



SMU

Office of the Provost

February 26, 2021

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) Spring 2021, 2) Road to R-1, and 3) News and Noteworthy.

Spring 2021

- **North Texas' inclement winter weather event**

- **Words of gratitude and compassion** – Let me begin by expressing my gratitude to SMU's faculty and staff for the many ways you endeavored to maintain safety and stability over the past two weeks. The challenges we have faced, coming after nearly a year in a global pandemic, are difficult at times even to comprehend. I recognize that these levels of stress far exceed what we are normally called to manage, and I encourage each of you to focus on your personal well-being and, if able, to extend care and compassion to those around you – all in the spirit of being World Changers.

To those who experienced extended power loss, water scarcity, property damage or other forms of hardship, I extend sincere compassion and hope for a safe and expedited return to stability and access to resources. As President Turner anticipated in his campus-wide [message](#) last Friday, things do in fact begin to feel more normal now that we have been able to connect with students over Zoom and in classrooms again.

Thank you to all the faculty – as well as the staff supporting them – who attempted to teach remotely at the start of last week. While we prepared for the extreme weather hopeful about the prospect of teaching remotely, the severity of that week's storms had other ideas. Thank you for supporting the difficult but necessary decision to cancel instruction last week, for your ability to transition back to SMUFlex and Virtual delivery modalities this week, and for your continued support of colleagues and students in navigating so many challenges.

- **Planning for the remainder of the semester** – We have received many questions from faculty and students about how we will approach make-up instruction days, in light of the almost five days of cancelled classes. As mentioned in my message last Friday, we are currently working through a clear and deliberate process that involved gathering input from deans, Faculty Senate, and Student Senate earlier this week. Because of the care required in making this decision, we will need until next week to confirm an approach informed by their input and by the requirements imposed by our accreditors. At that time, we will provide additional information.

- **Using Canvas on your phone** – The Canvas Teacher mobile app will allow you to stay connected with your students even when normal devices are not usable. The app provides quick mobile access to communicating, updating and grading—three of the most frequent course facilitation tasks for faculty through Announcements, Discussions, Assignments, and Quizzes.

Canvas Teacher is available for both Android and iOS devices. (Click [HERE](#) for Canvas Teacher Android guide, [HERE](#) for Canvas Teacher iPhone/iPad guide). If you need assistance, please contact the main OIT Help Desk at help@smu.edu or by calling 214.768.HELP.

- **Board of Trustees content recap** – Our quarterly meetings with board members were held this week. At the beginning of each academic year, the Chair of the Committee on Academic Affairs and the Provost establish a syllabus to provide focus to the board’s discussions about academics. See the graphic below for this year’s syllabus.



- **Committee on Academic Affairs: Graduate student quality and academic experience** – The primary focus of Thursday’s meeting with the Committee on Academic Affairs, and a short portion of Friday’s meeting with the Full Board, was on graduate student excellence. These presentations focused on answering questions such as the following:
 - What are our goals for graduate students?
 - What are the obstacles to achieving these goals?
 - How can graduate students impact the educational experience of undergraduates?
 - How do graduate students impact R-1 status and how does this drive our prestige in other rankings like *US News and World Report*?
 - How will SMU measure graduate student quality to increase our standing?
 - What services and resources do graduate students require to be successful?
 - What are our goals/needs in terms of graduate student scholarships to improve student quality and diversity?

Dean Jim Quick and I reviewed strategies with Trustee members for increasing and diversifying our applicant pool for graduate students and improving educational resources at the masters and doctoral level. We also discussed the need to grow the number of postdoctoral fellows at SMU.

- **Committee of the Whole: Strategic enrollment priorities** – Some board meetings, typically the February meetings, begin with a presentation for the Full Board called a Committee of the Whole. This year, Academic Affairs was asked to review SMU’s strategic undergraduate enrollment priorities for the next 5-10 years, focusing in particular on the financial and demographic trends projected to impact higher education over the next decade.

I began the presentation by describing how SMU’s enrollment priorities align with our four priorities for the next five years: 1) Meeting the goals within the 2016-2025 Strategic Plan, 2) Reaching and sustaining top-50 status in *U.S. News and World Report’s* annual rankings of colleges and universities, 3) Building SMU’s research and creative excellence for our Road to R-1, and 4) fulfilling our commitments in SMU’s response to the Black Unity Forum action plan.

I then reviewed the importance of data to our overall academic strategy – particularly in the area of enrollment management. Before transitioning to Dr. Wes Waggoner, Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management, I emphasized that successful enrollment management involves collaboration by the entire campus across the full student life cycle.

Wes’ presentation began with an overview of student demographic projections, over the next 5-10 years, in the United States. He then applied these projections to different sectors of higher education, focusing on the impacts these demographic changes will likely have on elite (*US News and World Report* top-50), national (*US News and World Report* 51-100) and regional (*US News and World Report* 100+) institutions. He concluded by applying these demographic projections to SMU specifically and reviewing our response strategies.

