



SMU

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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

- **Department Chair Retreat presentation overview** – At today's Department Chair Retreat, I reviewed the key themes arising from my conversations with faculty focus groups this semester and discussed strategic initiatives that will support SMU's goals as outlined in our 2016–2025 Strategic Plan, the University's responses to the Black Unity Forum Action Plan, and our Road to R-1.

To date this fall, I have hosted eight Q&A sessions with more than 600 faculty members, asking five standard questions across all groups. Broadly speaking, there are five themes emerging from these conversations:

- Research Capacity – SMU's high expectations for research productivity and performance and scholarly impact need to be matched by an R-1 research context.
- Structural change – The strategic reallocation of budgetary resources to prioritize research and performance and scholarly impact will require important investments that signal these activities are at the same level as undergraduate education and athletics.
- Continued excellence in teaching – Address any lingering concerns that R-1 will negatively impact teaching; demonstrate how research informs and inspires great teaching and strengthens our teaching mission.

- Identity – SMU needs to be more precise about what it is or is not and be more intentional about promoting a research image regionally, nationally, and globally.
- Faculty morale – After some difficult years, there is a need to regain faculty trust.
- Equity – There is a need to address equity concerns across a broad range of policies (e.g., promotion and tenure, workload) and processes (merit).

I plan to continue these meetings over the course of the semester and would also like to expand my understanding by meeting with individual academic departments. If there are any departments that are interested in such a conversation, please coordinate with your Department Chair and send a message to this [email address](#). I am also working with Dr. Paige Ware, Associate Provost for Faculty Success, to consolidate feedback and develop short- and long-term action plans. We will continue to keep you informed.

- **Performance-based funding model overview** – In consultation with the Deans, my office is developing a performance-based funding model that will inform and promote the transparent distribution of discretionary funds annually from the Office of the Provost to SMU’s academic units. Beginning in fiscal year 2022, we will introduce the performance-based funding model to distribute discretionary funding while also retaining SMU’s standard incremental funding model for budget creation.

The performance-based funding model is designed to reward academic units for actual performance based on transparent measurements and metrics that align with our strategy as defined by key documents such as the Strategic Plan and SMU’s response to the Black Unity Forum Action Plan.

While exact metrics, as well as their relative importance, are still in development with the Deans, examples of metrics include:

- For undergraduate programs (UG):
 - Academic program health (e.g., # of majors/minors)
 - Size of UG courses
 - UG student retention
 - UG student graduation rates
 - UG student diversity
 - Student outcomes (post-graduation employment)
- For graduate/Ph.D. programs:
 - Student quality
 - Student diversity
 - Post-graduation placement
 - Ph.D. student throughput
 - Ph.D. student discontinuance
 - Ph.D. student funding

- Research
 - Research expenditures
 - Research expenditures/faculty member
 - External funding for post-docs
 - Faculty scholarly/creative output, awards and recognition
 - Research space utilization
- Management
 - National ranking of programs
 - Transparent workload policies in place
 - Progress/support of Black Unity Forum Action Plan goals as well as the Strategic Plan
 - Utilization of annual merit
 - Implementation of a transparent college/school-level performance-based budget
 - Financial resourcefulness and utilization of financial aid

Once finalized, anticipated within the next few weeks, we will publicize our initial performance-based funding model. We will gather the necessary data to review outcomes prior to fiscal year 2021-2022 to make refinements as needed.

Fall 2020

- **Enrollment/budget perspectives from other universities** – As I read reports each week about the budgetary challenges sweeping across so many colleges and universities, some preceding but certainly exacerbated by COVID-19, I am reminded how grateful I am for the strong financial position SMU has been able to maintain to this point in the pandemic.

This [opinion piece](#) from last week's *Chronicle of Higher Education* (free to read, site registration required) paints a bleak picture of not only the temporary reduction measures taken in response to the pandemic, but also of the potential need for long-term budget reductions to address the financial stressors that are increasingly common within higher education. I experienced many of these hardships firsthand in my previous institution, the University of Missouri (MU). State budget cuts along with student refunds for certain services created significant budget pressures for MU. As a result, nearly 3,600 employees (out of nearly 18,000) have been furloughed and nearly 2,300 have taken pay cuts in an attempt to address budget shortfalls.

I remain hopeful that SMU can stay well prepared and well positioned despite the financial headwinds challenging higher education. I recognize that SMU's ability to remain in such a strong position has come thanks to the hard work of SMU's faculty and staff – many of whom have taken on additional responsibilities both prior to and throughout the pandemic. Thanks are also in order for our generous donors who help us stay “Mustang Strong” by recognizing and believing in the inspiring contributions of our faculty and staff—and in the community of learning

and growth we all create for our students. Thank you for all that you have done, and continue to do, to move SMU forward and upward during these challenging times.

- **Campus health and safety update** – As of today, we have 65 student cases and five employee positive COVID-19 cases. There are currently no reported active faculty cases. You can follow our trend and drill deeper into case specifics with the recently released SMU [dashboard](#). This interactive tool includes key information such as cumulative and current case counts, infection rates and isolation capacity. Our operational level remains in the “moderate” category. Remember that our operational level is reviewed each week and any necessary updates are posted each Monday afternoon on the [Mustang Strong website](#). Let me remind everyone again how important it is for all of us to remain vigilant and adhere to the protocols we have established to protect ourselves and our community. Thank you for your continued flexibility and caution in this pandemic.
- **October faculty/student survey** – Thank you to all who participated in this month’s faculty and student survey to provide feedback on your experiences during the first half of the semester. 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. We anticipate providing a report next week 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** – 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 (5-0!), we can anticipate hosting the football championship game in December. Given the possibility of league scheduling changes in response to the pandemic, it is possible this game could take place as late as December 19, resulting in a conflict for space with Commencement. Depending on the football schedule (as well as weather), our backup option for graduation will be two separate ceremonies on December 19 (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 update (reminder)** – Development is currently underway on a Spring Operations Plan with an anticipated release to the campus

