



# SMU®

*Office of the Provost*

October 16, 2020

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 to advance the goals of SMU's strategic plan and continue to move SMU forward and upward. If you have suggestions for what we should include in future communications, please send your ideas to this [email address](#). Previous newsletters are available [here](#). Today's update falls into four categories: 1) SMU's Road to R-1, 2) Fall 2020, 3) Spring 2020, and 4) News and Noteworthy

## **SMU'S Road to R-1**

- **College/school research spotlight** – SMU's Darwin Deason Institute for Cyber Security received more than \$1 million in new research grants for quantum informatic research. The grants are part of a collaboration with Bra-Ket Science, Inc., an Austin, Texas start-up company formed to develop intellectual property created jointly with SMU researchers. The broad goal of the project is to enhance cybersecurity through the use of quantum informatics, and the work plan encompasses architecture, algorithms and novel devices. For example, the researchers will advance photonic integrated circuitry for quantum computing and informatics using both standard circuit cells and novel integrated photonic components. The project benefits from AIM Photonics, a photonic integrated circuit foundry originally enabled by the Integrated Photonics Institute for Manufacturing Innovation. SMU researchers design and characterize the AIM Photonics fabricated photonic chips. The relationship between cybersecurity and quantum informatics is of crucial importance to national security. This research project combines expertise in both of these disciplines to produce technology solutions that will be rapidly transferred to market by Bra-Ket Science and industry partners. Kudos to Mitch Thornton, Cecil H. Green Chair of Engineering, and Duncan MacFarlane, Bobby B. Lyle Centennial Chair in Engineering Entrepreneurship, for this accomplishment.
- **Investing in a culture of collaboration** – Last week, SMU announced an \$11.5 million gift from Aurelia and Brad Heppner, '88 and family to SMU's Edwin L. Cox School of Business, to strengthen the school's

commitment to fostering the leadership skills of tomorrow's executives and investing in groundbreaking research that impacts the business world. The Heppners have committed \$10 million to establish the Heppner Family Commons, creating a new hub for collaboration between members of the Cox School and SMU community, and a centerpiece of the future Cox School renovation and expansion project. Additionally, their gift includes \$1.5 million designated to support Cox faculty research from the Heppner Endowments for Research Organizations (HERO).

You can [read more about the impact the Heppners' gift will have – and watch a video of last week's announcement event](#) – on the SMU website.

- **Better understanding of *U.S. News and World Report's* (USN&WR) student outcome (e.g., retention, graduation) metrics** – As mentioned in previous newsletters, SMU is ranked 66 in USN&WR's 2021 ranking of national universities, with a goal of being within the top 50 universities. We are reviewing the data to develop and refine our action plan to reach this goal, with our areas of focus being: 1) retention rates, 2) graduation rates, 3) affordability, particularly for Pell-eligible students, and 4) increasing the University's peer assessment score (an externally rated perception of the academic quality of an institution) as reported by college/university senior leadership.

For the past two weeks, we have focused on understanding and, ultimately, improving the University's peer assessment score. In today's newsletter, I want to share a more detailed look at what we are learning about the importance of improving our retention and graduation rates, particularly with SMU's focus in recent years on improving student selectivity (as measured by ACT and SAT scores).

In the USN&WR evaluation system, rankings are not just an indication of improvement, but an indication of improvement relative to other national universities. SMU has improved in our first-year retention rate (87% to 91%) and six-year graduation rates over the past 15 years (71% to 81%). However, SMU has not increased our first-year and six-year rates at a pace that is keeping up with other national universities. Further, SMU has not increased our first-year and six-year rates enough to account for the increasing quality of the incoming classes.

This is reflected in a "graduate performance rank" by USN&WR based on a predicted vs. actual graduation rate where the higher the incoming student quality means the higher the expected graduation performance. To illustrate the way this impacts our ranking, please see the charts below.

Figure 1: Comparison of SMU's average first-year retention and average six-year graduation rates with overall and graduation/retention rankings.

