

Weekly Update | May 3, 2024

Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

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 toward achieving the goals that fall within our four priority areas through 2025: 1) Academic Excellence, 2) Road to R1: Research and Scholarly/Creative Excellence, 3) 2016 – 2025 Strategic Plan, and 4) Inclusive Excellence.

If you have suggestions for what we should include in future communications, please [submit your ideas through this form](#). Suggestions received before noon on Tuesday will be reviewed and considered for publication in that week's Friday newsletter. Others will be held until the following week. Previous newsletters are available [here](#).

Today's update falls into five categories: 1) Spring 2024, 2) Academic Excellence, 3) Road to R1: Research and Scholarly/Creative Excellence, 4) Inclusive Excellence, and 5) News and Noteworthy.

Spring 2024

Recap: Board of Trustees meeting

This week, I had two opportunities to provide Academic Affairs updates to members of SMU's Board of Trustees.

Committee on Academic Affairs

In Thursday's committee meeting, my update covered two topics. I began by sharing the Educational Programs Committee's (EPC) proposed curricular recommendations that have been brought forward by faculty, reviewed and approved by department chairs and deans, and now require board approval. Following that, I discussed SMU's ability to increase revenue, particularly through overhead recovery, as our research enterprise grows.

Full Board meeting

In this morning's meeting, I shared a consolidated version of my presentation to the Committee on Academic Affairs. Additionally, the Board of Trustees provided special recognition and commendation to Carolyn Jeter, executive assistant to the provost, for her distinguished career of outstanding service to the University. After working at SMU for 36 years and supporting 11 provosts, Carolyn will be retiring at the end of the academic year. We wish her all the best in retirement.

Dedication of the David B. Miller Business Quadrangle

At 11:30 a.m. today, members of the Board of Trustees, President Turner, Dean Matthew Myers of the Cox School of Business, and I joined with the SMU community in celebrating the dedication of the new and renovated David B. Miller Business Quadrangle. This two-year \$140 million renovation and expansion project has created the facilities needed to train students for an ever-more collaborative and

technologically integrated world and have positioned the Cox School for future generations of continued excellence.

Final provost monthly lunch for current academic year to occur next week

On Monday, May 6, from 12–1 p.m., I will have lunch in the Faculty-Staff Dining Room in Umphrey Lee. This will be my last opportunity to host lunch during the current academic year as we take a pause over the summer months, but I look forward to reinstating these monthly lunches when we begin the fall 2024 semester.

I look forward to seeing as many of you who can attend on Monday and hope you will join me for a relaxed lunch and conversation.

Baccalaureate and May Commencement

Baccalaureate Service and Rotunda Recessional

Baccalaureate Service and Rotunda Recessional will occur next Friday, May 10, 2024, at 5 p.m. in McFarlin Auditorium. The nondenominational ceremony will feature a special sermon by Reverend Lisa Garvin, SMU's chaplain, for undergraduate candidates and their guests. Following the service, students will participate in the Rotunda Recessional led by SMU faculty and alumni marshals.

All-University May Commencement

The All-University May Commencement will occur the following day, Saturday, May 11, 2024, at 8:30 a.m. in Moody Coliseum. Participating faculty should assemble in academic dress no later than 8 a.m. in the Miller Event Center in Moody Coliseum. The faculty entrance is located on the north side of the building on Binkley Avenue.

This year SMU is awarding an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree to civil rights icon [Opal Lee](#), who led a national grassroots campaign that resulted in the 2021 establishment of Juneteenth, June 19, as a federal holiday.

Commencement speakers will be [Megha Tolia and Nirav Tolia](#), co-founding directors of the William S. Spears Institute for Entrepreneurial Leadership at the Cox School of Business.

For more information on SMU's end-of-year academic ceremonies, [please click here](#).

Academic Excellence

Highlighting the Class of 2024

Stories about our extraordinary graduating senior students are taking over the front page of www.smu.edu during the spring 2024 graduation season. Ten undergraduates are featured with photos, videos, and written prose that capture their past four years and future plans, as they walk into the next part of their journeys as world changers.

Additionally, SMU has released some incredible statistics on the graduating Class of 2024 (infographic below). To highlight a few data points, SMU estimates graduating 2,598 undergraduate students, 428 of whom are graduating with multiple degrees. This year's graduating class consists of students representing 48 states and 49 countries. Eighty-eight of our graduates are first-generation students and 38 are military veterans.



Ph.D. student named fellow for LA summer publishing workshop

Kendall Dinniene, Ph.D. student in the Department of English at Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences, has been named a fellow for the [Los Angeles Review of Books' \(LARB\) summer publishing workshop](#).

The *Los Angeles Review of Books* is a “nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting and disseminating rigorous, incisive, and engaging writing on every aspect of literature, culture, and the arts.” The Publishing Workshop hosted by LARB is an “intensive summer training program for aspiring publishing professionals with an emphasis on diverse and innovative publishing opportunities.”

