

From: [Loba, Elizabeth](#)
To: [Loba, Elizabeth](#)
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SMU®

Office of the Provost

July 17, 2020

Dear Faculty and Staff:

Let me begin by thanking you all for such a warm welcome to the SMU community! In these unprecedented times, and in the face of so many new and stressful challenges, you have gone out of your way to make my transition successful. I am grateful for the many ways each of you is tirelessly working, both individually and collectively, toward offering a safe and healthy reopening in fall 2020.

As we begin our work together, I want to demonstrate my commitment to open and transparent communication. I regularly, and as close to real-time as possible, share e-mails with my leadership team about key decisions, activities and other informational items. Heightened communication is vital to our success in managing the challenges of the COVID-19 outbreak, but it will remain equally important once we reach a steady state. These weekly updates will serve as a tool to help you stay informed and engaged with SMU's academic affairs division. To provide as broad an update as possible, my goal is to keep the content brief and to provide you links/attachments with additional information as needed. Today's update falls into two categories: 1) Preparing for Fall 2020 and 2) Updates on Faculty Success.

Preparing for Fall 2020

- **Expanded student outreach** – Working with Sheri Kunovich, Associate Provost for Student Academic Engagement and Success, we have begun a campaign to increase student awareness about fall scheduling. Last week, and in response to student concerns that preliminary schedules were showing many courses scheduled as “remote delivery,” Sheri sent a message to students providing an overview of fall 2020's course schedule and course formats (in-person/SMUFlex and online-only). In that message, we affirmed to students that our goal is to limit the number of required scheduling changes and alerted them to changes to the schedule that will be visible over the next few weeks in my.SMU that will help them determine best options should they wish to make any

elective schedule changes. Sheri's email to students is available [here](#).

- **Expanded faculty/staff outreach** – We recognize that Sheri's email to students about the fall 2020 course schedule and formats will likely generate questions from students to faculty and staff. In response, we sent an email to faculty and staff with a few key points to keep in mind when communicating with students and their parents about changes to the fall academic schedule of classes. The faculty version of the email is available [here](#).
- **Faculty preparation for online-only course delivery** – Working with deans and department chairs, the Office of the Provost approved a list of faculty who will be teaching their courses online-only in fall 2020. A joint team from Office of Information Technology (OIT), Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE), and Libraries, with input from SMU Global and Online (SMU GO), developed two required courses (one focused on Canvas, one focused on online teaching) to support these faculty members in their delivery of high-quality instruction through fully online modalities. The training is open to all faculty, not just those who requested online-only in the fall, and many additional faculty members have signed up to take the courses as well. As of Wednesday, 467 faculty had enrolled in these courses; 121 have finished the Canvas course and 26 have finished both courses. Training sessions are ongoing through the month of July. Thank you to deans and department chairs for encouraging faculty to complete this important training and thank you to the team members serving as trainers.
- **Required Canvas use** – Over the last two years, Student Senate and the student advisory board to OIT have repeatedly asked that faculty consistently use Canvas. They have identified the effective use of Canvas for managing course documents, announcements, and the gradebook as important to their student experience. Student feedback from their experience in the spring also confirms that an effective Canvas course was critical to the transition to remote coursework. Faculty who have completed Canvas training or regularly use Canvas also report greater satisfaction and ease in communicating with students and managing assignments. Therefore, it is important that all faculty use Canvas to deliver their courses, whether the course is SMUFlex or fully online. Canvas is a secure, student-friendly system of record for the University that helps fulfill accessibility and technology requirements as well as archival needs. It is also required for all Gen Ed courses, and student support for uniform use across campus is extremely strong. Minimum use of Canvas includes:
 - Publishing a syllabus with information about technology tools, student services, netiquette, academic integrity and expectations for grading/response times.
 - Communicating with students using Canvas Announcements.
 - Checking in each weekday with students in your course.
 - Organizing class content using Modules.