- **Student Affairs message to students about COVID** – Earlier this month, Dr. K.C. Mmeje, Vice President for Student Affairs, and Molly Patrick, Student Body President, sent this [message](#) to SMU students thanking them for their efforts to support a safe return to classes last fall and requesting their renewed commitment to measures needed to limit the spread of COVID-19 this spring.
- **Reminders from previous Friday updates:**
 - **Automatic live transcription services now available in Zoom** – SMU’s Zoom platform now allows faculty to enable AI-powered live transcription services in Zoom events. This setting (to be set up by the host) creates computer-generated captions at the bottom of the screen as well as a transcript. Click [here](#) for more specific information about this feature. Please contact your school’s [Academic Technology Service Director](#) (ATSD) for instructions on activating this advanced setting.
 - **Dr. Bob Smith Health Center still offering flu shots** – You can help ease the burden on the healthcare system by minimizing your chance of getting the flu. We encourage all SMU students, faculty, and staff to get their flu shot. Click [here](#) for more information on available options.
 - **COVID-19 vaccine plan updates** – We continue to submit weekly requests for vaccine allocations from the state but have not yet received notification of when we might receive our first allotment or how many doses to expect.

Once we begin receiving allocations, we will follow state distribution guidelines in making the vaccine available, beginning with the [1A phase designated for campus health care workers and police](#). Next, the [1B phase will prioritize people 65+ and/or those with underlying medical conditions](#) with priority given to those in that phase who are working/residing directly on

campus. Along with faculty and staff, students who fit in this category are also eligible for the vaccine.

Check out the [vaccination page](#) on the [Mustang Strong website](#) for more information on how the process will work. We encourage you to take advantage of the first opportunity to get the vaccine regardless of whether it is through SMU or another provider. Visit the [Texas COVID-19 Vaccine Provider Locations map](#) for additional vaccination sites and availability. Whether you have received the vaccine or are still waiting to get it, it is important to continue with the healthy behaviors outlined in our community's [Pledge to Protect](#).

- **COVID-19 test sites on campus** – The Urgent Care for Kids and Families' no-cost, rapid drive-through testing site remains available for employees and their dependents. It is located on the East Campus at Expressway Tower, [6116 North Central Expressway](#). You will need to [complete a telemedicine screening to schedule a test](#).

The Curative kiosk, located near the Airline Parking structure at 6501 Airline Court, is currently scheduled to be removed from campus today upon completion of the initial contract. Based on demand and available testing resources, we have made the decision not to extend the contract; however, we will continue to monitor the situation and reengage with a service such as Curative if necessary.

- **Date extensions for spring 2021 pass/fail declaration and course withdrawal** – As mentioned last week, and in response to student requests to provide our undergraduates additional support, we are extending the pass/fail declaration deadline to March 5 and the course withdrawal deadline with a W to April 23.

SMU'S Road to R-1 and Research/Creative Excellence

- **Reminders from previous Friday updates:**

- **Dedman College Interdisciplinary Institute (DCII) Book fest** – Unfortunately, the DCII's annual Book Fest was cancelled during the unprecedented spring 2020 semester and the difficult decision was made not to host an in-person event this spring. We would like to take the opportunity though to celebrate faculty- and staff- published books in a new, socially distanced format.

The DCII will purchase copies of books published in 2019 and 2020 by faculty and staff and display them in the library of the DCII's new space in Gerald J. Ford Hall for Research and Innovation. Campus community members will then receive an invitation and have the opportunity to browse the library at their socially distanced leisure. We hope that the invitation will increase exposure of your books, celebrate them, and inspire others on campus.

- **Fiscal Year (FY) 2021–2022 Budget Process** – The review of final budget proposals by members of SMU's senior leadership team continues throughout this month. Members of SMU's senior leadership team met for a third time this week to review proposals with the goal of announcing final budget decisions in March 2021. The focus throughout our budget deliberations this year, including faculty/staff hiring requests, has been on how budget requests will help us attain SMU's goals within the 2016–2025 Strategic Plan and Black Unity Forum (BUF) Action Plan, as well as *U.S. News & World Report* top 50 ranking and R1 status. Thanks to the Deans and Associate Provosts for their collaborative approaches to prioritization.
- **Department-level workload policies revised and approved by May 2021** – This is a reminder that SMU is committed to developing and approving department-level workload policies by May 2021. To meet the late-May timeline, at our October retreat, I asked deans to engage faculty and department chairs this academic year to develop and submit draft workload

policies to my office. I am requesting a draft by Wednesday, March 31, so that feedback can be provided. Chairs and faculty will have an opportunity to make revisions until the May timeline.

We know that this can be a difficult and time-consuming process, particularly with the added layer of winter weather and power outage delays. I am grateful that you are engaging in these conversations, as the goal is to achieve greater transparency and clarity about equitable service and research/creative output contributions so that faculty and chairs have a shared and explicit understanding that reflects the priorities and contexts specific to each department.

In the spirit of continuous improvement, we will certainly invite chairs and faculty in the coming academic year to examine how these policies are translating into practice and to host discussions to make modifications as needed. Anyone who would like access to resources gathered from webinars and research focused on best practices on developing equitable workload policies can reach out to the Associate Provost for Faculty Success, Paige Ware, at pware@smu.edu.

News and Noteworthy

- **Reminders from previous Friday updates:**
 - **Announcing a call for nominations for SMU's Task force on Social Justice and Equity** – As a next step in SMU's journey toward greater social justice and equity, I am pleased to announce the formation of a University-wide interdisciplinary [Task Force on Social Justice and Equity](#).

My thanks to Jessica Dixon Weaver, Associate Professor of Law in the Dedman School of Law, for agreeing to lead this task force. If you are interested in finding out more information about the task force or to submit your name for consideration to serve on the task force, please send an email to provost@smu.edu by March 1, 2021.

- **SMU to remain test-optional for upcoming undergraduate recruiting cycle** – After consultation with the Faculty Senate, the PEC affirmed the recommendation that SMU will remain test-optional for undergraduate students applying in fall 2022 and spring 2023.

Sincerely,



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