



# SMU®

*Office of the Provost*

September 11, 2020

Dear Faculty and Staff:

These weekly updates will serve as a tool to keep you informed and engaged with SMU's Academic Affairs division as, together, we work to advance the goals of SMU's strategic plan and continue to move SMU forward and upward. If you have suggestions for what we should include in future communications, please send your ideas to this [email address](#). Previous newsletters are available [here](#). Today's update falls into three categories: 1) SMU's Road to Tier-One Research (R-1) Status 2) Fall 2020 and 3) News and Noteworthy.

## **SMU'S Road to R-1**

With fall 2020 now successfully underway, I am excited to begin focusing on, and sharing with you, my hopes and ambitions for SMU. Working together this year and beyond, I believe we can develop and implement a shared vision to advance the goals within our 2016-2025 Strategic Plan that will help our University continue its strong upward trajectory toward its status as a premier research and teaching University with global impact. I am fortunate to have spent my time, as a student, faculty member and administrator, working in R-1 universities and know that, with focused effort, SMU can make this leap and do so while maintaining our strong commitment to outstanding undergraduate education, artistic and creative contributions, and world-class professional degrees. To reach our full potential, research must be strengthened, and we are well-positioned to accomplish this goal.

- **SMU is on a great trajectory and has a strong plan in place** – Among the many things that appealed to me so strongly during my interviews and time on campus this spring was SMU's impressive trajectory under Dr. R. Gerald Turner's leadership as President. Particularly within the past decade, our University has seen a remarkable rise in undergraduate quality, an incredibly successful fundraising campaign (totaling >\$1B), and the development and implementation of an ambitious 2016-2025 Strategic Plan – in which many of the goals and objectives link directly to the steps required for SMU to attain R-1 status.

In my short time here, I have been pleased to learn that a significant number of faculty and staff have provided great service to the University,

through a series of task forces, to further inform our strategic goals and aspirations. As I read through these documents, I am encouraged to see that a lot of the preliminary work has been completed and that we have a strong blueprint in place.

I recognize that spending so much time focusing on strategy (and currently, COVID-19), in addition to faithfully executing your day-to-day work, has been very demanding. I also understand that budget challenges, such as those we are currently managing due to COVID-19 and those that many of you experienced during the OE2C cost-savings initiative, can serve to diminish enthusiasm toward achieving our goals. But, as I am learning more and experiencing first-hand, SMU continues to face and overcome challenges in a way that makes us stronger as a result. We do this through outstanding leadership and exceptional faculty and staff.

- **We have made significant strides in recent years** – Now at the mid-point of our current 10-year strategic plan, there are many accomplishments within Academic Affairs that will have tremendous and lasting impact on our R-1 aspirations. Chief among these is the [Moody School of Graduate and Advanced Studies](#). The \$100 million commitment from the Moody Foundation positions SMU to provide research with impact in response to the talent and research needs arising regionally, nationally, and globally. Additionally, [ManeFrame II](#), SMU's high-performance computer cluster, was configured to its current capacity in 2019 and provides vast computational capacity and performance to SMU and throughout the region. As one final example, and in response to the strategic plan, SMU established a seed fund for bold ideas in research and creative activity to elevate SMU's intellectual footprint and attract sustainable philanthropic and grant revenue. While seed funding decisions are currently deferred because of the financial impact of COVID-19 on University operations, an external scholarly advisory committee (ESAC) has reviewed and scored 17 STEM and 9 non-STEM proposals from SMU faculty, to inform which of these have strong possibility for internal investment and show strong promise of ROI through external funding mechanisms. SMU remains committed to the expansion of research and the goal of attaining R-1 status among research universities, and we anticipate that financial support for SMU's Seed Fund Initiative will be reinstated once the University's budget stabilizes. At that time, I will make final funding decisions in consultation with Associate Provost for Research and Dean of the Moody School Jim Quick based on the recommendations of the ESAC.
- **My priorities for 2020–2021** – For the 2020-2021 academic year, I'm working with my great team of deans and associate provosts to improve data acquisition and utilization to create clear and transparent policies and processes that incentivize factors that will move us toward the goal of R1 status, and to help guide data-driven decision-making to determine specific

areas for strategic investment. I plan to provide to the Board of Trustees during the September meeting high-level plans on how we will advance in these areas. I will share additional information and engage faculty to inform these plans during the fall 2020 semester, and hope to present more concrete information during my address to the faculty during the spring 2021 general faculty meeting.

