



SMU

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Dear Faculty and Staff:

Welcome back to fall 2021 on the Hilltop! This week, the fall semester began in earnest. After months of planning and preparation, we have returned to in-person activities across campus. Thanks to each of you for the ways you advance our educational mission in support of our students.

These weekly updates will serve as a tool to keep you informed and engaged with SMU's Academic Affairs division as, together, we work toward a safe and healthy fall semester. 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) Fall 2021, 2) Research and Scholarly/Creative Excellence, and 3) News and Noteworthy.

Fall 2021:

- **Week one recap –**
 - **Opening Convocation and Rotunda Passage** – On Sunday, August 22, SMU welcomed our new first-year and transfer students to campus during our 107th Opening Convocation and Rotunda Passage. Recognizing that every undergraduate student at SMU has crossed through the Dallas Hall Rotunda, students had an opportunity to reflect on their passage to college and their intellectual and personal growth during their time at SMU. This was my first opportunity to participate in-person, and I have an even greater understanding and appreciation for this tradition's impact and meaning. Special thanks to Dr. K.C. Mmeje, Vice President for Student Affairs, for serving as this year's featured speaker.
 - **General Faculty Meeting** – The fall General Faculty Meeting took place on August 25. Faculty Senate President Pia Vogel gave the Faculty Senate's report, and President R. Gerald Turner delivered the faculty address. Newly tenured faculty members were recognized and received regalia during the event. Congratulations again to our newly tenured faculty!

- **Enrollment** – The first day of class preliminary headcount for the University totaled 12,327 – including 6,923 undergraduates and 5,404 graduate students, both degree and non-degree. SMU welcomed 1,580 new first-year and 281 new transfer students to the Hilltop at Opening Convocation last Sunday. New students include a record share of students who identify as traditionally underrepresented, 33.3% of the first-years and 44.5% of transfers. Official enrollment numbers change daily until the census capture date of September 8, 2021. You can view past years’ and preliminary 2021 [here](#). We are off to a strong start!
- **SMU’s position on vaccination following full FDA approval this week of Pfizer’s COVID-19 vaccine** – See [President Turner’s message](#) earlier this week for information concerning SMU’s decision to strongly encourage – rather than require – COVID-19 vaccinations on campus this fall. This decision was made in close consultation with local, state and federal health recommendations and guidance, and informed by direct engagement with the Governor’s office for clarity on [Texas’ going-forward position](#) on vaccine requirements in light of Pfizer’s vaccine receiving federal approval. As an additional consideration, SMU recruited and enrolled our new and continuing students under a ‘vaccine strongly encouraged but not required’ approach. It is important to meet those expectation as much as possible by not changing requirements once they arrive unless necessary to maintain the health of the campus.
- **Vaccination available through the Dr. Bob Smith Health Center** – To receive vaccinations, appointments are required and can be booked through the [health portal](#) or by calling 214-768-2141.
 - Third Doses for the immunocompromised: Starting last week and moving forward, third vaccination doses are available for moderately to severely immunocompromised individuals ([as defined by CDC and FDA guidelines](#)) who are fully vaccinated with either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines. Note: For immunocompromised individuals, this third booster can be taken as soon as 28 days after receiving your second shot.
 - Booster doses for non-immunocompromised – Starting later in September, it is expected that all community members who are fully vaccinated with either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines can begin signing up to receive their booster. Note: The recommended timeline for receiving a third dose is 8 months following receipt of the second dose.
- **Voluntarily Report Your Vaccine to SMU** – We have transitioned to a new way of voluntarily reporting your COVID-19 vaccination status through the Dr. Bob Smith Health Center.
 - If you were vaccinated on campus, your information will automatically be uploaded into your health record under *immunizations* (no action is necessary).
 - However, if you were vaccinated off campus, please upload that information directly to the [SMU Health Portal](#), even if you

already voluntarily shared your status through the vaccine reporting tool last spring.

- **SMU CAN's updated "Pledge to Protect"** - This week, the President's Executive Council (PEC) reviewed SMU CAN's revised "pledge to protect." On behalf of the entire PEC, Dr. Mmeje and I would like to thank SMU CAN for their work updating the pledge to reflect our community's shared values and commitments to safety and respect for the current academic year. Click [here](#) to preview the revised pledge and be on the lookout for an email from me and Dr. Mmeje next week for a version you can review and voluntarily sign.
- **COVID-19 testing** – Employees currently have several options to receive a COVID-19 test if you have symptoms or have been exposed to the virus.
 - **On campus (Dr. Bob Smith Health Center):** An appointment is required and can be scheduled by calling the health center at 214-768-2141.
 - **Off Campus ([Virtual Care Families](#)):** Several locations around the DFW area offer COVID-19 vaccines, and are open 7 days a week for rapid COVID-19 testing.
- **The Mustang Strong website is the most up-to-date source of information regarding SMU's COVID-19 response** – Please continue reviewing the [Mustang Strong website](#) for information on SMU's COVID-19 response. Here, you can find answers to frequently asked questions, access the latest [campus announcements](#), review information on receiving and reporting the [vaccine](#), and monitor the latest data on [confirmed COVID-19 cases on campus](#).
- **Reminder: SMU announces temporary mask requirement** – Effective August 12, SMU has implemented a [temporary mask requirement](#) in indoor spaces on campus including classrooms, event and meeting spaces, and commons areas in all buildings and residential halls, regardless of vaccination status. This requirement is a temporary precaution during the delta variant surge to supplement our other pandemic protocols.

