

2020 *vision*

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Inside Dedman College Newsletter

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A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN



This issue of *Inside Dedman College* introduces us to members of the Dedman College community who have become agents of change through the extraordinarily powerful mechanism of daring to think differently. They have learned that for as many ways there are of considering the world and its people, there are at least that many ways of understanding, and that understanding is the first step toward making meaningful change.

Leading off such change is **Sanderia Faye Smith**, an award-winning author and one of the newest members of the Dedman College faculty, who founded the highly successful “LitNight Reading Series,” which is based on the premise that literature “knows” in a way that ordinary language cannot. Literature can teach us about such highly elusive concepts as race, passion, justice, and, indeed, humanity that we will never fully understand through other means. Alumna **Jennifer Torres-Quintanilla** draws on the inspiration she received from teachers throughout her education who showed her how much difference one person can make in the lives of others. Ms. Torres-Quintanilla works with

high school students to help them navigate the road to college, a route she believes will have a transformative impact on their lives. Similarly, senior **Austin Hickie**, currently the vice president of SMU’s student body, used his Richter Fellowship to found the Collegiate Health Alliance of Texas (CHAT). That organization communicates to young people the importance of following public health guidelines in order to halt the spread of COVID-19.

It is difficult to grasp all of the different ways that COVID-19 has changed our lives, but Dedman College physics professor and chair of the department **Stephen Sekula** explains how the sudden move to online teaching last spring changed how we teach students. While we had little time to prepare for a new mode of delivering instruction last spring, through extraordinary effort and allocation of considerable resources, the faculty and administration of SMU developed over the summer sophisticated ways of teaching during a pandemic. Professor Sekula explains some of the methods the Department of Physics developed for teaching in lectures and labs, and he illustrates our faculty’s ingenuity in always finding new and innovative ways of reaching our students.

A number of undergraduate and graduate students, including **Jonathan Angulo**, **India Simmons**, and **Laurence Lundy** worked on “Voices of SMU,” a transformative project that emerged from Professor Jill Kelly’s course on doing oral history. “Voices of SMU” allowed students to hone their interviewing and interpersonal skills by taking the oral histories of SMU alumni of color. These alumni described their experiences at SMU, providing fresh insight and perspective that help the university and its communities understand how to create a better, more inclusive environment on campus. Ms. Simmons, currently a graduate student at American University, said that the relationships she built from working on the project were the most important aspect of her undergraduate experience and they help her in her current role.

Dedman College researches and teaches about the world, its people, and their past and present creations. One of the most important of all our creations is our ability to confront our challenges, understand their scope, and invent new ways of surmounting them. The Dedman College people you’ll read about in this issue of *Inside Dedman College* will demonstrate the ongoing applicability of SMU’s motto: **World Changers Shaped Here**.



Thomas DiPiero

Dean, Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences
Professor of World Languages and Literatures and of English

STUDENT SPIRIT AND PROGRAMMING

Even with SMU's return to campus plan in place, social distancing required students to find creative ways of bringing the fun and spirit to the Hilltop. A semester of movie nights on Dallas Hall Lawn, virtual events, and a winning football season surely demonstrate our students' 2020 vision!



Even with the transition of Senate to meeting solely through Zoom, we have continued to pass legislation and advocate to create a better campus for all. As part of the Membership Committee, I have been brainstorming innovative ideas for our Senate to connect and bond with each other during social distancing."

– Ashley Montgomery '22, Student Senate, on maintaining an engaged campus and membership



"While this year is not normal, we have still been able to cheer on our SMU Mustangs to a phenomenal 5-0 start. It has been great to see students and fans show up and cheer on the 'stangs with us every game."

– Derek Younkens '22, SMU Cheer, on the spirit at SMU football games



"Student Foundation has been working hard to plan and host SMU's long-standing traditions (PerunaPalooza, Family Weekend, Homecoming, and Celebration of Lights) in a safe and socially distanced way. All of our events have live-streamed components, and in-person participants are required to wear a mask, remain socially distant, and follow SMU's COVID-19 protocols."

– Allison Schultz '21, Student Foundation, on keeping campus traditions alive



"The BLM @ SMU team of six worked tirelessly and eagerly on a march that would fall in line with the movement in this nation. September 5 was a surreal moment for us, but a needed moment for the SMU community, and we were beyond grateful to be the coordination point for that."

