

Mustang Charge

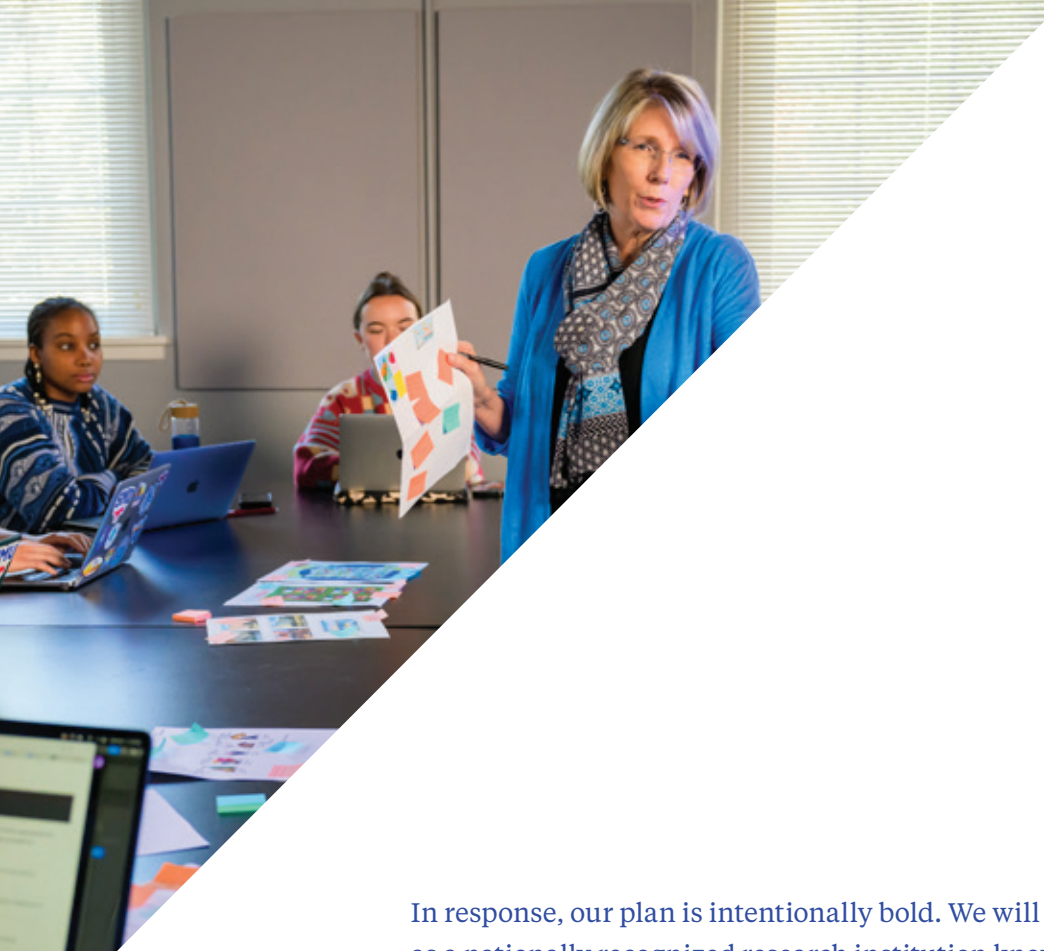
Accelerating SMU to the Forefront



SMU



Mustang Charge defines SMU's strategic ambitions and commitment for the future, challenging what lies ahead for our University. Our trustees and community charge us to lead with ambition and accelerate our path as we become one of the leading universities in America.



In response, our plan is intentionally bold. We will position SMU as a nationally recognized research institution known for the relevance and excellence of our work and its applications in the classroom and beyond. We will attract top student, faculty and staff talent. We will ensure our students have the best outcomes and are chosen by top employers and graduate schools. We will make the SMU education even more relevant, fulfilling and valuable, so our graduates are more prepared for what the future requires. We will embrace the uniqueness of our campus and culture. We will protect and enhance the defining elements of the Mustang experience.

