

SMU Office of Engaged Learning

OEL Newsletter

Spring 2026

Issue no. 12

We are excited to celebrate the remarkable accomplishments of our students, faculty, and partners. In this issue, you'll read about students presenting research at regional and national conferences, entrepreneurs representing SMU on the ACC stage, the launch of a new partnership through the Women's Innovative Network (WIN), and the many ways our community continues to learn, create, and lead beyond the Hilltop. These stories reflect what makes engaged learning so powerful: providing students with opportunities to apply their knowledge, share their ideas, and make meaningful contributions in the classroom, the community, and the world. *Jennifer Ebinger, EdD, Executive Director OEL*

Newsletter Highlights

Entrepreneurship

Undergraduate Research

Student & Staff Spotlights



OEL hosted the Research and Innovation Week: Undergraduate Poster Session on March 25, 2026. The event featured over 60 posters covering a variety of topics. Winners of the poster contest are highlighted on Page 3. And thank you Provost Mersey for dropping by!

Upcoming Events:

June

6/24 Summer Research Symposium
Dr. Chul Moon (Statistics)

6/26 - 6/27 Data Science Hackathon

July

7/8 Summer Research Symposium
Dr. Jake Batsell (Business Journalism)

7/15 Summer Research Symposium
Dr. Alexander Chase, Earth Sciences

7/22 Summer Research Symposium
Dr. Jennifer Ebinger (Citizen Science Research)

7/23 Three Minute "Thesis" Competition

Aug./Sept.

9/8 & 9/9 Big iDeas Ideation Sessions

9/16 Big iDeas Pitch Practice

9/17 Business Plan Competition
Applications Due

9/25 Big iDeas Business Plan
Competition

Oct./Nov.

11/4 Fall Research Symposium

11/12 Big iDeas Pitch Contest

Featured Events:

6/26 - 6/27 Data Science Hackathon

7/23 Three Minute "Thesis" Competition

9/25 Big iDeas Business Plan Competition

See the full
list of events
and register
on SMU360



Entrepreneurship

InfoSavvy Competes at ACC

CEO and Founder **Yaw Boateng** and COO **Ameen Zia** (both class of '27, Lyle School of Engineering), members of **SMU's Entrepreneurship Varsity Team**, represented the University at the **ACC InVenture Prize Competition** on March 27. Competing against student-led ventures from across the Atlantic Coast Conference, the team delivered a 20-minute pitch before a live studio audience, showcasing their startup, InfoSavvy. The company develops generative AI solutions for higher education institutions, helping students overcome information overload by simplifying and centralizing access to campus resources, services, and information.



Yaw Boateng (L) and Ameen Zia (R) on stage at ACC InVenture Prize Competition held at Notre Dame.



Next opportunity to pitch your idea is the Big iDeas Business Plan Competition, Friday, Sept. 25. Sign up today!

Farewell to Neha Husein—For Now



We are grateful to **Neha Husein** for serving the past two years as the Big iDeas Entrepreneurship Fellow. An SMU alum (2019 Human Rights and Marketing), Neha drew from her personal experience as an undergraduate in Big iDeas founding “Just Drive.” She currently works as a

Senior Event Producer for Vegandale, an international festival celebrating vegan food, music, and art. Over the past two years, she played a key role in strengthening Big iDeas businesses and the development of WIN. Through leading E-Launch workshops, ideation sessions, and one-on-one coaching for student entrepreneurs, Neha helped students refine ideas, build confidence, and take meaningful steps toward launching their own ventures. Thank you, Neha, we loved having you a part of our team!

WIN Launches Partnership with KS WELI

This spring, members of **SMU's Women's Innovative Network (WIN)** attended the **KS WELI Changemakers Summit** at the University of Texas at Austin, hosted by the **Kendra Scott Women's Entrepreneurial Leadership Institute**. The event brought together student leaders, founders, investors, and industry professionals to explore entrepreneurship, leadership, and innovation.

Students connected with women leaders from companies including **Poppi** and **TikTok**, as well as venture capital firms and emerging startups. The visit also launched a new partnership between **WIN** and **KS WELI** that will provide SMU students with expanded mentorship, programming, and leadership development opportunities beginning in 2026–2027.