– Tyne Dickson '23, BLM @ SMU, on planning a march through Highland Park



"Over the past several months, we have continued to innovate just as we normally do, but with a few more guidelines — we've done outdoor movie nights, virtual hang outs, murder mystery parties, voting drives, match-making services, etc. You name it, we've probably thought about it!"

– Peter Wetherbee '21, Program Council, on bringing the fun to campus

"Having Julissa [Calderon] speak to us about her life experience, it was very helpful to see that someone like us is able to make it big. I never had too many role models in the American sphere that I could relate to and it's great to see that we're starting to be better represented now, although there is still much more work to be done."

– Oswaldo Torres '21, College Hispanic American Students, on hosting Julissa Calderon, from the Netflix series Gentefied

CAMPUS SAFETY IS JUST A CHAT AWAY

We sat down with Austin Hickle '22 to learn more about his COVID-19 awareness coalition, College Health Alliance of Texas (CHAT). Austin is majoring in economics and political science with a minor in public policy and international affairs.



Tell us a little about yourself!

My name is Austin Hickle. I am majoring in economics and political science with a minor in public policy and international affairs. I am from Lubbock, Texas.

What do you do at SMU or in general outside of academics?

I am the student body vice president for the academic year 2020-2021. Further, I am a Hunt Scholar and Tower Scholar. This summer, I received the Richter Fellowship and Engaged Learning Fellowship and interned for the U.S. Congresswoman of Puerto Rico.

I have to ask: What drew you to SMU when you were deciding on a university?

I was looking for a college that would allow me to pursue a multitude of activities and provide a solid foundation for my career. The opportunity to be a change-agent at SMU is unique, and I knew I wouldn't find it anywhere else. SMU has provided me this and so much more.

What is the College Health Alliance of Texas (CHAT)? What role have you played in it?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I created a coalition of student body representatives from 24 Texas universities and colleges to form [The Collegiate Health Alliance of Texas](#). This coalition aims to serve as the voice of our generation to stop the spread of COVID-19. Our goal is to communicate the importance of public health guidelines effectively, to actively engage students to do our part, and to facilitate collaboration with health, administrative, and elected officials. We hope to encourage our generation to comply with public health recommendations and work with elected officials to provide the student perspective with effective communication.

Where did the idea come from? How did it start?

Over the summer, I served on SMU's Academic Continuity Subcommittee that helped plan what the fall semester would look like with COVID-19. By acting on the committee, I realized that students would be asked to carry a responsibility we've never had to carry before: it will come down to student engagement in safety protocol that will dictate how this semester looks. After this realization, I immediately started ideating how I can really have an impact, not only on this committee and my own school but statewide. All schools deserve to have a worthy semester for their students, especially after what we have all endured thus far this year.

What has been the most exciting or satisfying aspect of this project?

One of the most satisfying aspects of this

project is connecting with many outstanding leaders across the state. It has reassured me that our future is in good hands, and our generation is willing to step up to any challenge.

Where do you see this project headed? What is its trajectory moving forward?

Over the past month, I have worked with Dr. Paige Ware to develop, build, and receive IRB approval for CHAT's statewide survey. We are now in the process of collecting data from each university involved in CHAT. Results from the survey will be published in aggregate on CHAT's website and social media channels. Further, a report on the findings will be provided to key Texas state elected officials, including members of the State Legislature and Executive branch. Lastly, we will set up a U.S. Congressional Roundtable after four Members of Congress requested that we share our survey results with them to help inform future policy decisions.

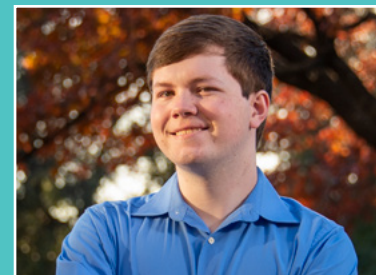
What has been the most important thing you've learned so far in working on CHAT? What has been the most important thing you've learned during your time at SMU?

I have learned a very valuable lesson through CHAT and my time at SMU, and that is: Don't underestimate the power one voice has. If you see an opportunity to create change, go for it.

After your time at SMU is finished, where do you see yourself? What do you see yourself doing?

Upon graduation from SMU, I plan to attend law school.