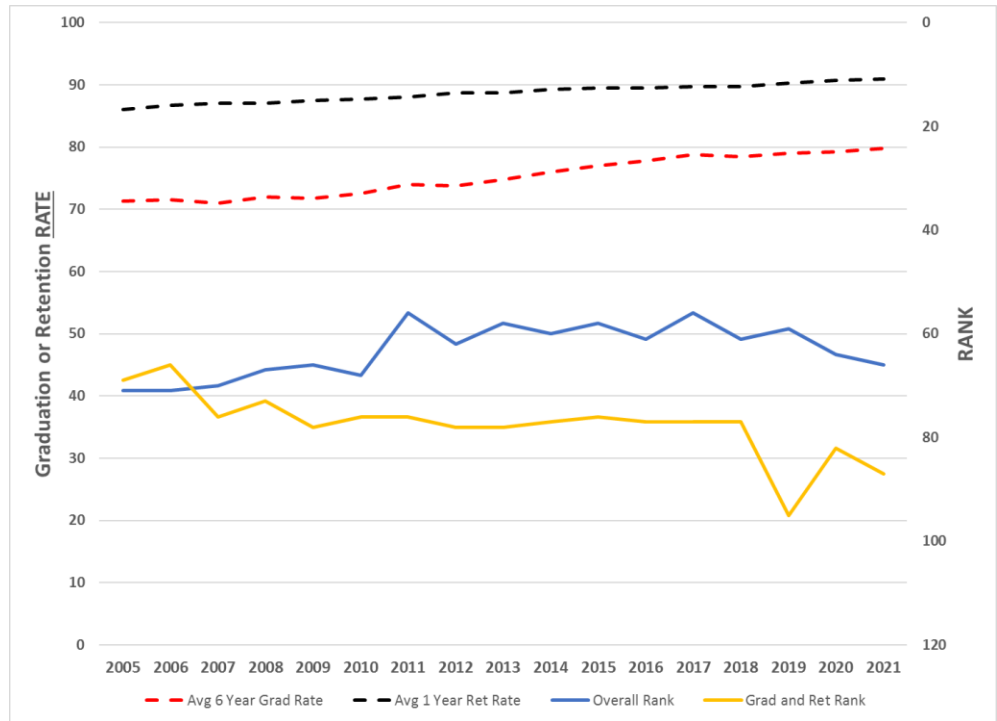
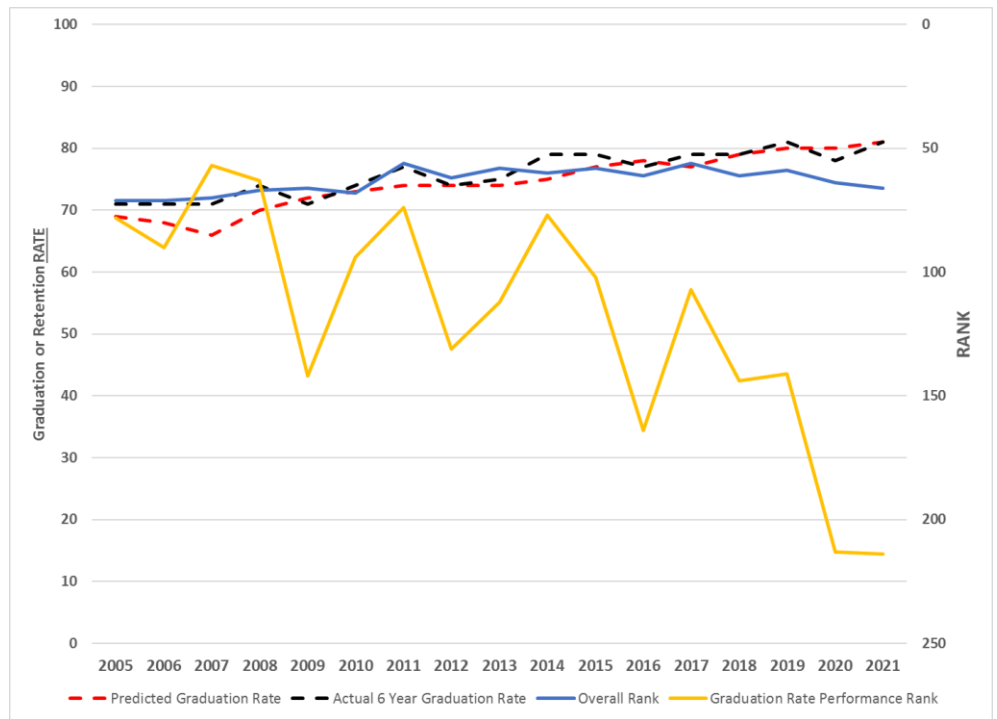


Figure 2: Comparison of SMU's predicted six-year graduation rate and actual six-year graduation rates with overall and graduation performance rankings



When thinking about making improvements in the area of graduation, it is important to remember that six-year graduation rates are a lagging metric. SMU's decisions made in 2014 will only be made manifest in 2020. Any decisions SMU makes in 2021, for example, will not be realized until 2027. Despite these challenges, it will be critical that we continue to find ways to expand recent improvements in retention and six-year graduation rates for our students.

