkers, current and former policy-makers, and front-line professionals engaged in urban planning, neighborhood revitalization, and attainable housing to study the question of how to make urban success more inclusive, particularly with regard to housing.

**Faculty Awards, Promotion, Tenure**

*Faculty Awards*

The recipient of this year’s Faculty Career Achievement Award was Charles Curran, the Elizabeth Scurlock University Chair of Human Values. He is considered by fellow theologians to be one of the greatest moral theologians of the 20th century. In addition to receiving this honor, the Charles Curran SMU Faculty Career Achievement Scholarship has been created and will be awarded to a student who will enter Perkins this autumn.

Four faculty members received the Altshuler Distinguished Teaching Award:

1. Gregory Crespi – Homer R. Mitchell Endowed Professor for Insurance and Commercial Law, Dedman School of Law
2. Alice Kendrick – Marriott Endowed Professor in Advertising, Meadows School of the Arts
3. James Linck – Professor and Chair in Finance, Cox School of Business
4. Peter Raad – Professor of Mechanical Engineering, Lyle School of Engineering

Five other faculty members received the Ford Research Fellowships:

1. Jill Allor – Professor and Chair in Teaching and Learning, Simmons School of Education and Human Development
2. Edward F. Countryman – University Distinguished Professor for Colonial America, American Revolution, History and Film, Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences
3. Jeffrey A. Engel – Professor of History, Director of the Center for Presidential History, Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences
4. D. Stephen Long – Cary M. Maguire University Professor of Ethics
5. Jessica Dixon Weaver – Associate Professor of Law, Dedman School of Law

Faculty Promotion and Tenure

Sixteen 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.

Continuation of Faculty Development Resources

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. 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.

Leadership Transitions

During this spring term, I made the bittersweet decision to accept the role of President at the University of South Florida (USF) effective 1 July 2019. I am deeply grateful to the SMU community for the privilege of serving the University and helping to continue its upward trajectory.

President Turner has formed a search committee for SMU’s next Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, under the leadership of Dean Sam Holland, with plans to launch the search later this month, solicit candidates throughout the summer, and conduct interviews during autumn 2019.

Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, ad interim

Beginning July 1st, Peter Moore, Associate Provost for Curricular Innovation and Policy, will serve as SMU’s Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, ad interim. In his current role, Peter has been a vital member of the Provost’s Office team throughout my tenure. His appointment underscores the university’s commitment to its current strategic direction, and conveys the University’s confidence in Peter’s abilities to lead academic affairs during this time of transition. Peter and I are working together between now and June 30th to facilitate a seamless transition.
Associate Provost for Curricular Innovation and Policy, ad interim

David Son, Professor of Chemistry, has agreed to join the Provost’s Office team as Associate Provost for Curricular Innovation and Policy, ad interim effective 1 July 2019, and until a new Provost arrives on campus, at which time Professor Peter Moore will return to this position.

Commencement

Each spring, Commencement is a special opportunity to celebrate and recognize academic life at SMU. The description and schedule of events for this year’s May 2019 Commencement are available here.

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. In particular, I wish to convey my sincere thanks to the Guild of Commencement Marshals for the framed silk “stole of gratitude” presented to me for my involvement in SMU’s graduation ceremonies. In the picture to the left, Tom Fomby, Chief Marshal and Professor of Economics, and John Hall, University Registrar, are presenting me with the stole.

The Baccalaureate Service was held at 8:00 p.m. on Friday, May 17th in McFarlin Auditorium, with Jan Langbein, CEO of Genesis Women’s Shelter & Support, providing remarks.

On Saturday, May 18th, SMU’s all-University Commencement Ceremony was again a special opportunity to celebrate and recognize academic life at SMU. This year, 1,739 students participated in the ceremony. Doug Parker, Chairman and CEO of American Airlines, was the featured Commencement speaker.

Virginia Savage McAlester, historian, preservationist, and author, and Hamdi Ulukaya, founder, chair, and CEO of Chobani, received honorary degrees during Commencement.

Concluding Remarks

It has been an honor for me to have the opportunity to serve SMU during the past few years as your SMU’s Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. From the outset, the SMU community has warmly embraced, encouraged, and supported Cheyenne and me. We will
greatly miss our special and meaningful relationships formed throughout the SMU community

All best wishes for a productive summer and preparation for the next academic year. Should you have any questions or suggestions, please contact my office via 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