Dedman Students Earn Prestigious National and International Awards



Jared Burleson '21, a mathematics and physics double major with a Chinese minor, was selected as one of only 154 international [Schwarzman Scholars](#). He plans to study the relationship between public policy officials and the physics community in China.



Brittany Rigg '19, '20 (left) and **Barrett Stout '20** (right) are among eight SMU students who received [Fulbright U.S. Student Program](#) awards for the 2020-2021 academic year. Beginning January 2021, the two will bring their English Teaching Assistantships abroad. Rigg has earned her M.Ed. in addition to a B.A. in English and B.S. in educational studies. Stout graduated with a B.A. in history and B.S. in anthropology.



Voices of SMU: Preserving the Oral Histories of Communities of Color

The Voices of SMU oral history project evolved from Dr. Jill Kelly's "Doing Oral History" class in 2018. Now, undergraduate and graduate students, university archivists, and alumni come together to document SMU and Texas history through the experiences of communities of color. Read on to learn about three students' experiences working on the project.



JONATHAN ANGULO, PHD CANDIDATE IN HISTORY, GRADUATE PROJECT MANAGER

I serve as one of two Graduate Project Managers for the Voices of SMU Oral History Project, alongside PhD Candidate in History Camille Davis. Voices preserves the histories of alumni of color at the university for the University Archives. It is a collaboration between the William P. Clements Department of History, SMU Libraries (SMU Archives and the Norwick Center for Digital Solutions), and the Office of Engaged Learning. Undergraduate Research Assistants interview alumni using oral history methodology. Since 2018, the project has documented the stories of over 200 SMU alumni. The interviews record the life histories and achievements of our Black, Latinx, and Asian alumni as well as their everyday experiences as SMU students.

Project participants are leaders in their fields — they are educators, ministers, entrepreneurs, politicians, artists, and medical professionals. They share accounts of growing up in Dallas' Hamilton Park, Little Mexico, Oak Cliff, and beyond. They reflect on their time at SMU, recounting how they experienced the school's struggle to eliminate microaggressions, improve race relations, and hire faculty of color. These narratives also point to the university programs and organizations that helped them navigate university life as scholars, like the Rotunda Scholars Program, Connect Mentorship Program, Association of Black Students, College Hispanic American Students, Asian Council, Multicultural Greek

organizations, and others. Participants describe what they encountered, allowing us to think about how SMU can create a better environment for communities of color.

Camille and I work on related research projects, make Voices accessible for research in SMU Library's Digital Collections, and manage the project's social media accounts. We identify patterns in the interviews to advocate for change. We proofread each interview's transcript for accuracy and verify metadata (the data about data that helps people find the videos online). Camille and I also run the project's blog, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, & Twitter pages. These platforms help individuals find the histories and assist us in engaging with potential participants. We support the undergraduate research assistants who interview the narrators and are the heart of the project. Voices is an important part of SMU's history that will continue to highlight these narratives.

"The relationships I have built from working with Voices have been perhaps the most meaningful aspect of my undergraduate career and has helped me gain the confidence I need as a scholar-practitioner and advocate."

- India Simmons '20



The Voices of SMU team gathers for a meeting.

Check out the *Voices of SMU* blog and social media!



INDIA SIMMONS '20, SENIOR RESEARCH ASSISTANT, CURRENT AMERICAN UNIVERSITY GRADUATE STUDENT

During my time at SMU, I majored in human rights, international studies, and political science. I am currently a graduate student and research assistant at American University, studying for an M.A. in International Affairs with plans to continue in a PhD program. My work with Voices of SMU for the past two years facilitated my pursuit of graduate studies. After my first year, I assumed the role of Senior Research Assistant, which consists of leading the research team each week at our meetings and overseeing the interview processes. I gained the vital skills of database management, public speaking, leadership, communication, and research-based advocacy. My passion for the project's work gave me the opportunity to speak at conferences throughout the U.S. and at local community events (and network with scholars and professionals along the way). My first scholarly publication, based on this research, will soon be out in *Sound Historian*, the journal of the Texas Oral History Association. All of this, in conjunction with the close mentorship I received, enabled me to confidently apply to graduate school and to feel just as capable and prepared as others. To this, I would encourage students interested in humanities research to reach out, connect with the faculty members who have similar interests, and take them up on any opportunities they suggest! The relationships I have built from working with Voices have been perhaps the most meaningful aspect of my undergraduate career and has helped me gain the confidence I need as a scholar-practitioner and advocate.

