



SMU

Elizabeth G. Lobo
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Office of the Provost

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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 three categories: 1) SMU's Road to R-1, 2) Fall 2020 and 3) News and Noteworthy.

SMU'S Road to R-1

- **Board of Trustees September meeting follow-up** – On Thursday and Friday last week, I was pleased to represent Academic Affairs during SMU's quarterly meetings with the Board of Trustees. After both Thursday's and Friday's sessions, I received encouraging feedback from Board members in support of both our faculty's research accomplishments and aspirations. As I mentioned last week, my leadership team is working hard to generate the data needed to inform our priorities and investments on the Road to R-1.

[Academic Analytics](#) is one tool used by many R-1 institutions to study faculty research productivity and to identify additional opportunities for funding, faculty honorific awards, and/or collaborations. As one of many approaches that can improve our capacity for data-driven decision making, I'm hopeful that we can begin using Academic Analytics at SMU during the current academic year. I have provided demonstrations to the deans and am happy to do the same for departments if/as needed, and plan to review in some detail during my address to the faculty during the spring 2021 faculty meeting.

- **Rankings** – While rankings alone do not determine our strategy, they are an important – and influential – indicator of how we are viewed by our peers and by the students and parents who make school selections. SMU aims, as a part of its strategic plan, to make improvements that will favorably impact our rankings in

key systems such as *US News & World Report* (USN&WR) and the *Wall Street Journal/Times Higher Education* (WSJ).

- **USN&WR** – As I mentioned in last week’s [newsletter](#), USN&WR released their 2021 rankings of national universities on Monday, September 14. SMU is ranked 66 and has set a goal to be within the top 50 universities.

Over the past few years, USN&WR has made several changes to their ranking system, with increasing focus on outcome-based measures such as: student debt ratios, the number of Pell-grant recipients, and graduation rates (particularly for Pell-grant recipients). Preliminary data analysis indicates that these scoring changes have had a direct impact on SMU’s ability to improve our USN&WR ranking.

We will continue to review this year’s results as we develop our action plan, but our initial areas of focus will be: 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. We know that faculty research and creative activity, in addition to the quality of undergraduate programs, are effective ways to increase a university’s peer assessment score, therefore our achievement of R-1 should also improve our rankings.

- **WSJ** – Last week, the *Wall Street Journal/Times Higher Education* also released its 2021 college/university rankings, and SMU ranked 88 out of 797 national institutions. Similar to the changes introduced by USN&WR over the past few years, the WSJ ranking system places a high priority on student outcomes, such as student engagement, graduation rate, student debt and earnings after graduation.

While there is work to be done in order to meet our goal of top-50 status in USN&WR, I’m encouraged that many of these focus areas are goals within the University’s 2016-2025 Strategic Plan and they also align with components of the Black Unity Forum’s Action Plan (see update below).

- **Innovation seed fund** – Last year, SMU created a seed fund for bold ideas in research and creative activity to elevate SMU’s intellectual footprint and to attract sustainable philanthropic or grant revenue. STEM and non-STEM proposals to the seed fund were reviewed in spring 2020 by separate External Scholarly Advisory Committees (ESACs) recruited to include disciplinary backgrounds appropriate to review the two groups of proposals, to include members of various national academies and learned societies, and representation from federal and philanthropic funding organizations.

All members of each ESAC reviewed and scored all proposals assigned to their committee prior to a two-day Zoom meeting in which each proposal was discussed in detail to identify possible targets for University investment and to provide feedback on proposals. A total of 17 STEM proposals and 9 non-STEM proposals were reviewed by their respective ESACs. Of these, 6 STEM proposals and 3 non-STEM proposals were identified as potential targets for seed funds. Last week, PIs received feedback as developed by their respective ESACs.

- **\$15 million gift to fund economic research and cutting-edge business education at Cox** – Last week, I hope you saw the exciting announcement about the new [Bridwell Institute for Economic Freedom](#), established with the generous support of Mr. and Mrs. Tucker Bridwell (BBA '73, MBA '74). The mission of the Bridwell Institute is to foster the scholarly study and intellectual discussion of the nature, consequences, and causes of economic freedom in our local, state, national, and international communities. The Bridwell Institute seeks to generate and sponsor high-quality, peer-reviewed scholarship related to the nature, consequences, and causes of economic freedom and to enliven conversations, both through on campus instruction and within the community, around the ideas of economic freedom. This model of “research with impact,” made possible by the Bridwell’s inspirational gift, is precisely the type of work that enables our outstanding faculty and staff to be world changers.