“Attending the **KS WELI Summit** with my fellow **WIN** members was incredible,” said **WIN** President Ryland Adzich. “Hearing from founders and entrepreneurs inspired me to continue pursuing the projects I’m passionate about.”



WIN members at KS WELI (L to R): Sophia Vasylyeva (Treasurer), Any Cao, Izzy Monserrate, Ryland Adzich (President), Abigail Schade, Tanya Harathi, Linh Vu

Entrepreneurship Ecosystem

The Entrepreneurship Ecosystem brings together departments across campus that support students and their ventures from ideation to launch. This year, it launched an SMU 360 page where students, faculty, staff, and community members can connect, collaborate, and stay informed about ecosystem events. Follow along and get involved!



Undergraduate Research

ACC Meeting of the Minds



Five undergraduate students represented SMU at the ACC Meeting of the Minds conference at Florida State University by presenting their research (L-R): **Will Schmitt '26** (Theater), **Nomvuyo Makhathini '26**, (Anthropology), **Aubrey Brown '27** (Statistics), **Journee Jones '26** (Psychology), and **Surabhi Soni '26** (Biological Sciences). This annual conference rotates hosts among the ACC universities and invites five students from each institution. Next year's host is Clemson University.

NCUR

For the fourth straight year, OEL has sponsored a group of students to present on the National Conference for Undergraduate Research (NCUR). With over 5000 attendees, NCUR provides an amazing platform for students to share research and network. This year's presenters were **Krithi Bolledula '26**, **Ashiyana Dahiya '26**, **Ebere Emezie '26**, **Trinity Gabreylski '28**, **Rachel Rodgers '26**, **Andy Su '26**, **Julia Trabucco '27**, and **Jenna Young '26**. NCUR 2027 will take place in Grand Rapids, MI, April 12-14, 2027.

Poster Session Winners

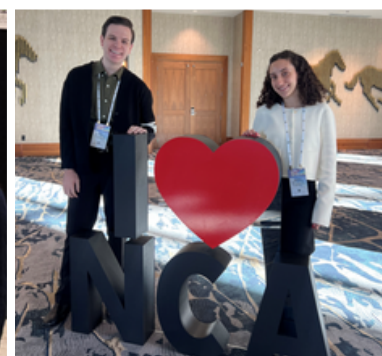
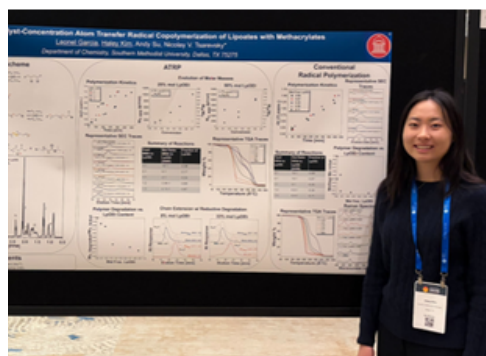
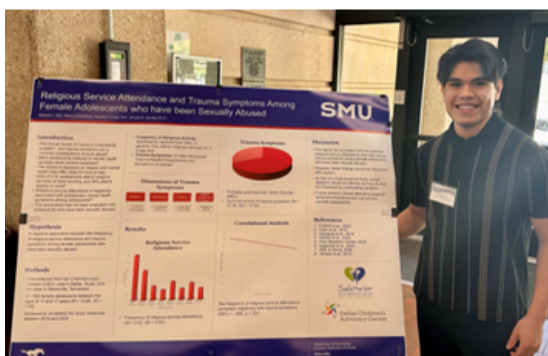
OEL hosted the Undergraduate Poster Session during Research and Innovation Week on March 25. 64 students presented posters and OEL awarded the following students with prizes for best posters:

- **1st place: Nomvuyo Makhathini**, "Narrating Girlhood: Intergenerational Perspectives on Teenage Pregnancy in Rural South Africa." (Faculty mentor: Elizabeth Berk, Anthropology)
- **2nd place: Delainey Hinson**, "Investigating local tardigrade species diversity." (Faculty mentor: Jonathan Hirschman, Biological Sciences)
- **3rd place: Kendall Schumacher**, "Contrasting the Marketing Strategies of Classical Chinese Dance: Navigating Artistic and Cultural Promotion into the U.S. and China." (Faculty mentor: Silas Farley, Dance)