LAURENCE LUNDY '20, RESEARCH ASSISTANT

Beyond my studies in history, I serve as an Undergraduate Research Assistant with the Voices of SMU Oral History Project and am involved with BLM @ SMU and Black Men Emerging. I started working on the Voices project in late 2019. I wanted to get involved to put some of my interviewing skills to work and hear from alumni about their experiences on the SMU campus. As a research assistant, I conduct interviews with alumni — now entirely via Zoom to ensure our safety and that of our alumni during the pandemic. This involves corresponding with interviewees, undertaking pre-interview research to prepare, ensuring informed consent, leading the interviews, and completing the accompanying paperwork and metadata for the library archives. I work with the team to adjust our questions with Black alumni to reflect the current moment — asking questions about their experiences with police or the recent COVID-19 pandemic — and to begin a series with former Black staff.

Working on the project has allowed me new insights into the lives of minority alumni at SMU. Their experiences fall on a spectrum, but overall, the common story of our alumni is one of resistance and determination. Each former student faced and overcame the challenges of individual and systemic racism that come with studying at a predominantly-white institution such as SMU. Whether they resisted the dominant culture of SMU overtly or covertly, minority alumni have sacrificed their own time, resources, and stamina to make change. They challenge the past of the university and its present. Minority alumni carried a burden simply being themselves on SMU's campus. Their struggles have been traumatic and hopeful in equal measure, but certainly a sign of progress towards a more equitable university. Change is slow, but our alumni have helped make steps towards the university we know SMU can, should, and eventually must be.



The Forge of Teaching

How to reshape learning from physical to virtual space, and other lessons from the Physics Department

By Dr. Stephen Sekula

This pandemic has exacted a high cost on human societies. Universities and colleges have obviously not been immune from the effects. In particular, the purpose of the university — the creation of new ideas and knowledge — is assailed by the realities of this pandemic. The mission of an institution like SMU is driven both by scholarship and teaching. While my own primary interests are in research, in this article I wish to focus on how COVID-19 has forced us to reshape a curriculum from physical to virtual space.

I would like to share the trials and lessons so far from the pandemic, using experiences in the Physics Department as examples, in the hopes that we can continue to learn from this experience for the betterment of all.

Learning in the Spring, Summer, and Fall

If the spring term was the crucible in which old conceptions of university teaching were melted, the summer term was the molding of new approaches and the fall term has been the forging. In the spring, all of higher education was forced to operate in unfamiliar territory on extremely short notice. Faculty and students were generally tolerant of stumbles during this period; we all recognized everything was coming undone. In the summer, however, students expected more. In physics, we actively saw students drop summer-term classes because they were dissatisfied with the quality of remote course content inherited from the spring. It was clear that we had to up our game for the fall. Between the summer terms and the start of fall term was a narrow window in which to shape a better learning experience. Our department employed digital teaching “hack-a-thons,” where people shared ideas, rapidly identified problems, and solved them in real time. Faculty re-shot lecture video material and reimaged course structure and pacing.



A narrow two-week period set the mold for the autumn.

Virtual Classrooms

It is generally agreed that in university education the face-to-face interaction of students with their peers and the instructor provides the highest-efficiency transfer of information and training in the creative arts and critical thinking.

A virtual classroom — one where neither the instructor, nor the students, occupy a common space — is therefore a challenge to this way of operating. However, the fully virtual classroom offers some key advantages: risk of transmitting the SARS-CoV-2 virus is essentially zero; there

is no meaningful time required to “get to class,” because it’s a web link away, making time-management between classes almost effortless. The disadvantages of this approach are many, of course: conversation is difficult, as most video conferencing systems fail to transmit the body language and microexpressions available in a physical space; it’s easy to step all over each other when trying to talk, because microphones cannot yet replace speaking in a shared space; group work is difficult, even with digital “break-out rooms,” because people are still not really “together” in a way that promotes easy collaboration; instructors have to be very aware of time and remember that just because it’s easy to transition between classes doesn’t mean you can only leave one minute for students to do so.

