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Dear Faculty and Staff:

Thanks to each of you for the ways you advance our educational mission in support of our students. 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 fall semester. 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) Fall 2021, 2) Inclusive Excellence, 3) Research and Scholarly/Creative Excellence, and 4) News and Noteworthy.

Fall 2021:

- **Updated COVID-19 notification letter to faculty** – In her role as Associate Provost for Student Academic Engagement and Success, Dr. Sheri Kunovich partners with the Dr. Bob Smith Health Center and SMU's contact tracing team to send faculty notifications when a student in their class has tested positive for COVID-19. The faculty notification [letter has been updated](#), based on last week's decision by the Deans to require recordings for students in cases where students are out for documented, COVID-related reasons. This decision was made in close coordination with the Faculty Senate and in response to student concerns that the uncertainty about how to make up missed classwork because of COVID-19 quarantine or isolation was significantly impacting students' mental health and possibly causing students to come to classes on days when they were feeling unwell.
 - **FAQs on recordings and maintaining academic success for students** – The [faculty FAQs](#) on the Mustang Strong website have been updated based on questions received pertaining to the decision to require recordings. To discuss available options for audio and video recordings, please contact the OIT Help Desk or [contact your school's ATSD \(listed here\)](#) so we can help determine technology options that meet the need.
- **Review and sign SMU's revised Pledge to Protect** – Last week, Dr. K.C. Mmeje, Vice President for Student Affairs and I [messed](#) the campus community encouraging everyone to review and sign this year's "[Pledge to Protect](#)."

The goal of this year's pledge, developed by SMU's Community Action Network (SMU CAN), is to keep our campus healthy and in-person. Signing is quick, easy and voluntary.

- **Additional syllabus language regarding mental health resources available to our students** – To help communicate important mental health resources to our students, Vice President for Student Affairs Dr. K.C. Mmeje has prepared a new statement for inclusion in all future syllabi, which has received endorsement by the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate:

Mental Health Resources: On-Call and Ongoing Counseling Services

Throughout the academic year, students may encounter different stressors or go through life experiences which impact their mental health and academic performance. Students who are in distress or have concerns about their mental health can schedule a same-day or next-day appointment to speak with a counselor by calling [Counseling Services](#). Counselors are available at any time, day or night for students in crisis at this number: 214-768-2277 (then select option 2). They will be connected with a counselor immediately. Students seeking ongoing counseling should call the same number (214-768-2277, then select option 1) during normal business hours to schedule an initial appointment.

Having now received Faculty Senate's review and approval, the above statement is also available on the [SMU Required Syllabus Statements website](#). Please consider adding this important information to your Canvas announcements this fall.

- **Vaccinations available through the Dr. Bob Smith Health Center** – To receive COVID vaccinations on campus, appointments (required) can be booked through the [health portal](#) or by calling 214-768-2141.
 - Third vaccination doses are currently available for moderately to severely immunocompromised individuals ([as defined by CDC and FDA guidelines](#)) who are fully vaccinated with either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines.
- **Voluntarily Report Your Vaccine to SMU** – Having accurate vaccination information helps to inform SMU's COVID-19 response. The process is quick and easy. Please take a few minutes to report your COVID-19 vaccination status today through the Dr. Bob Smith Health Center.
 - If you were vaccinated on campus, your information will automatically be uploaded into your health record under *immunizations* (no action is necessary).
 - However, if you were vaccinated off campus, please upload that information directly to the [SMU Health Portal](#), even if you already voluntarily shared your status through the vaccine reporting tool last spring.
- **COVID-19 testing resources for faculty and staff** – With the return of students, the Dr. Bob Smith Health Center will be unable to accommodate testing for SMU employees. As offered last year, [SMU is still providing access to convenient COVID-19 testing for employees and their families through Virtual Care for Families locations around the DFW area.](#)
- **Supplemental masks available through Deans' offices** – As a reminder, faculty in need of additional masks to provide when students forget them should consult their respective Dean's office. Supplemental masks have already been delivered to the schools/college for distribution on an as-needed basis. Deans' offices have the ability to arrange for delivery of additional masks by submitting a [service request](#).

- **Reminder: Consult Mustang Strong for the most up-to-date source of information regarding SMU's COVID-19 response** – Please continue reviewing the [Mustang Strong website](#) for information on SMU's COVID-19 response. Here, you can find answers to frequently asked questions, access the latest [campus announcements](#), review information on receiving and reporting the [vaccine](#), and monitor the latest data on [confirmed COVID-19 cases on campus](#).