Road to R1: Research and Scholarly/Creative Excellence

Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences professor publishes research on U.S. innovation policy and political polarization

Matthew Keller, professor in the Department of Sociology at Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences, and colleagues recently published a paper in [Politics & Society](#) documenting the decentralized role played by the U.S. federal government in fostering innovation since the Obama administration and its effect on political polarization. The authors argue that much of the deepening political polarization in the country in the last decade has occurred due to the significant reorganization of the relationship between industry and government without the concomitant awareness and understanding of the electorate, intensifying social divisions and conflict. This research was supported by the [Economy and Society Initiative of the Hewlett Foundation](#).

Stephenson Distinguished Visitor Award won by Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences faculty member

Professor Tom Runčevski from the Department of Chemistry at Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences has won the [Stephenson Distinguished Visitor Award](#) from [Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron \(DESY\)](#). Every year DESY, through the support of the [James D. Stephenson Fund](#), selects two internationally renowned scientists to visit and deliver a public lecture. Award winners will stay in Hamburg, Germany for four weeks to perform leading-edge research in the field of photon sciences.

Professor Runčevski's public lecture has been scheduled for Wednesday, May 15, 2024, from 2:15-3:15 p.m. Central European Summer Time at DESY. A [description of the talk can be found here](#).

Inclusive Excellence

SMU mourns civil rights leader and Perkins School of Theology alum

The Reverend Cecil Williams, a long-recognized national civil and human rights leader who was [one of the five Black students to integrate SMU in 1952](#), died on April 22, at the age of 94.

Williams' admission to SMU's Perkins School of Theology, along with four other Black students, represented the first voluntary desegregation of an educational institution in the South. The five graduated from SMU together in 1955.

[Read more about Rev. Williams's story here.](#)

News and Noteworthy

Faculty member from Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences discusses climate change research in leading European economics web publication

Professor Klaus Desmet, Ruth and Kenneth Altshuler Centennial Interdisciplinary Professor in the Department of Economics at Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences, and his co-author Esteban Rossi-Hansberg from the University of Chicago discuss their latest research on the spatial distributional effects of climate change in [VoxEU](#).

VoxEU is the [Centre for Economic Policy Research's](#) policy portal. VoxEU was created in 2007 to promote "research-based policy analysis and commentary by leading economists."

Honoring Our Professors' Excellence (HOPE) Banquet announces 2024 faculty award winners

For the 27th consecutive year, Residence Life & Student Housing (RLSH) and the Division of Student Affairs have recognized SMU faculty who go above and beyond in helping students succeed both inside and outside the classroom. This year, the HOPE Banquet expanded the HOPE Professor of the Year award to one undergraduate professor and one graduate professor. The HOPE Undergraduate Professor of the Year Award was bestowed upon Professor Willie Baronet, Stan Richards Professor in Creative Advertising in the Division of Advertising at Meadows School of the Arts, for cultivating an environment of diverse perspectives that allows students to have a deeper understanding of concepts and empowers students to become lifelong learners. The HOPE Graduate Professor of the Year Award was given to Professor Megan Heber, director of career engagement and community outreach for the joint MA/MBA and the MM in International Arts Management and director of corporate communication and public affairs graduate programs at Meadows School of the Arts, for her commitment to immersive learning and establishing meaningful connections with her students.

Additionally, three professors became "distinguished nominees" as faculty who have been nominated for five years or more by students. These professors are Melissa Murchison Murray, senior lecturer in the

Division of Music at Meadows School of the Arts; Kara Sutton, lecturer in the Department of Sociology at Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences; and Daniele Forlino, senior lecturer of Italian in the Department of World Languages and Literatures at Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences. Congratulations to these faculty members for their hard work and dedication to our students. Thank you to our students for taking the time to nominate faculty members and to RLSH and Student Affairs for creating spaces to celebrate our esteemed faculty.

Global, Online & Continuing Education (GOCE) establishes new non-credit generative AI program for SMU students and working professionals

[Generative AI for Business Professionals](#), a new non-credit specialization from SMU Continuing and Professional Education (CAPE), began on April 18, with 16 students from various professional backgrounds including financial services, healthcare, information technology, and law. Several SMU undergraduate students seeking to build their skills for future endeavors also participated. In the six-week program, students learned how to use generative AI tools in a business context and apply their knowledge to a unique project or opportunity related to their own industry or interests. The Generative AI for Business Professionals course was developed and taught by Sharlene Jenner, a veteran CAPE instructor and Vice President of Engagement Strategy at [Abelson Taylor](#). The Generative AI for Business Professionals program will be offered again in fall 2024 and is open to SMU faculty, staff, students, and community members.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth G. Loba, PhD
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Southern Methodist University
<https://www.smu.edu/provost>