2026 poster winners (L-R) Zehra Jaffery (honorable mention), Nomvuyo Makhathini, Kendall Schumacher, and Delainey Hinson

ELF Research Gains National Visibility



Engaged Learning Fellows who shared their work this year: **Roberto Diaz '26** (left) presented a poster at the Texas Undergraduate Conference for Social Sciences at UNT. **Haley Kim '25** (middle) presented a poster at the American Chemical Society SE & SW Regional Meeting in Orlando. **Maria Murad '25** (right) presented a paper with **Will Emmert** at the National Communication Association conference in Denver. ELF's **Trinity Gabreylski**, **Rachel Rodgers**, and **Andy Su** presented at NCUR.

Student and Faculty Spotlights

Excellence in Mentoring Awardees



Each spring, the Office of Engaged Learning recognizes two faculty members for Excellence in Mentoring of Engaged Learning Fellows. Faculty are

nominated by students and awards are based on the strength of the nomination, student achievements, and a sustained record of supporting undergraduate research and creative scholarship. The 2026 Excellence in Mentoring Awards were presented to **Jennifer Joan Thompson**, nominated by William Schmitt, and **Nicolay Tsarevsky**, nominated by Andrew Su. Dr. Thompson's work explores contemporary theatre, performance, and dramaturgy, while Dr. Tsarevsky's research focuses on polymer chemistry and advanced functional materials. Through their mentorship, both faculty have supported students in engaging in meaningful research and creative inquiry while advancing their own research.

Spring 2026 ELF Graduates

Congratulations to our graduating Engaged Learning Fellows!

Ellen Aughenbaugh	Nomvuyo Makhathini
Faith Bellamy	Alina Muñoz
Noelle Carpenter	Jordan Naivar
Syra Castillo	Adelaide Robison
Zander Crowns	Rachel Rodgers
Roberto Diaz	Anika Saiprabhu
Nha-Y Duong	Andrea Salamanca
Anna Foweather	William Schmitt
Caleb Garcia	Kendall Schumacher
Allison Hart	Andy Su
Olivia Kuo	

Research, Grants, and Community Impact

The Office of Engaged Learning supports research and grant development that extends the university's impact beyond campus. This year, our team continued its partnership with other SMU faculty and the City of Dallas on the Veterans Innovation & Insight Forum (VIIF), using research and community engagement to inform evidence-based solutions that improve services for veterans. Read the [VIIF report](#) to learn more.

Mustang Mentor Spotlight

Brianna Gapsiewicz '28 is a President's Scholar majoring in Film and Media Arts (BFA) and Journalism with a minor in Business. She writes for the Daily Campus and has her own freelance videography



business. As a Mustang Mentor, she supports first-year Film students as they transition into college and begin navigating the film program. "Every major looks different - progressing through classes and internships - so it's nice to talk with someone who has gone before you and done the same things. I really wanted to be that person for someone else."

ELF Student Spotlight

William Schmitt '26, a Theatre major (Acting) minoring in Education, explores how sound and silence can transform the theatrical experience. Mentored by Jennifer Joan



Thompson, his project, *Creating Theatre that Resonates*, examines principles of Indian sound healing and silence meditation and their application to contemporary U.S. theatre. Through research conducted in Northern India, Will developed an original theatrical work that he performed in both Dallas and Delhi. Will recently received a Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship to Thailand. [Read a story about Will's project in the Daily Campus.](#)

Staff News

Thank you to everyone who has supported and believed in our team:

- **Kelly Chandrapal** was promoted to Senior Program Specialist.
- **Jennifer Ebinger** (Executive Director) received the Faculty Senate Award for Outstanding Staff Member.
- **Adam Neal** (Program Manager) was elected as a divisional representative to the Council for Undergraduate Research.
- **Olivia Prioleau** (Project Specialist) received the SAES New Employee Award.

Support OEL

It costs approximately \$3000 to fund a student project. Want to make a difference? smu.edu/givenow

