



SMU

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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) Road to R-1 and Research/Creative Excellence, 2) Spring 2021, and 3) News and Noteworthy.

Road to R-1 and Research/Creative Excellence

- **Virtual Town Hall debrief and reminder to sign up for additional sessions** – On Monday, April 5, nearly 30 faculty members joined me and Jim Quick, Associate Provost for Research and Dean of the Moody School, in a virtual Townhall to discuss 3-5 areas of distinction for SMU. Our hope is that being able to hire additional, interdisciplinary clusters of faculty in strategic areas of strength, coupled with SMU's emerging capabilities in data science and high-performance computing, will set SMU apart in these fields. We recorded this session and are finalizing a plan for secure distribution to all faculty in next week's newsletter.

To begin the meeting, I reviewed our academic priorities for the next 3-5 years and shared a high-level timeline and roadmap for achieving our goals. Dean Quick then reviewed efforts taken to date, in partnership with the Deans, to develop an initial grouping of priority areas for consideration based on SMU's research strengths and their potential for significant impact. He also shared insights on the most recent and anticipated federal research and development landscape. While there are other sources of funding (including corporate and philanthropic) that will need to be considered, we believe that the federal funding priorities as presented by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) can serve as an effective guide for SMU as we seek opportunities for strategic growth within our research faculty.

Dean Quick concluded his prepared remarks by reviewing OMB priorities (as articulated by the previous administration), overlaid with the new administration's platform and with SMU's research strengths. Based on that analysis, the following broad areas begin to emerge for consideration as candidates for cluster hires:

1. National Security: resilience, earth-system predictability and climate, military preparedness
2. Education: STEM ecosystem & world-class education in every zip code
3. Technology: application of Data Science, AI, ML, HPC to health, national security, education, economic development

We then invited faculty feedback, recommendations, and questions on this initial list of priorities. To highlight a few key discussion topics:

- In response to faculty concerns about limiting the focus of our initial round of cluster hires, we emphasized that the goal of this initiative is to attract clusters of faculty in 3-5 areas of academic distinction that will set SMU apart as world-class in terms of research, post-docs, and Ph.D. support. These cluster hires will not be our only areas of investment in terms of faculty hires or other forms of research support for faculty, but they will be an effective place to start in our efforts to boost SMU's research footprint.
- Faculty also offered suggestions on other areas for consideration, such as the intersection of big data with the humanities, neuroscience, and social justice.

All faculty are encouraged to attend the remaining sessions. Click [here](#) to register.

- **Workload Policy update and next steps** – Thank you to the faculty, department chairs and deans for the time and effort represented in last week's draft workload policy submissions. My office has begun the process of reviewing drafts and will return comments as quickly as possible so that department chairs and faculty will have the opportunity to make revisions through the month of May.

While I anticipate that we will continue to iterate on these policies across the next academic year, your efforts this year will have gone a very long way towards establishing greater transparency in support of our research goals as well as our commitments in response to the Black Unity Forum action plan.

Be on the lookout for additional information once draft workload policies are finalized. We plan to provide SMU's faculty access to all department-level and school/college-level workload policies through the Provost Office's website.

- **Bridwell Library to house the World Methodist Museum Collections** - We are honored to announce that Bridwell Library will soon be the new home to the entire World Methodist Museum collections. This gift represents the single largest acquisition of materials to Bridwell at once in its seventy-year history. Anthony Elia, Director of Bridwell Library, deserves our gratitude for expertly shepherding this tremendous gift. You can read the [announcement](#) from the World Methodist Council or view a video with [collection highlights](#).
- **Reminders from previous Friday updates:**
 - **2022 USN&WR graduate rankings** – Last week, *US News and World Report* [released its 2022 rankings of graduate schools](#). I am pleased to highlight two of the most noteworthy gains made by SMU's schools in 2022. Congratulations to Dean Jennifer Collins and Dedman Law's faculty, staff, and students for ranking 52nd this year, up four places from last year's ranking of 56th among the best law schools in America. And, kudos to Dean Stephanie Knight and the Simmons School of Education's faculty, staff and students for ranking 59th this year, up nearly fifty places from their ranking of 105 in 2020.

Spring 2021

- **Summer operations and preparing for fall** – As announced in previous newsletters, we are currently planning for the continued utilization of Virtual and SMUFlex modalities during the May and summer terms, with hopes of a return to normal, in-person operations in fall 2021.

The University's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is also revising our COVID-19 Operations Plan to reflect changes, and we plan to share those updates with you before the end of the spring 2021 semester. If faculty have ideas or questions, we encourage them to reach out to any of the four representatives of Academic Affairs on the EOC: Dean Sam Holland, Associate Provost for Curricular Innovation Peter Moore, Associate Provost for Faculty Success Paige Ware, or directly to me.

- **Registration for summer/fall terms underway** – Enrollment commenced Monday, April 5, for returning undergraduate students for the May, summer and fall 2021 terms. Open enrollment, for visiting, new and readmitted students, and continuing non-degree students begins on Wednesday, April 14. Click [here](#) for more information.
- **More COVID-19 Vaccines Now Available at SMU** – SMU has received another round of doses of the COVID-19 Pfizer vaccine for distribution to our University community through the vaccination site near the Dr. Bob Smith Health Center. Once again, all SMU faculty, staff, and students are eligible.

Vaccinations began today. Register to make a first-come, first-serve appointment through the [Mustang Strong vaccine page](#). If you have trouble registering, reach out to the Help Desk at 8-HELP (4357).

- **On-campus vaccination update/communication about second-dose** – Earlier this week SMU completed administering the allotment of Pfizer first dose vaccines received in March. For those who got first doses through SMU last week, be on the lookout for communication from the Dr. Bob Smith Health Center for instructions on registering for your second dose.