That said, since nearly all but our large introductory-level classes were virtual, our department has a lot of experience with this type of classroom. The consensus seems to be that, even with their limitations, virtual classrooms “just work”: students show up, they participate (if awkwardly through digital tools), the whole class period is easily recorded for students unable to attend that day, and a digital content management system (Canvas, in our case) permits a flow of information between student and instructor.

Virtual classrooms are probably the



lowest-stress option for everyone involved, even if the teaching or learning experience can sometimes feel like the equivalent of drinking flat soda.

Flexible Classrooms

Flexible classrooms, where the instructor is present in a teaching space at SMU also co-occupied by in-person students, complemented by the remaining students being connected virtually (in real time), sound like they should be better for learning and teaching. Experience, however, has taught us this is not true, for one simple reason: the instructor is now also the director and producer of their own classroom live television show. With that reality comes all the engineering bumps and bruises of managing a real-time interactive broadcast. Unlike in a professional broadcasting studio, there is no one “running the board” for the instructor — that’s left to the instructor, in addition to having to set up at the beginning of class, then actually teach, and then tear down everything to get out of the way for the next instructor. During class, one small mistake can cost you half your audience.

Students who can be present in the room have generally reported an acceptable experience, though group work is still frustrating because you cannot get closer to your peers than 6 feet. Masks, necessary to prevent viral spread, can inhibit speaking and frustrate listening comprehension. Students connected virtually to these classrooms report high degrees of frustration, to the point

where the desire to simply stop attending class is overwhelming (they can always watch the classroom recording later and catch up, of course). Faculty report being immensely frustrated with this approach, simply because of the sheer amount of new responsibility on their plate (cameras, microphones, batteries in devices, streaming services, etc.).

“While teaching during a pandemic will never be ‘normal,’ the goal is nonetheless to accomplish the mission of the University: to shape potential world-changers into the leaders, thinkers, and problem-solvers that the future so desperately needs.”

Laboratory or Workshop Classes

A class where students need to be highly hands-on with equipment or practices make for a particularly challenging environment. In our department, the introductory physics labs serve about 300 students each semester. These students are usually split over 12 sections each of at most 27 students. Each lab section would normally be three hours long, with the first hour devoted to team-based cooperative problem solving and the remaining two hours devoted to laboratory practice. The rooms, however, can only hold nine students when socially distanced, and there are only two such laboratory spaces in our department.

We solved this problem the way all departments at SMU had to this semester: creatively. We broke the three hours into three one-hour cohorts. For the first hour, one cohort is in the lab taking their data; the other two cohorts are engaged in problem solving activities, done entirely

virtually. For the second hour, the cohort that took data in hour one is now doing the problem-solving activity. That means the instructors who handle the problem-solving activity are spending twice as much time this semester running those activities as in the past; meanwhile, the students are getting 50 percent less time in the laboratory space to take their data. Some students are participating entirely virtually, but we nonetheless accommodated that situation with data sets collected for them from the experiments each week. The only practice those students are missing is the one hour of data collection; everything else for them is the same.

Shaping the Spring

Like all departments at SMU, the Physics Department keeps the eye on the future and learns from the present. The goal is to improve each time, making the experience better for instructors and students. While teaching during a pandemic will never be “normal,” the goal is nonetheless to accomplish the mission of the University: to shape potential world-changers into the leaders, thinkers, and problem-solvers that the future so desperately needs. If the university is the anvil on which new ideas are forged, I am encouraged by the hammer that has been the commitment and creativity faculty have brought to solving each new problem; our desire to improve is sustained by the fire that is the enthusiasm students have for learning and discovering — even in these strange and difficult times.



SMU ALUMNA INCREASES COLLEGE ACCESS FOR LOCAL STUDENTS

Jennifer Torres-Quintanilla '16, '19 graduated from SMU with bachelor's degrees in human rights and public policy and a master's degree in dispute resolution and conflict management. She currently works as a Program Specialist in SMU's College Access Department.



Jennifer Torres-Quintanilla (right) with one of her college-bound students.

Dedman College: Tell us a little about yourself! Where are you from? How did you choose SMU?

Jennifer Torres-Quintanilla: I was born and raised in Fort Worth, TX and found my way to SMU thanks to my high school college counselor, Mr. Mills. As a first-generation Latina, I grew up in a very traditional Latino household. Because of that, I was ready to branch out and leave home by going to school out of state. I applied to schools everywhere but Texas until Mr. Mills required me to at least apply to one in-state school, and he suggested SMU. I had honestly never heard of SMU before then and applied blindly. SMU surprised me and provided me with the best financial aid package which, coming from a low-income household, was extremely important for my parents and me. Since then, SMU has continued to surprise me with amazing professors and opportunities.