Mustang Charge provides a framework for how we will achieve our vision. This framework allows the University to be strategic, entrepreneurial and nimble. It directs us as we focus on our immediate priorities and continue to evolve with and ahead of the needs of the future.

We choose to charge to the forefront. We accept the challenge. And we accept the charge.

Mustang Charge.



Dear SMU community,

We look to the future with great optimism and excitement, alongside big expectations for SMU over the next decade and beyond. I am proud of the engagement we received across our community in creating our strategic framework, and I recognize that SMU's power lies in our collective ability to achieve what previously seemed impossible.

Our growing strength allows us to dream big. Our vision is intentionally bold. We will be at the leading edge of higher education, advancing in the key dimensions that define a top university: teaching, research, and the student experience – across academics, athletics, and the arts – on our quintessential campus, aligned with a world-class city.

As we work to accelerate our progress, we heard how important it is to protect the uniqueness of our Mustang culture and the defining principles of the University. We learned how many people in the SMU community believe that we must continue to evolve while striving to be among the best in the country. We are building on a strong foundation replete with teaching and research excellence, traditions, experiences, and culture that truly differentiate SMU.

Mustang Charge: Accelerating SMU to the Forefront gives us a framework to reach our bold vision. Our ever-changing world requires us to continually evaluate our priorities, make decisions and adjust course. This framework allows us to do precisely that. It also provides a way for our community to bring forward expertise and ideas for consideration and adoption in the next iterations of our strategy.

None of this happens without our community – the ideas you have shared, the questions you have pushed us to answer, and the belief you have placed in the future we will build together. More will be required of us in the future as we look to expand our community and engage in new, more meaningful ways. We are all Mustangs, and we all must feel part of the collective greatness we are creating.

Now, let us charge forward, together.

With great optimism,



Jay C. Hartzell
President



Strategic Planning Process

This strategic framework was developed over the course of a year in extensive partnership with the broader SMU community. The process began with a comprehensive listening effort: We engaged students, faculty, staff, alumni, trustees, parents and community members through surveys, interviews and group sessions to gather critical insight and feedback.



2,200

FACULTY AND STAFF

5,393

PARENTS, DONORS,
COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS
LEADERS, AND ALUMNI

1,213

GRADUATE AND
UNDERGRADUATE
STUDENTS

150+

STAKEHOLDER
CONVERSATIONS

30+

WORK SESSIONS WITH
STUDENTS, FACULTY AND STAFF

The research surfaced themes that directly informed *Mustang Charge’s* five strategic focus areas. For each of these strategic imperatives, we assembled a dedicated working group consisting of faculty, staff and students. Their charge was to define their imperative and identify SMU’s biggest strategic opportunities through multiple rounds of working sessions, feedback and refinement.

We deeply appreciate every member of the SMU community who took the time to participate in this process and who has offered to remain engaged going forward. We view *Mustang Charge* as a living framework that will be revisited and adjusted as opportunities emerge over the next decade.

Strategic Plan Steering Committee

CO-CHAIRS

Jay Hartzell
President

Rachel Davis Mersey
Executive Vice President and Provost

Michael Harris
Leon Simmons Endowed Dean of Simmons School of Education and Human Development

James Lee
Altshuler Distinguished Teaching Professor of the History of Early Christianity and Director, Graduate Program in Religious Studies
2025-2026 Faculty Senate President-Elect

Kenechukwu “K.C.” Mmeje
Senior Vice President for Student Affairs

Rachel Mulry
Senior Vice President for Business and Finance and Chief Financial Officer ad interim, *joined March 2026*

Sean Murphy
Director for Student Center and Activities
2025-2026 Staff Association President

Harold Stanley
Vice President for Executive Affairs

Shontel Grumhaus
Senior Vice President for Development and External Affairs, *joined May 2026*

