



SMU.

Office of the Provost

July 24, 2020

Dear Faculty and Staff:

As mentioned in last week's inaugural [e-mail](#), 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 a safe and healthy reopening in fall 2020. 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) Virtual Town Hall Follow-ups and 2) Preparing for Fall 2020.

Virtual Town Hall Follow-Ups

- **Faculty/Staff Town Hall on July 17th recap** – President Turner and I held a town hall with faculty and staff to provide updates on SMU's plans for a safe and healthy fall 2020. Thank you to those who were able to attend. A recording of the event is available [here](#) for those who were not able to join.

In our opening remarks, President Turner and I emphasized that student choice, particularly among the undergraduate population which accounts for nearly 75% of the University's operating budget, has been an important, though far from singular, factor in shaping SMU's plans. We shared a financial scenario and modeled the impacts that could follow in the form of faculty/staff furloughs, should we experience decreases in enrollment and/or tuition and student fees. Our desire was to convey the severity of potential impacts we are facing and to underscore the importance of a safe and healthy return to operations.

Our No. 1 priority for the fall is ensuring the safety and well-being of our students, faculty and staff. At the same time, we need to provide our students with the highly personalized, high-touch educational experience that is the hallmark of an SMU education. That is why students choose to come to SMU. This is truly a moment of crisis for universities across the country, and I know we all want SMU to succeed and thrive for generations to come. Our students want to be on campus and in our classrooms, and we believe that our extensive planning and consultation with health experts means that we can do that successfully and safely. Faculty and staff, at all levels of the University, have been working tirelessly this spring and summer to design and implement a strategy to protect community members in a way that also preserves our ability to

operate to the level we all desire for SMU. A refreshed [website](#) to better describe the plans was launched last week.

- **Additional town halls** – Our next town hall, for students and parents, will take place on July 29 from 3:30–4:30 p.m. Vice President for Student Affairs K.C. Mmeje and I will join President Turner in hosting this event. We anticipate hosting more engagement activities, focused on particular issues, so that we can invite more opportunities for synchronous faculty and staff input.
- **Additional options for community members needing child care** – During last week’s town hall we heard your concerns about the added pressures to identify child care needs, particularly as Texas School Districts are finalizing plans for the reopening of the 2020–2021 school year, with many K-12 public and private schools not holding in-person classes until after Labor Day or later. While K-12 schools are delaying the start of in-person instruction, staff members should continue to work with their respective leadership to accommodate individual and family circumstances as they have been doing since last spring. President Turner’s [announcement](#) this morning explains additional options SMU is offering for staff parents who choose to keep their children home or who are in school districts that are not open for face-to-face classes until later this fall. Identifying additional child care offerings for the SMU community has, and will continue to be, a priority for the President’s Executive Council (PEC) and deans’ meetings. We hope to provide additional options in the coming days and weeks. I have asked Associate Provost for Faculty Success Paige Ware to take the lead on this issue for faculty, and she will begin engaging deans, department chairs, and individual faculty members next week.
- **COVID-19 testing resources and insurance coverage for SMU community**

Also during the town hall, there were many questions about what medical and testing support SMU will provide to community members. As a clarification regarding medical coverage for illness, only employees and their dependent(s) who are currently enrolled in SMU’s medical plans are covered for medical treatment should they become ill. However, free rapid [COVID-19 testing](#) is available for all SMU employees and their dependents. SMU will cover testing costs for all SMU staff and faculty members and their dependents who have symptoms or circumstances in which they may have been exposed to the virus.

Preparing for Fall 2020

- **Update on student outreach** – Last week, Associate Provost Sheri Kunovich sent a message to students describing the two instructional formats offered in fall 2020 – remote and in-person/SMUFlex. Students wanting a fully remote experience must complete an online form to request a letter of support. SMUFlex will be the dominant class format this fall, and that message provided students an overview of classroom expectations and safety requirements. Sheri’s email to students is available [here](#).
- **Fall scheduling** – Earlier this month, the PEC and deans discussed the fall schedule of classes, and together set a goal to offer our undergraduate students, on average, the opportunity to take 75% of their courses in the SMUFlex format. Additionally, we arrived at this target in consultation with colleagues in the [Colonial Group](#), many of whom reported offering between 75%–100% of their courses using a hybrid (in-person/remote) delivery model. We felt meeting this goal would assure that most of our students could take a majority of their classes in the in-person/SMUFlex format given that most of our undergraduate students requested to have their courses in person. We appreciate the tremendous efforts of deans, department chairs and faculty, working with a team led by Peter Moore, in working to attain that goal.