SMU's motto, "World Changers Shaped Here," gives purpose both to our daily work and to our strategic objectives. When I think about the idea of shaping world changers, it is easy to focus only on the importance of preparing our students for meaningful lives and careers. But I'm challenging myself, and believe that many of you do the same, to apply this motto to ourselves as faculty and staff. To be world-changing means pursuing ambitious projects and research of global impact, striving for career development opportunities to realize our full potential for ourselves and for SMU, and doing our best in service to our community. This is a lofty goal, but it inspires me and I hope it does you as well.

### **Fall 2020**

- **Fall 2020 enrollment update** – As of September 8 (census date), the combined number of undergraduate and graduate students totaled 12,385. We have 1,531 first-year undergraduate students (target 1,526) and 297 transfers (target 290). Returning students totaled 4,999 bringing us to a total of 6,827 undergraduates (target 6,400). My immense thanks to all of you, SMU's faculty and staff, for the support and preparation required to serve our students, and special thanks to the Division of Enrollment Services for their outstanding recruiting efforts this year.
- **Transition to "high" risk level and SMU response** – On September 7, SMU sent an email to faculty and staff indicating that we were raising our operational level from "moderate" to "high" this week to reflect the number of positive COVID-19 cases on campus and other related factors. For reference, you can find a full explanation of our operation levels [here](#) ([Appendix 2](#)).

We recognize that this change has raised some questions among faculty and staff and wanted to offer a few additional points of information, particularly as to what this change means in terms of fall 2020 academic continuity. The University's detailed fall operations plan that you can access in the Appendix linked above stipulates the ways in which we offer services at each operational level. In terms of classroom instruction, we designed our base approach to the fall schedule (e.g., social distancing measures in place, classes >95 fully remote, etc.) specifically to meet the standards necessary to operate at "high" levels. Therefore, even when we were at "moderate" level, we were fortunately already operating under the

parameters specified for the “high” level - and so there was no need at this time to change our instructional approach.

As our testing increases, so does the likelihood of positive cases. As with many of the schools who started in-person instruction before us, the majority of positive cases are within the student population. While currently active student cases have increased, as of September 9, only 232 out of nearly 12,400 students have tested positive, and we have continued to have a very low rate of infection among employees. Currently, three employees are positive for COVID-19. During July term, with ~80 students on campus, we also had very few employees testing positive at any time. Now, with fall semester fully in play and over 10,000 students potentially coming to campus, we still are fortunately averaging just a few employees who are testing positive at any given time. And, to our knowledge, no employees or students have needed to be hospitalized. This is all very heartening news for which we are thankful; and, a testament to the hard work by all of you to ensure that we are remaining committed and adhering to our personal responsibilities outlined in the Pledge to Protect, namely wearing face coverings, practicing physical distancing, and washing hands regularly.

It is important to remember that the Fall Operations Assessment Tool will provide University leadership with the information necessary to evaluate the appropriate level of operations for the University. There is no one item alone that would drive the decisions related to University operations. We will, of course, continue to actively monitor these results to defend against the potential for local outbreaks. To date, we are not seeing a transmission of infection from student to staff or from student to faculty. Our data suggests that neither classrooms nor dining areas have been sources for COVID-19 transmission.

Our current operations, while in the “high” level, reflect the plans as laid out in our fall operations plan and align with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and our consultant epidemiologist. We are listening to recent recommendations from federal and local officials that it may be preferable for students to isolate on campus (as long as it is feasible) in lieu of travelling home so as to prevent the spread of the virus to other areas. We are continuing to give students the option to go home for isolation if they choose.

Despite this week’s change to “high” status, I am hopeful and confident that we will maintain safe and healthy operations. We expected to see a rise in positive cases, and we are responding within expectations to these circumstances. We will continue to monitor with great vigilance all of our metrics and will keep you informed to changes in the levels. As always,

thank you for all you have done and are continuing to do to make SMU a fantastic place to live and learn.

- **COVID-19 website updated case count display** – In response to feedback, SMU has updated its [COVID-19 reporting page](#) with a dashboard and additional reporting details for greater transparency, including isolation capacity levels and quarantine numbers. Individual active and non-active cases continue to be listed as well. The page will continue to evolve as needed.
- **Recording of this fall's General Faculty Meeting** – I realized that I had not yet provided a link to a recording of the August 26 General Faculty Meeting in these weekly newsletters. Click [here](#) for a recording, and congratulations again to our newly tenured faculty!
- **Canvas utilization** – I want to acknowledge the great work of our faculty this spring and summer preparing their course content for fall 2020 delivery. For many, this preparation required adapting new ways of working, most notably the utilization of Canvas – SMU's online learning management system. Based on a preliminary review of the data, 97% (>2500) of this fall's courses have been published and flagged as active in Canvas! This high level of Canvas adoption demonstrates the tremendous commitment of SMU's faculty and the high-quality support offered by the joint team of staff from CTE, OIT, SMU Libraries, and SMU GO who provided training and support. I had the opportunity to meet with our Student Senate leadership this week and they expressed how thankful the students were for the significant increase in Canvas utilization this semester. Thank you all again for your efforts in this regard.
- **Spring schedule** – For spring 2021, our goal is to create a schedule that supports the best learning opportunities for students and that is informed by our experiences this fall. Key data points will include: faculty/student surveys, attendance data, student inquiries, and monitoring student choice/waitlists as they sign up for spring classes.