### **Fall 2020**

- **Flu shots are available at Expressway Tower and remote pharmacy locations** – A limited number of flu shots are available at tents on campus set up by the Dr. Bob Smith Health Center. With the next shipment of vaccines delayed, as staff and faculty, you are encouraged to help preserve the supply for students by getting your vaccine at the Urgent Care drive-thru tent at Expressway Tower. Visit this [website](#) for additional information.
- **Campus health and safety update** – As of today, we have 45 student cases and 11 employee positive COVID-19 cases. With a recent slight increase in cases, we are working with impacted areas to make the necessary operational changes to limit the risk of additional spread. All recent positive COVID-19 cases have been students or staff. There are currently no reported active faculty cases. Our operational level remains in the “moderate” category. Remember that our operational level is reviewed each week and any necessary updates made are posted each Monday afternoon on the [Mustang Strong website](#). SMU's recent, and so far, modest increase in cases mirrors similar trends within the region. Working together, we have done a great job remaining safe and vigilant. Now is not the time to let up! Thank you for your continued flexibility and vigilance in these challenging times.
- **New COVID-19 case count dashboard** - As a reminder, last week SMU released a refreshed, interactive dashboard to keep community members informed about key information such as case counts, infection rates and isolation capacity. SMU has identified a technical issue in the automated system that feeds case numbers into the COVID-19 dashboard. The discrepancy only affected the previously reported student cases on October 12-13, not faculty or staff cases. The dashboard was put on hold October 14-15 while the issue was resolved. As of October 16, all numbers have now been verified, corrected and updated manually. Going forward, automated updates to the dashboard will reflect the previous day's case counts.
- **Investigating new outdoor seating options for spring 2021** – In response to requests from student leadership, the Office of Facilities Planning and

Management and the Division of Student Affairs are putting together a proposal to develop new outdoor seating options for our campus community by spring 2021. The President's Executive Council (PEC) is currently reviewing this proposal and will update the campus once our plans are finalized.

- **Reminder: Exams, tests and quizzes to be delivered exclusively online in fall 2020** – All exams, tests and quizzes will be delivered online this fall so that all students, regardless of mode of instruction, have equitable access to testing. We are discouraging in-class, paper-based testing because of the flexibility that everyone might need if case health issues arise. Consult SMU's Keep Teaching [website](#) for additional information and support for this important interim requirement. You can also view this [webinar on Online Exam Basics](#) created by CTE and sent to all faculty by email in late September.
- **October faculty/student survey** – Last week, we gave faculty and students another opportunity to provide feedback on their experiences during the first half of the semester. Thank you to all who participated. To encourage participation among graduate and professional students, we created a separate survey attuned to their experiences. At the close of the survey window this week, rates of submitted and partial participation were on par with, and higher than, in the September survey, with 554 faculty members, 1,590 graduate students, and 1,323 undergraduate students. Mirroring the approach taken to analyze September's feedback survey, work is underway with members of my team and the Faculty Senate to review and analyze the October survey data and to recommend improvements in response to your feedback. Please look for the report in the next two weeks as we continue to monitor how the fall 2020 semester is unfolding under these unique circumstances. In the meantime, if you have any questions about the survey, please reach out directly to either Associate Provosts [Sheri Kunovich](#) or [Paige Ware](#).
- **December Commencement** – Per President Turner's mid-fall [message](#) earlier this week, SMU will celebrate December Commencement with graduates and their families on Saturday, December 19, 2020. We are currently planning an outdoor ceremony in Ford Stadium at 1:00 p.m. for all students and their guests. Should the football team's successful start continue, we can anticipate hosting the football championship game in December, which typically plays early in the month. However, given the pandemic and league scheduling changes, it is possible this game could be delayed by up to two weeks, taking place later in December and resulting in a conflict for space with Commencement. Depending on the football schedule and weather, our back-up option for graduation will be two separate ceremonies that day (one for undergraduate students and one for graduate students) in Moody Coliseum. Regardless of the final location, we

are planning for a safe and healthy celebration to mark this important achievement by our soon-to-be alums.