SMU does not currently have second-dose vaccines available for individuals who have already received their first shot of Pfizer or Moderna elsewhere, so please reach out to your initial vaccine provider to complete your treatment. Spouses and dependents of SMU employees and retirees are not currently eligible to register but may be at a later date.

- **Methodist Health System announces extended registration for COVID-19 vaccine** – Methodist Health System (MHS) is also offering more appointments to SMU students, faculty, and staff. Vaccine appointments are available Monday-Friday between the hours of 8:00 a.m.–4:30 p.m. at Methodist Dallas Medical Center on 1441 N Beckley Ave. To schedule an appointment, [click here](#).
- **May commencement** – I look forward to seeing many of you at our [May Commencement](#) ceremony on Saturday, May 15, at 8:00 a.m. in Ford Stadium. We will be following the same health and safety guidelines put in place during our previous commencement ceremonies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As always, your participation in commencement means a great deal to our graduating students and their guests, but it is very much voluntary. Please access the [May Commencement RSVP](#) webpage to reserve your seat. The deadline to RSVP is **Friday, April 16**, by 4:00 p.m. Confirmations with important information regarding entry, security screening, and prohibited items will be sent to you closer to the ceremony date.

If you are unable to attend May Commencement in person, I invite you to view the ceremony virtually from your home or office at smu.edu/live. Whether you attend in

person or watch the webcast, I hope you will join with your colleagues in support of these events and the values they represent.

- **Additional reminders from previous Friday updates:**

- **Reminder to report your COVID-19 vaccination** – To tailor the University’s requests for vaccine allotments each week and assess the quantity of doses that best meet the needs of our campus, it is important to know how many people have already been vaccinated or are scheduled to get either a single dose of the Johnson and Johnson or the first and/or second doses of either the Moderna or Pfizer vaccines.

As of April 8, over 327 faculty and 689 staff (greater than 40%) have reported receiving at least a first-dose of the vaccine.

If you have already received your vaccine, please remember to fill out the self-reporting tool – *and keep it up to date if a second dose is required* – on the [Mustang Strong vaccine page](#). Your voluntary submission will not be used to communicate to you directly about your own vaccine status. Unsure of what activities are safe after you are vaccinated? [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offer guidelines for what vaccinated individuals may do.](#)

- **Reminder: Guidance for staff who are able to schedule vaccine shots during working hours** – SMU encourages you to schedule a time to get your COVID vaccination as soon as you are eligible and can find one. While you are not required to take vacation/sick leave to get your vaccine during working hours, you should notify your dean or manager if you miss time and also plan to make up any lost work. We also encourage faculty to be supportive of students who are able to acquire their vaccination during classroom time. Once you’ve received the vaccination, please [remember to update your status and report it through the reporting tool](#).
- **Supporting Technology Assets Building Logistics and Events (STABLE) project update** – As you may have heard, STABLE is a new enterprise software solution being implemented this year. STABLE will introduce new processes and tools to facilitate work orders for Facilities and OIT, event management, room reservations, key management, space management and more. There is a wealth of information about this project on our [website](#), including a revised project timeline and information about each module.

News and Noteworthy

- **Update on SACSCOC Decennial Reaffirmation of Accreditation** – Last week, SMU hosted a committee of peer reviewers in one of the final steps in the tenth-year process to reaffirm accreditation. Initial reports from our accreditation team indicate that SMU’s report, and our responses to their questions, were exemplary. We will submit any remaining items to the peer review team by September and then await final determination on reaccreditation status which will be announced after SACSCOC’s December 2021 Board of Trustees meeting.

Special thanks to Associate Provost for Institutional Planning and Effectiveness Dr. Patty Alvey for her tremendous leadership, both prior to and throughout this two-year reaffirmation window. Our success in making the case with SACSCOC for the reaffirmation of accreditation would not have been possible without her exceptional work along with the sacrifices and

dedication of the 100+ faculty and staff responsible for writing content, securing and organizing evidence files, designing and producing beautiful SMU in Four Books, shooting and editing a video tour of SMU's main campus and participating in many interviews. The list of those who were involved is [here](#). Thank you, all, for helping to show SMU's ongoing commitment to excellence.

- **Call for faculty participation in Summer 2021 Common Curriculum Assessment** — SMU is committed to ensuring that its general education curriculum includes a regular, rigorous assessment and quality assurance process. SMU has adopted a post-hoc (juried) model of student learning outcomes assessment in general education, where a sampling method is used to collect and assess students' work anonymously after a term is completed. Faculty involvement is critical to the post-hoc success, and the Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness is recruiting faculty and/or doctoral students to serve as raters. A stipend will be awarded to each rater for one week of work. Most stipends will be \$2,500 but may be reduced if the sample of work to be assessed is minimal. The work will take place during May 17 – 21, or May 24 – 28. Two components per week.

If you are interested in serving as a rater on one of the four CC components assessed this summer, please click [here](#). If you have any questions, please email assessment@smu.edu.

- **Faculty senate meeting debrief** – Thanks to Faculty Senate members and President Aurelie Thiele for the invitation to speak during this week's Faculty Senate meeting. During that meeting, I addressed questions from senators on topics such as: What have I learned since arriving at SMU? What is my vision for SMU in five years? What are the key initiatives my office plans to pursue next year? What is the balance between tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty? How will we maintain excellence in areas of distinction such as the arts and professional schools while pursuing R-1 aspirations? What is the status on the rollout and planned utilization of Academic Analytics? I look forward to continuing the conversations around these important questions and I am scheduled to meet next week with the Faculty Senate Executive Committee.

Sincerely,



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