Imperative Working Group Co-Leads

TRANSFORMATIVE TEACHING AND PROGRAMS

Bryan Stone
Leighton K. Farrell Dean of Perkins School of Theology

James Linck
Professor and Distinguished Chair in Finance
Senior Associate Dean, Programs

Melissa Chessher
Dean, Honors & Scholars Programs
Professor, Division of Journalism

RESEARCH THAT MATTERS

Annie Wilhelm
Professor and Chair of the Department of Teaching and Learning

Dinesh Rajan
Mary and Richard Templeton Dean of the Lyle School of Engineering ad interim

Janarthanan Jayawickramarajah
Elisabeth Martin Armstrong Dean of the Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences

ATHLETIC IMPACT

Damon Evans
Director of Athletics

Michael Harris
Leon Simmons Endowed Dean of Simmons School of Education and Human Development

Sheri Kunovich
Associate Provost for Student Academic Engagement and Success

EXCEPTIONAL EXPERIENCES

Holly Jeffcoat
Dean, SMU Libraries

Kenechukwu “K.C.” Mmeje
Senior Vice President for Student Affairs

Stephen Yeager
Assistant Dean for Student Affairs and Faculty Supervisor, Corporate Counsel Externship Program

PRINCIPLED LEADERSHIP

James Lee
Altshuler Distinguished Teaching Professor of the History of Early Christianity and Director, Graduate Program in Religious Studies
2025-2026 Faculty Senate President Elect

Rita Kirk
William F. May Endowed Director of the Cary M. Maguire Center for Ethics and Public Responsibility
Professor, Corporate Communications and Public Affairs

Shilo Brooks
President and CEO of the George W. Bush Presidential Center
Professor of Practice in the Department of Political Science

Strategic Framework Structure

The Model

Mustang Charge is the framework to align our efforts and will be instrumental in achieving our vision over the next decade and beyond. The visual representation of the framework conveys our path: upward in direction, forward with power. The model rises on a diagonal, from our enablers and imperatives at the base to our vision at the peak, conveying the same momentum and ascent we strive for across the University.

Mustang Charge is comprised of three layers, each visible in the model:

VISION

The highest-order goal that defines where SMU is going as a university over the next decade.

IMPERATIVES

The areas where SMU will concentrate its energy, investment and ambition.

*Each imperative includes a series of **objectives**, followed by some sample **initiatives** that translate this framework into action.*

ENABLERS

The cross-cutting inputs that will empower us to achieve our strategic imperatives.

Mustang Charge

Accelerating SMU to the Forefront



VISION

SMU will be at the forefront of America’s universities, winning in teaching, research, athletics and the arts, delivering exceptional experiences, partnering with the Dallas community and empowering well-rounded, principled leaders who are driven to tackle the world’s most important challenges.

IMPERATIVES

- Transformative Teaching and Programs
- Research That Matters
- Athletic Impact
- Exceptional Experiences
- Principled Leadership

ENABLERS

- Student Outcomes Supporting Lifelong Success and Purpose
- Top Talent Empowered by Mustang Culture
- Operations Aligned to Academic Excellence
- Committed Partnership with All of Dallas



Our Vision

SMU will be at the forefront of America's universities, winning in teaching, research, athletics and the arts, delivering exceptional experiences, partnering with the Dallas community and empowering well-rounded, principled leaders who are driven to tackle the world's most important challenges.

The Key Elements of Our Vision:

Forefront of America's Universities

We are intentional in our goal to be among the leading universities in the country across teaching, research, athletics and the arts.

Winning in Teaching, Research, Athletics and the Arts

We are competing for excellence at every level by attracting top talent to develop the brightest minds and drive the best outcomes.

Exceptional Experiences

The unique opportunities our students, faculty, staff and alumni have on our campus and with our University will be distinctly SMU.

Partnering with the Dallas Community

Dallas creates incredible opportunities for us to be a stronger national and global university. We will continually find new ways to support and engage with the world-class city that is our home.

Empowering Well-Rounded, Principled Leaders

SMU students will find their passions and will be known as multifaceted, entrepreneurial and team-oriented leaders who navigate the world with strong character and ethical grounding.