community around Thanksgiving. The [Fall Operations Plan](#) that has guided our campus response will feed into a carefully reviewed and updated operations plan for spring 2021. With strong planning and the support of our outstanding faculty, staff and students, SMU 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** – On September 16, I charged the [Spring 2021 Calendar Committee](#) to “explore options for the spring 2021 calendar that promote faculty, staff and student health (physical and mental) while continuing to maintain the strength of our teaching and learning and mitigating the financial impacts to the University and to our students.” Committee members were carefully selected to promote broad representation and included Associate Provosts, Associate Deans, Faculty Senate members, staff (Student Life, Registrar, Campus Services and OIT) and Student Senate members.

After nearly two weeks of deliberation, the committee presented four options for consideration: 1) as-is, 2) sprinkled spring break, 3) late start and 4) early finish. They recommended options 2) and 3) for final consideration. I circulated these options in late September/early October with the PEC, Deans, Faculty Senate leadership, and Associate Provosts for review and feedback. In response to my request for feedback, PEC members, Deans, and Associate Provosts provided suggestions that led to our final decision, [announced](#) last week, to 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.

Last week, Student Senate leadership met with Faculty Senate leadership and, to gain a better understanding of faculty and student concerns with the spring 2021 calendar, developed and deployed a survey to SMU’s faculty and students. Faculty and Student Senate leadership met with President Turner on Monday, October 19, to review survey results and to discuss next steps. Per President Turner’s [message](#), SMU will “stay the course” with the current spring schedule.

The Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) has already made a call to the academic leadership group to help generate ideas for ways that faculty can ensure that we have many pedagogical options that will support the successful navigation of the spring semester. From ideas shared, CTE will put together a resource document. If you have ideas to share about reducing possible stress and anxiety that students or colleagues may be facing or recommendations that faculty can implement to improve or better organize the workload in their classes, please send those to cte@smu.edu by Wednesday, October 28. CTE will assemble these collective good ideas and create a resource to share with all faculty, and my office will stay in close contact with faculty through Chairs, Associate Deans and Deans. You may also submit your ideas to our Mustang Strong website’s [spring 2021 suggestion box](#).

- **Spring schedule** – Associate Provost for Curricular Innovation and Policy Peter Moore and his team released the spring 2021 schedule on October 19, which can now 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. Some graduate courses can also be accommodated, with priorities to be determined by the individual schools and college. Undergraduate course priorities will be given to courses such as labs and performance-based classes. For faculty interested in the possibility of shifting a red/blue rotation SMUFlex class to a “Fully In-Person” mode, they should work directly with their Department Chairs to determine the feasibility across variables such as physical space, impact on undergraduate course schedules, and other discipline-specific factors that merit contextual consideration. We will also continue to offer SMUFlex courses and virtual-only classes. Spring enrollment for undergraduates will take place by appointment November 16–20. Open enrollment will continue until the end of the add period.

- **New outdoor seating options for spring 2021** – In response to requests from students, the Office of Facilities Planning and Management and the Division of Student Affairs developed a proposal to expand the number of outdoor seating options for our campus community by spring 2021. Work is underway to determine feasibility and to confirm Wi-Fi access to these outdoor spaces. We will share more detail with the campus once plans are finalized.
- **SMU Abroad** – As a reminder, and based on current travel restrictions, SMU does not plan to offer in-person study abroad programs in spring or summer 2021 at this time. The uncertainties brought on by the pandemic continue to challenge our ability to make definitive plans for study abroad experiences in 2021. The SMU Abroad office will plan to offer virtual study abroad courses/internships to students in summer 2021.

News and Noteworthy

- **G-14 Survey Results** – In spring 2019, SMU joined several universities in the G-14 (formerly the Colonial Group) to conduct a faculty survey. The survey was intended to assess institutional climate, workload, work/life balance, the tenure and promotion process, mentoring, research and scholarship infrastructure and benefits.

In addition to the SMU survey data results, we have access to benchmarking data derived from the responses of the participating G-14 institutions. As we continue on the path to R-1, having a faculty-informed perspective will help us establish a

baseline understanding from which we can measure performance and develop additional opportunities for improvement.

For over a year now, a [working group](#) has been reviewing, analyzing and preparing survey results for distribution to the SMU community. We recognize that these results are being released more than a year after the survey was initially conducted. The committee worked throughout the summer and fall of 2019, and was nearing a final draft in February of 2020. All of the analysis was conducted exclusively by the committee during that time. Obvious circumstances diverted attention to other pressing matters, and we are now, finally, able to release the survey results.

I am pleased to report that the working group has completed its charge and has developed both a final [report](#) that is accompanied by an interactive app built from the raw data (a [user guide](#) is also available to give you instructions on how to access and use the app) as two ways to review the results and to access queries.

- **SMU GO staff reorganization** – Last Friday, SMU reorganized its Global and Online (GO) unit to fall under a new Office of Global, Online, and Continuing Education. This new unit will continue to be led by Dr. Michael Robertson, formerly Associate Provost for Continuing Education, *ad interim*. Dr. Robertson's new title will be Assistant Provost for Global, Online, and Continuing Education, and he will report to Dr. Peter Moore, Associate Provost for Curricular Innovation and Policy.

The new Office of Global, Online, and Continuing Education includes the SMU GO division, as well as a reformed SMU Continuing and Professional Education (CAPE) division. Moving forward, SMU GO will provide central oversight of all current and future online and hybrid learning initiatives across the University, while noncredit offerings will be offered via SMU CAPE.

Sincerely,



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



World Changers Shaped Here