## **Spring 2021**

- **Spring operations plan development underway** – The [Fall Operations Plan](#) that has guided our campus response will feed into a carefully reviewed and updated operations plan for spring 2021. Development is currently underway on a Spring Operations Plan with an anticipated release to the campus community around Thanksgiving. Through these efforts, our University will remain flexible to the fluid nature of the coronavirus with a clear focus on continuing to offer safely our excellent education and exceptional campus experience to the greatest extent possible.
- **Spring 2021 calendar** – As President Turner [announced](#) this week, we will start our spring 2021 semester a week later than originally planned, on January 25, and continuing straight forward without a spring break through the conclusion of exams on May 12. Good Friday will remain a University holiday. Jan Term classes will be also be available beginning January 7, 2021. The Dedman School of Law will start classes on January 13, and also will continue straight through until the end of exams without a spring break. To accommodate graduating accounting majors with full-time spring internships (30–50 students), the Cox School of Business will offer accelerated accounting courses beginning January 15, 2021. The first four days of class (January 15, 19, 21 and 22) will be fully online.

Many thanks again to the [Spring 2021 Calendar Committee](#) for developing options to promote campus health while maintaining the strength of teaching and learning. I, along with members of the President’s Executive Council (PEC), will be meeting with student leadership in the coming days to discuss their concerns with the spring 2021 calendar and will provide you with updates on our efforts to reduce the added stress of a condensed schedule without built-in pauses such as spring break.

- **Assessment underway for 2021 academic operations at SMU-in-Taos and SMU Abroad** – This week, Dr. Peter Moore and Dr. David Lee convened a meeting of key constituents to review the feasibility of reopening the Taos campus for upcoming 2021 terms. Any recommendation to proceed will be reviewed by the EOC and PEC for approval prior to implementation. Look for additional information in the next 1–2 weeks.

The uncertainties brought on by the pandemic, particularly in the absence of a vaccine, continue to challenge our ability to make definitive plans for study abroad experiences in 2021. Based on current conditions and travel restrictions, SMU does not plan to offer in-person study abroad programs

in spring or summer 2021 at this time. The SMU Abroad office will plan to offer virtual study abroad courses/internships to students in summer 2021.

- **Spring schedule** – Taking lessons learned from fall 2020 scheduling and with greater time for feedback from the colleges/schools, Associate Provost for Curricular Innovation and Policy Peter Moore and his team will release the spring 2021 course schedule on October 19, which can be viewed in my.SMU. Thanks to deans, department chairs, faculty and departmental schedulers for the tremendous effort required to build the spring 2021 schedule.

We will be able to accommodate a limited number of undergraduate courses as fully in person for spring 2021. Priorities will be given to courses such as labs and performance-based classes. We will also continue to offer SMUFlex courses and virtual-only classes. Spring enrollment by appointment for undergraduates will take place November 16–20. Open enrollment will continue until the end of the add period.

We expect that in the spring, faculty members teaching any in-person classes, both SMUFlex and fully in person, will be able to require attendance for all non-virtual students with the proviso that students unable to attend due to COVID-19 or flu symptoms (or, in the case of COVID-19, isolation or quarantine) will be able to join through Zoom. Thus, faculty will need to continue recording all classes. Additionally, we expect that a sizeable number of our undergraduates will continue to be virtual. Our hope is to reduce the number of virtual-only students in SMUFlex classes. Once we have actual enrollments, we will likely be able to make some room changes that will open up more courses that could, theoretically, be shifted from SMUFlex to fully in person. This will require close consultation and collaboration with faculty and department chairs to make the final determinations on which additional courses to offer fully in person.

### **News and Noteworthy**

- **Undergraduate Fall Research Symposium** – The Office of Engaged Learning and partners will present the undergraduate fall research symposium on Wednesday, October 28 from 3:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. At this event, you will have the opportunity to watch undergraduate research presentations from seven distinguished undergraduates via Zoom. Dr. Maryann Cairns from the Department of Anthropology and her undergraduate research assistants will provide the keynote address. Click [here](#) to register.

If you don't have time on the 28<sup>th</sup>, you can [take a look](#) at some of the spring poster winners at any time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elizabeth G. Loba', written in a cursive style.

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