For fun, I enjoy spending time with my family and friends both in the United States and Guatemala. If you have never visited Guatemala, please go (after COVID-19 of course) — it is such a magical place to travel. I may be biased since my family is from Guatemala, but trust me. To relax, I enjoy reading and running. Those are the two things in this world that truly bring me peace and comfort by helping me escape from the fast-paced life I live.

Would you please explain your role as a college access program specialist? What is the relationship between SMU, Dallas County Promise, and H. Grady Spruce High School?

I work in SMU's College Access Department as a Program Specialist and manage our College Knowledge program. The SMU College Knowledge program serves as a College Access Provider (CAP) for the Dallas Independent School District. As a CAP Program, we are contracted by the district to assist DISD high schools in creating a college-going culture by increasing student college applications, scholarship applications, participation and performance on college entrance exams, and parental involvement in the college admissions and financial aid processes.

I was fortunate enough to pilot the SMU College Knowledge Program right after I graduated from SMU in 2016, and I have been able to shape and grow the program these past four years. This year we serve as the CAP for both H. Grady Spruce High School and Barack Obama Male Leadership Academy.

As the CAP for H. Grady Spruce HS, I work very closely with any program or initiative that involves the post-secondary success of our students. I was first introduced to the Dallas County Promise scholarship program during its implementation in the 2017-2018 academic school year. The Dallas County Promise's purpose is to bridge the workforce-talent gap in Dallas; but, for me, it has helped start conversations with students about their post-secondary education. Many first-gen students do not see college as an option because they believe they could never afford it or fear student loan debt, but the Dallas County Promise provides a guaranteed tuition-covered option. It allows me to tell them that going to college is without a doubt possible for them.

What inspired you to get involved with the work you're doing?

If someone had asked me as a senior in undergrad if I wanted to work in a high school, my answer would have been a definite no. This opportunity

was placed in front of me because Dr. David Deggs, the Executive Director of the College Access Department, saw me present for the SMU McNair Scholars at a research conference and found my personal story and academic background to be the perfect fit to help pilot this new program. His belief in me put me in this position — it has allowed me to find my passion in education and develop a program that I find immense pride in.

I think the important question is what keeps me inspired to do this work. Working in education is tiring, stressful, and extremely demanding. But it is important. I was blessed that my fourth grade teacher, Mr. Flora, believed in me enough to talk to my family about having me test for a K-12 college prep private school scholarship. The private school, Trinity Valley School, is every parent's dream for their child's education. It provides endless resources and amazing opportunities. At TVS, there was never a question of IF I would go to college, but WHAT college I would go to. I honestly do not think I would be standing here today with my bachelor's and master's degrees if Mr. Flora had not believed in me enough and taken the time to convince my parents that that scholarship was an opportunity of a lifetime.

Now, I want to be each one of my students' "Mr. Flora." I want to be the person who helps each student realize their full potential and possibilities. I want to be the person who helps tell their parents that it is okay to let them grow and be successful. The idea of being a student's person is what inspires and motivates me to go to work every day.

How did your studies in human rights and public policy prepare you for working in the school system?

I will always be thankful for my human rights and public policy education because it has given me the perfect combination of empathy, understanding, and analytical skills needed to navigate the world of post-secondary education. The SMU Human Rights Program allowed me to see that human rights work is everywhere, even in our schools. My

human rights professors not only taught me to see the issues, but also how to address them with grace, empathy, and dynamism. My public policy major has enabled me to analyze the data and constantly changing policies that drive education in our nation. Both of these areas of study have helped me understand the balance that must be achieved when dealing with students and systems.

"I know from personal experience the impact a college degree can have on a person's future, their family's future, and ultimately, their community's future. Every student I can get to believe in themselves and pursue post-secondary education is another student who will affect change."

What has it been like working as a college access specialist during the COVID-19 pandemic? How have you adapted? Has your role shifted at all?

Every time I get asked what it is like to work in education during this time, my response is always the same: it is like building a plane mid-flight. The world of education right now is unpredictable and constantly changing. While we all wish we could stop, think, and plan, it's difficult because our students do not wait. They need us, and they need us now.