Tackle the World's Most Important Challenges

The thinkers, leaders and doers who graduate from SMU will positively impact society's biggest opportunities and issues.



Our Imperatives

Transformative Teaching
and Programs

Research
That Matters

Athletic
Impact

Exceptional
Experiences

Principled
Leadership



Transformative Teaching and Programs

SMU will uniquely prepare every student to think critically, lead ethically and contribute to a changing world. Academic pathways will sit at the intersection of intellectual depth and real-world practice, grounded in a strong liberal arts and professional foundation, the energy of Dallas and a global network of accomplished alumni. Through close student-faculty relationships, signature interdisciplinary experiences and the thoughtful integration of emerging technologies, we will ensure every learner receives an education that is rigorous, experiential, relevant, globally minded and distinctly SMU.



Objectives

Make Work-Integrated Learning and Professional Experiences Core to the SMU Academic Experience

Every student will graduate having connected classroom learning to real-world practice through experiential learning and a relevant curriculum, as well as through internships, research, Dallas-based partnerships and immersive and international experiences. Embedded across schools and disciplines, these academic opportunities will empower students to develop the entrepreneurial mindset, adaptability and career readiness to succeed beyond SMU.

Equip Students, Faculty and Staff for a World Shaped by Emerging Technologies

Students, faculty and staff will be prepared to thrive in a world shaped by emerging technologies. Modernized classroom infrastructure and evolving learning modalities will empower faculty to design innovative, relevant learning spaces; staff to better serve students and interact more seamlessly with each other; and students to confidently leverage AI and use new technologies thoughtfully, ethically and effectively.

Define SMU Through Signature Classes and Programs

SMU will expand our distinctive and relevant academic strengths by building flagship courses and signature programs and by developing curriculum in innovative, emerging and interdisciplinary areas of instruction.

Empower Teaching Excellence in Every Classroom

By providing the infrastructure and support needed to advance faculty development, we will ensure a culture of excellence in teaching, fostering innovative and inspired teaching as the standard in every classroom.

Launch Graduate Students into Their Careers

Through elite, rigorous academic programs, graduate students will be equipped with the resources, access and professional preparation needed to excel in their careers and lead in their chosen fields.

SAMPLE INITIATIVES

Expand Experiential Learning Inside and Outside the Classroom:

Create relevant and distinct curricula and academic experiences, including internships, research opportunities and immersive, intensive-study experiences, such as SMU Taos and education abroad.

Innovate Discipline-Specific Emerging Technology Frameworks:

Develop discipline-specific frameworks for emerging technology and AI covering pedagogy, ethics and applications.

Establish High-Profile, Signature Academic Programs:

Develop curriculum and programs in innovative, emerging and interdisciplinary areas of instruction.

Create a Graduate Teaching Academy:

Build a Graduate Teaching Academy with structured preparation for teaching assistants and graduate instructors.

Research That Matters

SMU will expand its ability to conduct world-class research that will elevate departments and faculty to national recognition and make ambitious, high-impact research a defining feature of the University. The research enterprise will be driven by outstanding scholarship and creative activity across every discipline – foundational work that advances fields, interdisciplinary work that bridges them and publicly engaged research that shapes policy, practice, industry and communities. This work will be conducted by top research faculty and graduate and undergraduate students at local, national and global scales, translating discovery into innovation, entrepreneurship and impact.



Objectives

Activate Research Funding Through the Dallas Advantage and National Priorities

SMU will be the go-to research partner for Dallas industries, corporations and government institutions, turning the region’s economic dynamism into a sustained advantage in generating ideas and securing funding and data, in conjunction with our alignment with national research priorities.

Build World-Class Research Infrastructure

To empower researchers to pursue bold, ambitious, world-class research and compete for federal, state and industry research funding, we will build the necessary faculty support, proposal infrastructure, and physical and digital research capacity.

