



13 August 2020

Dear Mustangs,

Hello from the Hilltop! I hope this message finds you and your loved ones doing well. I imagine you are making final preparations for your return to Dallas and SMU, and we are excited to welcome you back.

By this time, I hope you have reviewed the Canvas course that provides “what to expect” information for the fall semester. I expect you have read through material shared by President Turner and others that explains the systems and processes that our faculty and staff have spent months developing to make SMU as safe as possible during the pandemic, but I would like to focus on how *you* fit into the health and safety picture:

Students have a critical role – if not the most critical role – in facilitating a successful fall semester.

If you have not read the [Pledge to Protect SMU](#) that can be found at the conclusion of the Canvas course referenced above, please read it now. This *Pledge* was developed by individuals representing all campus stakeholders – including students – and the entire campus community is expected to honor the expectations outlined for keeping each other safe.

You will get plenty of positive reinforcement and friendly reminders to keep that *Pledge*. However, those students who deliberately or negligently disregard the expected behavior articulated in the *Pledge to Protect SMU* should expect to be held accountable through the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards. Examples of behavior that would violate the expectations outlined in the *Pledge to Protect SMU* include, but are not limited to:

- Knowingly attending class in person while exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19;
- Repeated failure to wear a face covering or disregard for requests to wear a face covering;
- Disregard for isolation or quarantine guidance provided by a contact tracer;
- Refusal to comply with contact tracing efforts by University officials;
- Planning or participating in a gathering not organized according to social distancing guidelines;
- Hosting unauthorized guests on campus; and
- Planning or participating in student organization events that are not in compliance with the guidelines established by the Division of Student Affairs.

“Dishonesty,” “irresponsible conduct,” “failure to comply,” “interference” and/or “assault” are all potential charges under the *Code of Conduct* that could apply if a student were to violate the expectations outlined in the *Pledge to Protect SMU*. Sanctions assigned to students found responsible for violating the expectations of the *Pledge* could range from a warning to suspension or expulsion from the University. Those situations that put others at the most risk could result in a student’s removal from campus for the remainder of the semester and a requirement that they complete their coursework remotely. In these situations, no reimbursement of tuition or fees will be provided.

The Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards will work to resolve these cases as quickly as possible. **If a student is referred to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards for allegedly violating one of the tenets of the *Pledge to Protect SMU*, they will be prohibited from attending any in-person activities – including classes or student organization events – until their case is resolved.** Students who fail to comply with this directive could face additional conduct charges, including suspension from the University for a period of time.

Please note that student organizations found responsible for violating the expectations outlined in the *Pledge* will also be subject to disciplinary action through the SMU Student *Code of Conduct*. **If a student organization is alleged to have hosted an unauthorized party/social gathering, on- or off-campus, they will be placed on an immediate cease and desist (or interim suspension) pending the outcome of the conduct process.**

Student organization leaders have a particular responsibility to plan events that do not put students at risk for contracting COVID-19. The general expectations outlined in the *Pledge* encompass following the [event guidelines](#) that have been developed by the Division of Student Affairs and will help ensure the appropriate safety measures are in place. A student organization found in violation of the guidelines outlined in the *Pledge* will likely be prohibited from hosting any events for the remainder of the semester (and possibly year). Student leaders of student organizations may also face individual charges through the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards. Additional information regarding the event guidelines is forthcoming and will be included in MOM training for this year.

We expect that our students will practice behavior that keeps us all safe, but I want to be clear so that there are no surprises should violations of these expectations occur: **students will be held accountable.** Given the gravity of the situation, we simply cannot be complacent about enforcement, and we do not have the luxury of providing individuals multiple opportunities to comply. We must recognize we all have a responsibility to our entire campus and that means holding ourselves and others accountable.

I am optimistic about the fall and I have strong faith in the ability of our smart, motivated students to help keep the Hilltop safe and healthy. Of course, please reach out to me if you have questions; I welcome your feedback and ideas. I look forward to seeing you back on campus very soon.

Pony Up!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Melinda J. Sutton".

Melinda J. Sutton, Ph.D.
Associate Vice President for Student Affairs
and Dean of Students