During a regular school year, I can meet with multiple students at a time in the College Center. I can juggle students working on multiple things, including college applications, FAFSA, Promise Pledge, and scholarship applications all at the same time, in the same room. I spend my time jumping from student to student talking to them and answering any questions they may have. This year, I instead jump from one student zoom meeting to the next.

Our program has been able to successfully shift into the virtual space, but it has been an adjustment for everyone. For example, I typically host a FAFSA Night event in October where, in the past, we have had over ninety students and parents show up to receive financial aid application assistance. This year, social distancing protocols

have prevented us from hosting events of this size and caliber. Instead, we held a virtual Financial Aid Week where students could sign up for virtual one-on-one FAFSA/TASFA appointments with a trained volunteer to complete their financial aid application.

As we work through the school year, the College Knowledge program continues to be creative in order to provide our students with the same opportunities and experiences they would get in "normal" times.

What about college excites or concerns the students with whom you work? How do you address those topics?

I work with a student population that is made up of minority first-generation students from low-income households, so there is a lot about college that both scares them and excites them. Their fears include the cost of a college education, leaving home, not being smart enough, and failing. Among the things that excite them are the possibilities of a new place and a new adventure, living on their own, being the first, and making their family proud.

I have to juggle the fears and dreams of both students and parents. I make sure to dedicate the time to have conversations with students and parents both together and separately. I can empathize with the students because these fears and excitements are the same ones I felt when I was in their shoes. I empathize with the parents because I remember my own mother's hesitation to let me go, even though her biggest dream was for me to attend college. I always remind each parent of their dreams for their child. I also remind each student that they are capable, smart, strong, and that only they can stop themselves from achieving their wildest dreams.

What impact do you hope your work makes in your students' lives and the community?

I know from personal experience the impact a college degree can have on a person's future, their family's future, and ultimately, their community's future. Every student I can get to believe in themselves and pursue post-secondary education is another student who will affect change.

They will be the older sibling that a younger sibling admires and follows. They will be the new engineer, lawyer, psychologist, social worker, nurse, doctor, or teacher that will come back to the community they grew up in and give back. They are our future.

What is the most rewarding aspect of your job?

Every year on the day of graduation I finally share with my seniors my personal contact information and social media handles so that we can stay connected. I feel immensely proud when I see my students post pictures of their move-in day, joining Greek life, studying in the library, playing on a college football team, or just being a thriving college student. I have even had the privilege of visiting some of my graduates on their college campuses when I take other students to tour at their university. It makes me extremely proud to see them be successful and "making it."

The first graduating class I ever worked with at Spruce was the Class of 2017, who will be graduating from college in 2021. I have already seen some of them post how they are now applying for law school or master's programs. I cannot wait to see them walk the stage for the second time. Their success is the most rewarding aspect of this job.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

It is truly amazing the effect we can each have on the trajectory of a young person's life, and I strongly encourage everyone who can to volunteer to mentor a younger student. Be that ONE PERSON for someone.



\$2.3 million NSF grant awarded to SMU Department of Mathematics for Research Training Group

SMU Department of Mathematics builds expert teams that foster interdisciplinary research and strengthen mathematical career interest.

The SMU Department of Mathematics was awarded a \$2.3 million grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to build the Southern Methodist University Research Training Group (SMU-RTG) — a collection of interdisciplinary teams made up of mathematicians, engineers, chemists, and neuroscientists that collaborate with junior scholars and provide training in modeling and computation.

The Department of Mathematics will utilize its core strengths in modeling and scientific computing and its ongoing success in placing graduates in a range of careers as they build SMU-RTG over the next five years.

“The SMU-RTG program supports efforts to improve research training by involving undergraduate students, graduate students, postdoctoral associates, and faculty members in structured research groups centered on a common research theme. Effectively, this will be a full departmental effort,” says Alejandro Aceves, SMU-RTG Principal Investigator, SMU Mathematics professor and department chair.

According to the NSF website, the research groups involved in the SMU-RTG will address problems in emerging scientific fields such as data-driven models in neuroscience, the nonlinear dynamics of the electric power grid and other large-scale networks, and the fabrication and modeling of nanoscale structures.