Establish Centers of Excellence

SMU’s research identity will be anchored in areas of exceptional disciplinary strength, creating opportunities for academics, graduate and undergraduate students while leveraging our Dallas location and external partnerships.

Leverage SMU’s Research Strengths, Location and Partnerships to Create Exceptional Graduate Programs

Investing in the graduate, doctoral and postdoctoral researchers who power SMU’s research will enable us to build more elite graduate programs, while attracting and developing an excellent pipeline of talent.

Elevate Faculty Productivity and Scholarly Impact

Faculty will be empowered with the support, conditions, incentives and recognition to produce bold, high-impact scholarship and creative activity – increasing the quality and quantity of grant and fellowship activity, publications, citations, performances and productions, nominations and awards across disciplines.

Fuel Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Encourage and incubate entrepreneurship and innovation that turn SMU research into companies, products and technologies by supporting and encouraging licensing, commercialization and relationships with venture capital, industry partners and startup communities.

Champion Undergraduate Involvement in Research

Opportunities for undergraduate students interested in research will expand, supporting them as future leaders through meaningful training and engagement.

SAMPLE INITIATIVES

Build Systems to Support High-Impact Research:

Establish the research infrastructure, graduate programs, industry relationships and institutional presence that will position SMU’s researchers to excel.

Cultivate a Culture of Excellence in Scholarship:

Cultivate a University-wide culture of research recognition that encourages and supports productivity while celebrating faculty and graduate student scholarship through awards, events and visible displays of work.

Expand Undergraduate Students’ Access to Top Research Opportunities:

Embed the development of research skills into the undergraduate experience, preparing students for graduate school and equipping them to contribute to their field by exposing them to world-class researchers and experience.

Athletic Impact

SMU will harness the power of athletics and its broad impact, uplifting the whole University: winning championships, driving academic excellence and research, investing fully in student-athletes and becoming the top destination to launch careers in sports. Athletics will be a unifying experience that brings the Mustang community together with a shared sense of pride and spirit. It will be one of the most powerful platforms for strengthening the University’s brand and national profile, attracting top talent and establishing SMU as essential to the future of collegiate athletics.



Objectives

Ignite Athletics for Sports-Related Academic and Research Excellence

By leveraging our programs and Dallas’ professional sports ecosystem, SMU will position the University as the destination for students who want to build a career in sports. At the core of these programs will be excellent academics and research.

Cultivate a Student Experience Anchored in Athletic Opportunities, Campus Pride and Recreation

Athletics will be core to a vibrant student experience, uniting the Mustang community through campus spirit, traditions and recreation. Elevated recreation facilities, expanded intramural and club sports and a connected ecosystem of well-being resources will support students physically, mentally and socially.

Support Every Student-Athlete in Their Pursuit to Win On and Off the Field

World-class academic and health-support structures, leadership development and expanded career pathways will empower the academic, professional and personal success of student-athletes, building a stronger sense of belonging and ensuring that every Mustang who competes here leaves prepared to win during their time at SMU and beyond.

Leverage the Athletic Platform to Elevate SMU’s Brand to National Prominence

Athletic success on and off the field will elevate SMU’s brand, establishing the University as essential to collegiate athletics and a top destination for students, talent, donors and partners. Revenue and reputation generated through athletic success will elevate the whole University, expanding sponsorships, deepening donor partnerships and maximizing facilities as assets for all of SMU.

Build Lasting Engagement with the Dallas Community

Deepening the connection between SMU, its alumni and the Dallas community will convert athletic pride into lasting partnerships, fill stadiums and make SMU an indispensable part of this city.

SAMPLE INITIATIVES

Establish Leading Programs to Launch Careers in Sports:

Launch and expand sports-related academic programs across sports analytics, business, media, journalism, health and wellness at the undergraduate and graduate level.

Infuse the Mustang Spirit into Every Corner of Campus Life and Across Dallas:

Create moments that enable every member of the SMU community and the city to feel the pride and spirit of SMU.