Fall 2020

- **Health and Safety update** – Toward the end of last week, we began to see a favorable decline in active student and employee positive COVID-19 cases. The trend has extended into this week, with our active case count falling below 200. As of today, we have 148 student cases and 1 employee case. And there have fortunately been no hospitalizations required of any employees or students to date. As a result of this favorable trend, and the accompanying reduction of the utilization of campus isolation spaces, we were able to change our operational level to the “moderate” category. I would like to express my thanks to community members for adhering to SMU’s “pledge to protect” and encourage everyone to remain vigilant in the days ahead.
- **Changes to the fall operational tool** – This week, SMU [announced](#) changes to the Fall Operational Plan and Fall Operational Assessment Tool (Appendix One of the Fall Operational Plan) that will inform the metrics we use to provide the most effective and safe road map for SMU’s leadership to guide the University through the pandemic. As mentioned in the paragraph above, our change to “moderate” status this week was based on the factors as described in the original version of the Fall Operational Assessment Tool. The changes to the Assessment Tool that were announced this week were made in response to lessons learned after four weeks back on campus and will go into effect next week. Also, you can expect additional changes and improvements to our COVID-19 case count

reporting tool in the near future. We are developing a new dashboard tool that will provide even more information and transparency and will let you know once the dashboard is available.

- **Update on the spring 2021 calendar** – Last week, I [launched](#) a calendar committee consisting of key faculty and staff to explore options for the spring 2021 calendar that will promote campus health while maintaining the strength of teaching and learning. I have asked the committee to provide me multiple scenarios for the spring 2021 calendar by October 5. After consultation with the deans and Faculty Senate leadership, I plan to present a recommendation to the PEC for review and approval. We will announce our plans for the spring 2021 academic calendar once approved.
- **Change in enrollment dates for spring 2021** – In order to create a schedule of classes that has the appropriate balance of course modality delivery and to clearly communicate to students the delivery style of each class before they enroll, SMU has decided to move continuing undergraduate student enrollment for spring term to the week of November 16th through November 20th. As a result of this change, continuing student enrollment, which typically takes place over a three-week period, will now occur over a one-week period. Faculty advisors are encouraged to contact student advisees in advance and recommend to them that they schedule advising appointments in the two to three-week period preceding registration, or possibly earlier; students should also be encouraged to enroll at the beginning of their assigned enrollment window. The compacted registration schedule will cause classes to fill up more quickly than they typically do, and even minor delays in enrollment could limit the course options available to students.
- **Faculty/student survey for early impressions on fall 2020** – Two weeks ago, we gave faculty and students an opportunity to provide feedback on their experiences during the first weeks of the semester. Many thanks to the team of faculty (notably, Alan Itkin, Johnitha Johnson, Meredith Richards, and Elizabeth Stringer) for their thoughtful input, data analysis, and report generation, the fruits of which will be made available next week. Both surveys asked a number of multiple choice items with options for open-ended responses across the areas of campus health safety, classroom experiences, university communications, and operational supports. The report draws on the descriptive statistics of those questions, as well as a synthesis across all open-ended responses to explore themes related to each area. Preliminary findings in just one of these domains (classroom experiences), for example, indicates the following:
 - Student survey. Among the students who took the survey (20.8% of all undergraduate students and 9.3% of all graduate students), just over half of the students (53%) reported being generally satisfied with their overall classroom experiences, with little difference reported whether courses were Virtual (56.6%) or SMUFlex (56.5%). Other responses receiving high percentages included students who either indicated that they had a

few concerns “but believe they are being addressed” or “it is too early to evaluate.” Nine percent of the students responded that they had “many concerns.”

- Faculty survey. 472 faculty participated in the survey, out of 1,154 full-time faculty, adjunct faculty, instructional staff, and graduate teaching assistants who are teaching this fall across all undergraduate, graduate, and professional degree-seeking and non-credit programs. Overall, 43.9% of responding faculty reported being satisfied with their teaching experiences in the first two weeks; faculty teaching virtually were the most likely to be satisfied and the least likely to have many concerns (59.5% and 3.8%, respectively). Faculty teaching in both formats were least likely to be satisfied and more likely to have many concerns (22.2% and 38.9%, respectively).