Deans, associate deans, department chairs, and departmental/building schedulers will develop a base schedule by September 18, that is curriculum-focused and includes both SMUFlex and Virtual options for all required courses, and for classes with multiple sections. They will consult with and engage faculty to establish the base schedule by September 25. Those developing the schedule at the college/school level have been asked, as they were this fall, to maximize adherence to the standard M-W-F/T-R class grid and to promote the spread of courses throughout the day to cover all available timeslots so that we can provide a wide range of classroom options.

- **Faculty survey for early impressions on fall 2020** – We would like to give faculty an opportunity to provide feedback on your experiences during the first weeks of the semester. If you have not done so already, please provide your feedback no later than today, September 11, to help us identify early successes and also to determine where to make improvements as we move forward by responding to the optional, five-item [survey](#). All responses will be anonymous and will be shared only at the aggregate level.

If you have any questions about the survey, please reach out directly to either Associate Provosts Sheri Kunovich or Paige Ware. They will be working with members of the Faculty Senate to analyze the results and share them with our community. Note: President Turner sent a comparable survey to students on September 8, to capture their feedback as well.

- **Get help for student concerns, fast!** – The challenges and stresses of a new semester are only amplified as we manage them in the midst of COVID-19. Consequently, we know that faculty are facing a quantity and complexity of student concerns for which there are few precedents. Encouraging students to come to you with questions, concerns and problems is one thing—but knowing how or where to best refer them for help is quite another. Students pose questions ranging from fear, to grades, to health, to anxiety, to technology, to dining hall hours, and everything in between.

Please be aware of the Caring Community Connections (CCC) [program](#)—which SMU offers to support students who are experiencing ANY challenges by identifying and linking them to appropriate resources so that you don't have to do the legwork. Faculty (as well as staff, parents and other students) are encouraged to [report](#) student issues or behaviors where there are needs or concerns of any kind. Note: If reporting a student concern about COVID-19, be sure to check the “COVID-19 concern” box in the form's “Medical Issues” section.

- **Zoom space update** – IF you hear from students that zoom space reservations are filling up fast at Dallas Hall, please remind them that spaces are available in other buildings across campus and they can [see what's available and reserve zoom spaces online](#).
- **SMU Child Care Center enrollment update** –SMU's on-site [Child Care Center](#), is open and welcoming families – and spaces are available. COVID-19 has changed so much, but safety remains the center's number one priority. In partnership with **Bright Horizons**<sup>®</sup>, SMU has implemented important health and safety protocols to keep your child safe. Additional information, including a video of the center's enhanced protocols in action, can be found [here](#).

## News and Noteworthy

- **Faculty Fellows application process (final reminder)** – The application process is coming to a close for the inaugural cohort of Provost’s Faculty Fellows. All full-time faculty members can [apply](#), with a preference for tenured faculty or non-tenure track faculty. The application deadline is **September 18**, and questions should be addressed to Associate Provost for Faculty Success Paige Ware at [pware@smu.edu](mailto:pware@smu.edu).
- **Faculty-in-Residence application process (final reminder)** – The Office of the Provost and the Vice President for Student Affairs are now [seeking faculty candidates](#) for two Faculty-in-Residence (FiR) positions. The successful candidates will begin a three-year appointment in the fall 2021 semester.
- **SMU community demonstrates support for the Black Lives Matter movement** – Several hundred SMU students, staff, faculty and community members joined a student-led march around the perimeter of the SMU campus on Saturday, September 5, to support the Black Lives Matter movement and continue the call for racial equity and justice. Dr. Turner made clear his support for the group, saying, “A university is an excellent forum for the free expression of ideas and opinions, and SMU supports our students’ rights to peacefully express their hurt and frustration over racial injustice.” The walk around our campus was thoughtfully planned by the student group’s leaders and will achieve their intent to express their concerns to SMU and the broader community.



Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Elizabeth G. Loba

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