Build a Next-Generation Academic Success and Leadership Center for Student-Athletes:

Foster an innovative environment where athletics and academics work together to support every student-athlete in their personal development.

Exceptional Experiences

SMU will reimagine what it feels like to learn, work and belong at our University. We will define the undergraduate and graduate student experience, personalize support for each student, empower faculty and staff, elevate the campus environment and deepen alumni, community and corporate partnerships – all working toward cultivating a strong, shared Mustang identity and signature experiences for students that are unique to SMU and Dallas.



Objectives

Create Spaces and Opportunities to Engage Intellectually

Faculty, staff and students will gather in vibrant, shared spaces to engage intellectually with one another, creating opportunities to spark conversation, research and learning.

Support Every Student in Finding Their Community and Interests

Every undergraduate and graduate student will have a roadmap and seamless support to guide them through advising, career readiness, well-being, financial support and campus engagement from their first day through graduation. They will also have the opportunity to discover where they belong, building a clear sense of community, direction and passion.

Elevate the Staff Experience

SMU will foster an outstanding staff experience where team members feel valued, recognized for excellence, and proud to be a key part of advancing our mission and vision, supported by programs for continuous professional growth, reward structures and community supports.

Build a Lifelong Mustang Community

We will reimagine the alumni experience at every stage of life, carrying the Mustang community forward through signature traditions and a robust engagement infrastructure.

Connect Dallas to Campus and Campus to Dallas

SMU will position Dallas as a living extension of campus, where students, faculty and staff cultivate reciprocal partnerships, while inviting the community to engage with our vibrant campus and world-class creative spaces and experiences.

SAMPLE INITIATIVES

Enhance Residential and Dining Experiences:

Expand housing flexibility and invest in residential facilities to ensure every student’s living experience meets a consistent standard of quality. Elevate the dining program across residential and retail offerings by upgrading dining hall facilities, expanding food options and meal plan flexibility, and growing retail dining across campus.

Deliver Individualized and Cohesive Student Support:

Build a personalized system to support advising milestones, financial information, networking and alumni engagement that follows every undergraduate student from first enrollment through lifelong learning.

Transform Campus into a Community Destination:

Turn SMU’s campus into a destination for the broader Dallas community, hosting events across athletics, arts and civic life that also engage graduate and undergraduate students.

Empower Staff to Succeed:

Attract, retain and develop staff with an intentional culture that recognizes and invests in our team through clear pathways for advancement and performance management.

Principled Leadership

SMU will cultivate principled leaders through a University-wide effort, targeted curriculum and cocurricular experiences, all grounded in our University’s ethos and supported by a coordinated, campuswide commitment to character development, open inquiry and wide-ranging discourse across differences. Every member of the SMU community will develop the judgment to act with principle and moral courage, carrying that foundation guided by core virtues while on campus and long after they leave. They will be trusted in moments of consequence, able to mobilize others around a shared goal and driven by civic responsibility.

Objectives

Anchor Principled Leadership in the SMU Academic Experience

We will embed principled leadership into the academic core of our University through signature courses and a dedicated academic pathway, ensuring that character development is integrated into an SMU education.

Define Opportunities to Practice Principled Leadership

Every student will have access to structured, hands-on opportunities to practice principled leadership and explore their moral and ethical foundations in the classroom and the community, from campus leadership roles to immersive experiences to service alongside Dallas’ civic institutions and nonprofits.

Define and Embrace SMU’s Institutional Identity

SMU’s institutional identity and moral and ethical grounding will be clearly articulated, widely understood and consistently put into practice across the University community.

Establish SMU as a National Leader for Conversations on Principled Leadership

Through partnership with the George W. Bush Presidential Center and Dallas’ civic institutions, SMU will lead the national conversation on principled leadership by hosting high-impact speaker series, forums and dialogue with influential leaders, fostering open-minded civil discourse and debate.

Empower Faculty and Staff as Principled Leaders

Faculty and staff will have the development, mentorship and recognition to grow as principled leaders.