- Using the Canvas Gradebook so that students can keep track of their progress.
 - Connecting smoothly to SMU library course resources.
 - Assigning a variety of assessments/assignments.
- **Fall scheduling** – To meet the educational needs and desires of our students, and in particular, new incoming and international students, we are working hard to provide an average of 75% of fall 2020 undergraduate course offerings via in-person/SMUFlex format. Members of my team, most notably Peter Moore and Michael Tumeo, are working with deans and department chairs to make the necessary adjustments to the fall schedule that will allow us to reach our goal. By today, July 17th, we should have a base schedule that will be released to deans. Schedulers will have access to the base schedule early next week with distribution to a wider audience shortly after that. Although this is only her first week in her role as Associate Provost for Faculty Success, Paige Ware is also actively engaging deans, associate deans and department chairs with help and recommendations. My thanks to everyone for the tireless effort in service to our students and our academic mission!
 - **Facilities** – SMU Facilities Planning and Management (FPM) is upgrading all air filters in air handler units across campus, as a strategy to improve air quality in all University buildings. See the web page [here](#) for more information. All air filters will be updated from the current MERV 10 level to the highest rated filtration level effective for SMU's air handler system - MERV 13. The diagram on the page details the filtration ratings, and the types and amounts of particles captured. FPM is also committed to informing students, faculty and staff of steps and measures taken to protect the SMU community, as we prepare for the fall semester. The guide at the bottom of the [same web page](#) communicates the cleaning protocols and strategic communication plan developed specifically with regard to prevention of the spread of COVID-19 on our campus.
 - **Additional time between classes** – In response to a recommendation by the Academic Continuity subcommittee and based on faculty requests and feedback from the Faculty Senate town hall, we are recommending a five-minute increase to the time between classes (from 10 minutes to 15 minutes). This will allow faculty and students additional transition and set-up time. This recommendation should go before the President's Executive Council (PEC) next week for approval. If this change is approved, we will communicate the change to faculty, staff and students, and start/end times will be adjusted to provide a full class period for instruction.
 - **Decision on return-to-campus COVID-19 testing** – Testing provides a snapshot of a person's status at a point in time and does not predict what will happen in the future. Many times, people take tests at a time when their viral load is not high enough to show a positive test. Negative

results of this sort give people the impression that they are healthy when they might actually be asymptotically exposing community members. Everyone needs to wear masks, social distance and not have a false belief that they are not positive when it is possible they are, or may become, positive. With this in mind, SMU does not plan to conduct blanket return-to-campus COVID-19 testing for students at the start of the fall 2020 semester.

This decision is also supported by concerns raised in a recent [Wall Street Journal article](#) about the strains that asymptomatic testing would put on the supply chain. The article is behind a paywall, but here is a key quote: “The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is discouraging widespread testing of the asymptomatic as a screening tool, recommending instead that schools follow the lead of such cities as Austin, Texas, which is preserving testing capacity by focusing on symptomatic patients. The American Academy of Pediatrics, in a statement, said testing all students for infection before the start of school is ‘not feasible in most settings at this time.’”

- **Refreshed website** – A refreshed website has been launched to give students, faculty and staff a more seamless navigation experience into SMU’s COVID-19-related information. The website includes the latest campus updates, resources and frequently asked questions, as well as a preview of what the SMU community can expect as they learn, teach and work in the fall. Visit www.smu.edu/coronavirus for more information.
- **SMU CAN and community pledge to protect** – The SMU Community Action Network (SMU CAN) was established last month to support greater understanding and adoption of the personal responsibilities (e.g., regular handwashing, social distancing, face coverings, self-monitoring and reporting in the event of exposure to COVID-19, and taking additional proactive measures such as flu shots, all in a spirit of cooperation). SMU CAN includes members from SMU’s faculty, staff and student communities, including Student Senate, whose leaders have committed to promoting the need for personal responsibilities among students. As a first step to promote a safe return, SMU CAN has developed a community “pledge to protect” which we will be encouraging all community members to review and sign. More information will be coming soon.
- **Town halls** – President R. Gerald Turner and I will hold a town hall with SMU’s faculty and staff to provide updates on our plans for a safe and healthy fall 2020. That meeting, the first of many engagement activities, will take place today, July 17th from 1:30 – 2:30 p.m. I encourage you to join the meeting via zoom at <https://smu.zoom.us/j/91386144801>. We anticipate hosting more opportunities for engagement, focused on particular issues so that we can invite more opportunities for synchronous faculty and staff input.
- **Enrollment update** – Despite the challenges of recruiting and enrolling