After several weeks of concerted effort, several hundred million iterations on ManeFrame II, one final run of 50 million iterations, and tremendous support from the academic community, we were able to load a base schedule into my.SMU for fall 2020. Manual adjustments have been made throughout the week to accommodate a number of faculty concerns. We expect the bulk of those adjustments to be completed by today.

- **More information on implementing SMUFlex** – With the base fall 2020 schedule finalized, we wanted to provide more detail about SMUFlex, which is based on the HyFlex instructional model that can support maximum flexibility to reach all students under the unique circumstances this upcoming semester presents. In practice, excluding classes where room capacity can safely accommodate the full student enrollment, instructors will meet in person with approximately half of their students, while the other half of the class will simultaneously attend virtually via Zoom. To achieve this, students will be assigned to either a “red” or “blue” team grouping. They will come to campus for face-to-face instruction based on their assigned color. We will announce red/blue designations to students during the week of August 10th. In the event that last-minute schedule changes result in an imbalanced mix of red/blue students, there will be an adjustment period to move students to ensure that no classroom has more students than can be accommodated for social distancing. We will work toward solutions that are in students’ best interests. See more in this [e-mail](#) from Associate Provost Paige Ware to faculty and staff.

While SMUFlex is designed to meet the needs primarily of our undergraduate students, we recognize that graduate students are nearly 40% of the University’s student body, and graduate education is vitally

important to the University's research and teaching mission. To meet their needs, we have worked with deans and department chairs throughout the development of the base schedule for graduate students and will continue working to address concerns that arise. Many graduate programs polled their students to help determine the best instructional modalities for their students. We have given deans latitude to make college- and school-level determinations about remote vs. SMUFlex delivery, including the red/blue strategy as needed, to support graduate student course instruction.

- **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, a five-minute increase to the time between classes has been approved. We are in the process of adjusting start/end times to provide a full class period for instruction. These changes to start/end times will extend to evening classes as well. Students who attend evening classes, typically a large number of graduate students, will be notified of these time shifts once finalized so that they can make arrangements to accommodate work schedules and child care.
- **Faculty preparation for online-only course delivery** – A joint team from the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE), Office of Information Technology (OIT), and Libraries, with input from SMU Global and Online (SMU GO), has developed two required courses (one focused on Canvas, one focused on online teaching) to support faculty members in their delivery of high-quality instruction through online modalities. As of Thursday, 149 of the over 300 faculty members exempted to teach remotely have finished the Canvas course, and 40 of those have finished both courses. An additional 145 faculty have voluntarily self-selected to take these courses. Training sessions are ongoing through the month of July.

Non-tenure track, adjunct faculty, and/or graduate-facing faculty who will be teaching online must take these courses as well. We recognize that some faculty who fall into these categories might only learn of the need to teach remotely very near to the start of classes. In cases such as these, arrangements will be made in coordination with deans and department chairs so that those faculty members can complete the training over the course of the semester. Look for more information in future updates.

As a reminder, the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE), Academic Technology Services (ATS) and teams provide assistance with Canvas, Zoom, and instructional support resources to help you prepare for fall 2020. In addition to the many general support resources available at SMU, please make frequent use of your local academic-support partners. Especially if you have any questions, are having any trouble, or want to learn more about either online teaching or new remote technologies in your classrooms – please reach out for personalized assistance. See this [e-mail](#) for school-specific information on support available.

- **Standard syllabus language** – Prior to the beginning of each semester, the Office of the Provost sends a letter to faculty providing guidance on required language for inclusion in course syllabi. Given the challenges we will be facing in fall 2020, you can anticipate additional language to include guidance on topics such as classroom attendance, participation and safety protocols related to instructional activities. Members of my office are currently developing a draft. Once drafting has been completed, we will work with deans, department chairs and the Faculty Senate to finalize and distribute to faculty before the beginning of the fall semester.
- **SMU CAN and community “pledge to protect”** – As a first step to promote a safe return, the SMU Community Action Network (SMU CAN) has developed a community “pledge to protect” which has now been approved by the PEC. Prior to the start of the fall semester, all faculty, staff and students will review and sign the pledge to confirm our understanding and commitment to our personal responsibilities during these challenging times. Click [here](#) to review and sign. Please note that to submit, we request that community members provide their name and SMU ID. This is not an effort to identify individuals who have not signed, but rather to understand the level of commitment in the different segments of our campus community. This pledge is also included in the student return-to-campus training.

Sincerely,



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