We will continue to provide monthly opportunities in October and November to provide ongoing feedback through this survey mechanism to establish a rhythm of seeking – and acting upon – your feedback. Please look for additional feedback opportunities as soon as we continue to monitor how the fall 2020 semester is unfolding under these unique circumstances and how to best build the spring schedule. We will be asking, based on response to your feedback this month, for additional input and suggestions on attendance patterns.

- **On-campus event request process** – This is a reminder that in-person meetings of SMU students, staff, and faculty may occur as long as the most current county and state guidelines can be followed within the meeting space. There must also be a way for attendees to participate remotely via Zoom, conference call, etc.

As a part of our current operations, no events beyond the meetings described above will take place on campus. [Employees requesting events](#) must submit [exceptions](#) to the Events Group no later than 10 business days prior to the event for consideration. A recommendation to approve/disapprove will be made by the Group. If further discussion is required, the exception request will be brought forth to the EOC for determination. If PEC review is required, they will make the final determination. Click [here](#) for a description of guidelines for student events.

- **Flu shot availability for employees and students** – Free drive-up/curbside flu shots for SMU faculty and staff are now available every day at Expressway Tower on SMU’s East campus. Please schedule an appointment [here](#). In addition, free flu shots for employees are available with SMU insurance at Walgreens, Kroger, Costco, CVS and CVS-Target pharmacies.

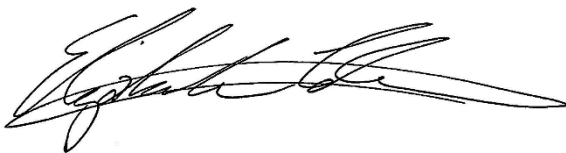
Students are encouraged to watch the Dr. Bob Smith Health Center’s [flu website](#) for additions and changes to the student vaccination schedule.

News and Noteworthy

- **Call for faculty to serve on the Faculty Athletics Admissions subcommittee this year** – As a reminder, please [e-mail Dr. Sheri Kunovich](#), Associate Provost for Student Academic Engagement and Success, if you are a faculty member interested in serving on the Faculty Athletic Admissions subcommittee to support student athletes admitted to SMU. The time commitment is approximately 20 hours over the course of the fall and spring semester.
- **SMU’s response to Black Unity Forum action plan** – This week, members of my leadership team have been finalizing our initial list of Academic Affairs’ responses to the items within the Black Unity Forum’s action plan, focusing on the development of appropriate implementation timelines for many of the key activities. President R. Gerald Turner has assured the Forum of a response by September 30, and we remain on track to fulfilling that commitment.
- **SMU named as one of the best sports management programs in the country** — According to niche.com’s 2021 [study](#), SMU is ranked number three out of 413 sports management programs in the country (trailing only Rice and the University of Michigan – Ann Arbor). The Best Colleges for Sports Management ranking is based on rigorous analysis of academic, admissions, financial, and student life data from the U.S. Department of Education along with millions of reviews from students and alumni. Congratulations to the Simmons School, to Peter Carton, Director of Sport Management and Clinical Assistant Professor, and to the entire Sports Management faculty!
- **Emerging leaders fall seminar series begins today, September 25** – This semester-long series, by invitation only and based on deans’ recommendations, will give emerging faculty leaders an opportunity to supplement their knowledge and expertise with a larger sense of the University as a whole. The seminar’s goals are two-fold: 1) participating faculty will develop and refine their own interests in pursuing intellectual and administrative leadership positions, and 2) SMU will benefit from the ongoing contributions of engaged, informed thought leaders. Congratulations to this year’s [emerging leaders](#).
- **Just-in-Time teaching** – The Center for Teaching Excellence has completed this semester’s round of Just-in-Time Teaching and Technology grants. Grants were awarded to 16 faculty across five schools. These grants are sponsored by CTE and OIT and will impact 753 students and their faculty this semester, with many of the tools also ready for use in future semesters.

“Sellout” for SMU’s fall 2020 home football opener – With reduced capacity in Ford Stadium for the Saturday, September 26 game against Stephen F. Austin, 1,200 tickets were claimed by the campus community in just 3 days. Faculty and staff claimed 200 tickets within 18 hours and beginning Monday, September 21, SMU students quickly claimed the remaining 1,000 tickets that were reserved for them. For those unable to attend, the game will be broadcast on ESPN+. Kickoff is at 6:00 pm. Pony up!

Sincerely,

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

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



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