Aceves adds that the structure of the SMU-RTG research and training activities have been designed to respond to the key NSF objective which states, “The long-range goal of the RTG programs is to strengthen the nation’s scientific competitiveness by increasing the number of well-prepared U.S. citizens, nationals, and permanent residents who pursue careers in the mathematical sciences.”

“Our Department of Mathematics has long been unusually strong in interdisciplinary research. This grant will allow our top researchers to train budding mathematicians at all levels, from undergraduate through postdoctoral, in cutting-edge work that will grant them greater access to careers in industry, the nation’s laboratories, and the academy,” said Dedman College Dean Thomas DiPiero.

Receiving this prestigious award is a recognition of SMU and its Mathematics Department’s prominence. The department is taking a leading role in addressing this important mission for the country.

RTG UNDERGRADUATE AND PHD FELLOWS' SUMMER 2020 RESEARCH



Sabrina Hetzel and Jonathan Lindbloom have worked on modeling the COVID-19 pandemic. Sabrina just presented her work at a (virtual) regional SIAM conference. Jonathan is expected to graduate with his B.S. in mathematics in May 2021.



Steven Walton initiated a study group on Machine Learning.



Molly Robinson and Elyssa Sliheet worked with Dr. John Nemunaitis at Gradalis Inc. on an antitumor immunotherapy, called Vigil.



Dedman Faculty and Fellows Use Multimedia to Engage with the Community



The Past, The Promise, The Presidency A podcast by the Center for Presidential History

WHAT: *The Past, The Promise, The Presidency Season One: Race and the American Legacy* explores the intertwined history of race in America and the American presidency. The purpose is to bring good history to the national conversation. As the country grapples with its difficult racial past in the midst of this tumultuous

presidential election year, we wanted to help listeners to at least get the history right!

To accomplish this, we record conversations with expert historians and discuss each president’s era, policies, personality, and effect upon both race relations and the presidency itself. We draw upon a wide variety of academic scholars and public historians to help us make this history accessible to listeners. Whenever possible, we interview scholars who can broaden our understanding of race beyond discussions of relations between whites and African Americans. These scholars illuminate the complex history of American race relations through the lens of the presidency.

The podcast opens with segments from the two separate interviews and follows with a conversation between the three co-hosts. In that follow-up discussion, the co-hosts digest the major themes from the talks and reflect on how what they learned shapes their thinking about that president as well as the presidency before or since.

WHO: Dr. Jeffrey A. Engel, Dr. Lindsay Chervinsky, and Postdoctoral Fellow Dr. Sharron Wilkins Conrad host the podcast. Dr. Brian Franklin and Postdoctoral Fellows Dr. Kaete O’Connell and Dr. Amanda Regan assist with pre-and post-production work. The podcast’s theme music was composed by Marshall Engel.

WHEN: New podcasts are released every Thursday! The first season exploring presidencies from Abraham Lincoln through Donald Trump will continue through April 2021.

WHERE: iTunes, Google Play, Spotify, and the podcast website. Check it out [here!](#)

WHY: The nation is facing a reckoning in 2020, and it’s happening on a number of fronts: a global pandemic, race relations, and the nation’s leadership and direction. Placing all of this in historical context is absolutely essential, and we think adding the voices of thoughtful historians can help. Ultimately, we want to make this history accessible and interesting to a broad audience. The Center for Presidential History’s public engagement mission is to broaden understanding of presidential history, and its potential for aiding ongoing contemporary debates for our nation’s future course. *The Past, The Promise, The Presidency* podcast meets that commitment.

Information provided by Dr. Sharron Wilkins Conrad.

LitNight Reading Series with Sanderia Faye Smith



WHAT: LitNight Reading Series is a monthly series that honors and supports professional and emerging authors, writers, and their literature, featuring a different host and authors every month.

WHO: Founded and hosted by Sanderia Faye Smith, Assistant Professor of Practice in the SMU Department of English and national award-winning author of *Mourner’s Bench*.

WHEN: Monthly! Check out our social media for dates.

WHERE: Zoom - you can find the link on the LitNight Facebook page, Twitter, and Instagram (@LitNightDallas)

WHY: LitNight’s mission is to establish Dallas as a city of ideas, where literature thrives and encourages conversations about critical topics such as race, gender, immigration, prison reform, religion, LGBTQIA+ issues, among other subjects.





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