SAMPLE INITIATIVES

Establish an Academic Ecosystem of Principled Leadership:

Build a community of faculty and programming around principled leadership, with academic offerings including a signature course and a campuswide undergraduate minor in partnership with the Bush Presidential Center.

Build a Visible, Coordinated Presence for Community Service and Civic Engagement:

Create a cohesive system for service, civic engagement and community partnerships across Dallas available to graduate and undergraduate students.

Invest in Faculty and Staff Leadership Development:

Establish leadership development opportunities for faculty and staff, ensuring the opportunity to be developed, recognized and empowered as principled leaders.

Define “What It Means to Be a Mustang”:

Provide an opportunity for the SMU community to codify our institutional identity and bring it to life.

Our Enablers

Student Outcomes Supporting Lifelong Success and Purpose

SMU will ensure every student will be individually supported as they find their passions and leave with the skills and opportunities needed to discover their path forward and build a meaningful career and life.

Operations Aligned to Academic Excellence

SMU will align operations to further the academic mission by removing unnecessary or outdated policies and bureaucratic barriers so our teams can focus on higher-value work.

Top Talent Empowered by Mustang Culture

SMU will attract and retain exceptional students, faculty and staff – people who will help SMU become what it aspires to be and who are supported by a cohesive and defined Mustang culture.

Committed Partnership with All of Dallas

SMU will be the best partner we can be for all of Dallas and the region, making it easier to engage with our University, our faculty, our research and – most importantly – our students.

Wins at the Intersection

SMU's strategic framework is designed to help guide our academic, talent, community and investment decisions in the years ahead.

Mustang Charge requires complex, cross-functional solutions that will transform the future of our University and our students, faculty and staff. At the convergence of our imperatives and enablers, we are able to create transformative opportunities:

Establish a model to develop world-class, industry-focused academic programs, starting with the O'Donnell Energy Science, Innovation and Enterprise Program and then, leveraging learnings from this effort to create additional signature programs.

Elevate student outcomes in career placement and top graduate and preprofessional programs, building an elite model for student outcomes by connecting every student to real-world curricular and cocurricular experiences, internships, leadership opportunities and support, enabled, for much of campus, by a reimagined Hegi Family Career Development Center.

Drive innovation by expanding the eastern edge of our campus, where law, business, entrepreneurship and applied research intersect, where companies and civic leaders in Dallas come to solve problems and innovate across disciplines, brought to life through a new law school, graduate housing, and a hotel and conference center.

Infuse principled leadership across SMU, expanding on our foundation to develop our students, faculty and staff with a broad, interdisciplinary perspective on ethics, principles and values integrated into our curriculum, experiences and personal, career and leadership development.

Empower researchers to tackle relevant, interdisciplinary challenges through world-class departments and centers of excellence, supported by premier infrastructure for foundational and applied research, and give our undergraduate and graduate students opportunities to work among top research talent.

Build athletics into an engine that accelerates SMU's academic ascent, becoming the top destination to start a career in sports through sports-related academic programs and opportunities, creating unparalleled spirit and campus experiences and positioning our student-athletes to excel in their careers and lives after SMU.

Scale entrepreneurship campus-wide by expanding class offerings across schools, honors programming, speaker series and bespoke experiences accessible to every student who wants exposure.

Articulate “what it means to be a Mustang” by nurturing and celebrating our institutional identity, while embracing the core tenets, traditions and rituals of our unique culture.

Unlock the power of Dallas by being an indispensable thought partner and resource for knowledge, providing unparalleled access to SMU's research, innovation, insights, culture and talent and creating reciprocal partnerships with all of the city and region through The Dallas Office.

Become a destination for elite talent by creating the conditions for top students, faculty and staff to choose SMU as their first choice and to be supported, developed and empowered to do their best work here.

Our Charge

To achieve the level of success for which we aspire,
it will take all of us – across disciplines, the campus,
Dallas, the state and the country to understand,
engage and embrace our *Mustang Charge*.