students during a global pandemic, we expect to open the fall semester with full enrollment. Though these numbers change even in a calm year, we currently estimate that we will have approximately 6,700 undergraduate students with us this fall either in person or online. An incredible effort to recruit new students in a new virtual admission environment will lead to a record first-year class that is more ethnically and racially diverse than any in SMU's history. We expect retention will increase as well, thanks to the work to enroll continuing students. I applaud those in the Division of Enrollment Services, in Student Academic Engagement and Success, and across the University who have made these efforts successful.

- **Contact tracing** – In conversations with faculty, staff and students, it has become clear that we need to distribute clear and concise information about SMU's approach to contact tracing, communication regarding positive cases, etc. The Emergency Operations Center (EOC), in partnership with the OIT and Student Affairs, has developed detailed documentation. The Health Center, with help from Risk Management and Marketing and Communications (MarComm), has developed easy-to-understand visuals and printable instructions on the contact tracing process, available [here](#).
- **Black @ SMU** – The urgency for true equality that the senseless deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and countless other Black men and women has galvanized across our country has been on my heart and mind for weeks. Over the past weeks, President Turner, Vice President K.C. Mmeje and Dr. Maria Dixon Hall convened a series of 90-minute town halls with our Black faculty, students, staff, and alumni. Although I had not officially started as provost at the time, I am thankful that President Turner included me and I was able to attend all of these town halls. While painful and profound, these meetings left each of us with a renewed commitment to ensure that we are all living the SMU values of excellence, integrity, intellectual freedom, open dialogue, diversity and inclusion. The University and this office have begun the task of reviewing their recommendations and charting a path forward. The deans and I began this work last week. I will continue to update you as we proceed.

Faculty Success

- **Associate Provost for Faculty Success** – Paige Ware, professor and Associate Dean of Academic Affairs in the Simmons School of Education and Human Development, joined the Provost's Office team on Monday, July 13 as Associate Provost for Faculty Success. See announcement [here](#). I am thrilled to have Paige on the team and encourage you to welcome her to this new role. She has asked me to let you know that she will be communicating frequently with our associate deans and department chairs in the days and weeks ahead, and that she welcomes anyone to reach out.

- **University Distinguished Professors** – Seven (!) SMU professors have been either reappointed or newly appointed as University Distinguished Professors. Appointment decisions are based on recommendations from deans and endorsed by a six-person ad hoc faculty committee working with the Office of the Provost. See the announcements [here](#) and [here](#) and please congratulate the following faculty members on this distinction:
 - Jill Allor, Simmons School of Education and Human Development (newly appointed)
 - Yildirim Hurmuzlu, Lyle School of Engineering (newly appointed)
 - Lolita Buckner Inniss, Dedman School of Law (newly appointed)
 - Jeffrey Kahn, Dedman School of Law (newly appointed)
 - Sukumaran Nair, Lyle School of Engineering (reappointed)
 - Santanu Roy, Dedman College (reappointed)
 - Stephen Wegren, Dedman College (newly appointed)
- **SMU Faculty Career Achievement Award** – Caroline Brettell, University Distinguished Professor of Anthropology, has been named the 2020 recipient of the SMU Faculty Career Achievement Award for her contributions to the teaching, scholarship and service missions of the University. Contributions on the level of Professor Brettell's are critical in support of SMU's efforts to reach R1 and top 50 USNWR status. I am thankful to her for her service to SMU and am honored to have the chance to present her with this award. See SMU's press release [here](#).

Sincerely,



Elizabeth G. Loba
Provost and Vice President for
Academic Affairs
Southern Methodist University
P.O. Box 750221, Dallas, TX 75275-0221
egloboa@smu.edu
214-768-3219