Based upon the upward trend in COVID-19 cases that occurred at the beginning of the fall 2020 and spring 2021 semesters, we will continue to require masks indoors for at least the first few weeks of the fall 2021 semester. After that, we will review the situation on a weekly basis using our assessment tool to measure the impact of the pandemic on our campus while taking into consideration the most up-to-date health guidance from local, state and federal authorities. Factors such as the number of cases at SMU and in the county; infection and vaccination rates; local hospitalizations; and campus isolation capacity will help determine when the mask requirement should be lifted.

- **Reminder: New faculty COVID-19 instructional resource** – While our focus is on providing in-person instruction this fall with safety protocols in place (e.g., temporary mask requirement and vaccinations are encouraged), we recognize the need to navigate short-term “what if” scenarios when faculty or students might be in isolation or quarantine.

Please see the [faculty FAQ of the Mustang Strong website here](#) for the most commonly asked questions and answers. If you have other questions not addressed in the FAQ, please reach out to your Chair or academic Associate Dean. You can also copy this [email address](#) on your request for additional support. This email, monitored by a team of Associate Deans and the Associate Provost for Faculty Success, has been established to help us navigate additional concerns specific to unique circumstances, as we recognize that there may well be situations that require more context to arrive at the best solution.

Road to R-1/Scholarly and Creative Excellence

- **Council of Deans meeting recap** – Today, I hosted the annual full-day Deans’ Retreat. My thanks to the Deans for committing their entire day, and to the Associate Provosts for joining us in the afternoon session, to discuss our plans and priorities for the year ahead.

See below for a recap of the meeting’s primary agenda items:

- **Return on Investment (ROI) in Academic Spaces** – Jim Quick, Dean of the Moody School and Associate Provost for Research, and Tom DiPiero, Dean of Dedman College, shared information on the anticipated return on investment, as measured by key ratios such as research expenditures per square foot in our academic research spaces. Rachel Mulry, Executive Director of Planning and Customer Service, and Allison Day, Director of Space Management, participated as guests to review ways that [STABLE](#), SMU’s new Integrated Workforce Planning Solution, will support data capture and analysis moving forward.
- **Faculty hiring deliberations** – Last month, members of the Provost’s Office team and I met in a half-day retreat with the Deans. We reviewed recommendations of the Deans concerning which tenure-track cluster hires, as well as which tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty lines outside of strategic cluster hires, to open for searches this fall with the goal of bringing new members to campus in the fall of 2022. Earlier this week, I shared with the Deans which cluster hires and which additional faculty lines are currently approved for searches starting this fall.

During today’s retreat, we discussed the information needed to approve any additional requests. We also developed a plan for recruiting cluster hires, as this will require inter-department collaborations across multiple schools/college.

- **Workload Policies** – SMU is committed to developing and approving department-level workload documents that make our

SMU policies clear and transparent, which will be a critical step in helping us reach our research and creative impact goals for R1 and our BUF goals around greater transparency and equity.

In today's meeting, Paige Ware, Associate Provost for Faculty Success, provided Deans a status update on draft workload policies and reviewed remaining actions required prior to approval. Our goal remains to approve and post final department-level workload policies early in the fall 2021 semester.

- **Review Audited Financial Statements and FY 2021 Operating Budgets and FY 2023 budget process overview** – Ernie Barry, Associate Vice President for Budgets and Finance, reviewed SMU's consolidated financial statements and FY 2021 Operating Budgets with the deans. Ron Fellers, our office's new Director of Academic Planning, provided an overview of the budget process for FY 2023.
 - **Update on Capital Campaign** – Brad Cheves, Vice President for Development and External Affairs, shared an update on planning efforts for Campaign 3.0 which formally begins on Friday, September 16, with a kick off ceremony and picnic.
 - **Enrollment Management Strategies** - Wes Waggoner, Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management, facilitated an extended conversation with the Deans across a broad and important range of topics related to our undergraduate enrollment strategy: 1) "Right-sizing" our undergraduate programs and schools, 2) Strategic utilization of financial aid, and 3) Aligning academic interest with capacity.
 - **Current year strategy for the Office of Institutional Research** – Daniel Eady, Associate Vice President for Strategy and Operations and my Chief of Staff, updated the Deans on our plans this year to increase coordination between the Offices of Institutional Research and the college/schools in support of improved data to support university decision-making.
- **SMU biologist receives \$2M from industry and the Cancer Prevention Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT)** – Dr. Zhihao Wu, Assistant Professor in Dedman College's Department of Biological Sciences, is the first SMU Researcher to receive a grant (\$249,272) from the Cancer Prevention & Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT) for his collaborative neurodegenerative work with The University of Texas. This accomplishment is on the heels of an industry-sponsored research agreement (\$1,770,547) with Dr. Wu and ModeGene, LLC, a Texas-based start-up, to explore co-translational quality control mechanisms as it is related to age-associated diseases.
 - **Reminder: Plans for September Board of Trustees meeting** – Plans are underway for this September's Board of Trustees' meetings. On September 16, the Committee on Academic Affairs and the Finance Committee will convene a joint meeting to review the strategic academic priorities that will help us meet our goals for greater academic quality along with the financial investments required, through fundraising,

resource reallocation and/or new revenue, to implement them. We will share additional information in future updates.

News and Noteworthy

- **SMU faculty member researches admissions alternatives to standardized admissions tests** – Dominique Baker, Assistant Professor of Higher Education in Simmons School's Department of Education Policy and Leadership, had her research cited in a recent [article](#) in the *Wall Street Journal*. Baker's study of admissions lotteries is one of a few different policy solutions the article cites in an examination of potential alternatives to standardized admissions tests.

Sincerely,



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