Inclusive Excellence Initiatives:

- **Quarterly Black Unity Forum (BUF) update** - Dr. Maria Dixon Hall, Chief Diversity Officer, Dr. K.C. Mmaje, Vice President for Student Affairs, and I joined President Turner in this week's quarterly meeting with the BUF executive team.
 - President Turner began the meeting with an exciting announcement. In response to BUF's challenge to raise funds for a \$10 million endowment for scholarships, SMU established the Mustang Excellence Scholarships to provide need-based support for underrepresented, socioeconomically disadvantaged and first-generation students. SMU has recently received a new \$2 million commitment toward that \$10 million goal. Combined with other gifts received in 2021, we have raised \$2.49 million – a quarter of our \$10 million goal.
 - Dr. Dixon Hall then highlighted some key accomplishments from her first year, in areas such as:
 - Faculty/staff recruitment
 - Faculty retention
 - Staff pathways for career development
 - Training
 - Diversity Officers
 - My update concentrated on four areas of focus for Academic Affairs this year in response to the BUF action plan:
 - Promotion and tenure: The college/schools have submitted their updated promotion and tenure guidelines to my office through the Associate Provost for Faculty Success, and they have been reviewed for transparency and thoroughness. The Provost Advisory Council for Promotion and Tenure provided feedback on process and other areas related to promotion and tenure during the Feb-March 2021 review cycle.

Based on these reviews and feedback, my office created a three-page document and circulated it among the Deans over the summer. Paige Ware, Associate Provost for Faculty Success, will co-host with academic leadership across campus a series of Promotion and Tenure workshops this fall—one designed for pre-tenure faculty and one designed for associate faculty considering promotion to full professor. Please look for related announcements early in October.

- Recruitment, promotion and retention of Black faculty: Maria Dixon Hall, Chief Diversity Officer (CDO), in partnership with Academic Affairs, established a faculty retention protocol with Deans to respond to and guard against academic recruitment by other universities. In addition, a formal voluntary, independent faculty exit interview process has been established for departing faculty.

In addition, the CDO, in partnership with the Office of Institutional Access and Equity and the Provost's Office, has instituted three key changes to the faculty hiring process: 1) inclusion of a mandatory diversity, equity and inclusion workshop for all search committee members; 2) use of a transparent process

(Interfolio) for managing applications; and 3) decanal and CDO sign-off on robust recruitment plans. Further, all three offices (CDO/IAE/Provost) now have access to a digital tracking system for all current searches.

- Compensation of faculty members working on inclusion-focused initiatives: Associate Provost Paige Ware, working together with the Research Fellow for Diversity and Inclusion, Johnitha Johnson, reviewed systematically the research about the intersection of equity and workload policies. They hosted a Lunch-and-Learn for all Department Chairs in August. Further, workload policies for all academic departments are in the final revision stages to be posted by the end of September 2021.
- Increasing five-year graduation rates of Black first-year students: As part of the SMU-in-Four initiative the Office of Student Academic Engagement and Support has established school-specific implementation teams to address equity gaps in four- and six-year graduation rates.
- Dr. Mmeje identified three focus areas for the Division of Student Affairs
 - After successfully piloting the Diversity Equity and Inclusion Internship Program this summer, the Hegi Family Career Development Center, in collaboration with the Black Alumni of SMU, will work towards expanding the program for summer 2022. We hope to double the number of historically underrepresented students who complete paid internships next summer (20), and increase the number of paid internship opportunities offered by the Black Alumni of SMU.
 - Student Affairs will prioritize the implementation of the BUF Student Code of Conduct Task Force's recommendations for strengthening SMU's Student Code of Conduct and the Bias Education Response Team (BERT) processes. The recommendations range from bolstering BERT training and education efforts, including reference of the BERT process in the Student Code of Conduct, and enhancing communication with complainants during the student conduct, non-discrimination, and BERT grievance processes. Collectively taken, the recommendations ensure that the Code more precisely reflects the University's dedication to constitutional principles while honoring its commitment to provide a safe and respectful educational living and learning environment for all of its members.
- We concluded the meeting with a time of dialogue and questions from members of the BUF executive team.

Road to R1 and Scholarly/Creative Excellence:

- **Cluster hires** – As mentioned last week, SMU will advertise cluster hires in fall 2021 across two areas of strategic research excellence: 1) 21st Century Technology and Education and 2) Earth Hazards and National Security.

These clusters will enhance areas of established research strength at SMU and will serve as a model for future cluster hires to support our research and scholarly/creative ambitions.

Dedman College and the Simmons School of Education are using existing resources and funding lines within each of their schools to accomplish this first round of strategic cluster hiring to augment areas in which our SMU faculty are already engaged in these two high-impact research areas.

Tom DiPiero, Dean of Dedman College; Stephanie Knight, Dean of the Simmons School of Education and Human Development; and Jim Quick, Dean of the Moody School of Graduate and

Advanced Studies met last week to develop a plan to manage the search process for these two interdisciplinary clusters.

We will announce the hiring committees for these two faculty clusters in the near future.

While our first two faculty cluster hires are in fields most directly linked to the Carnegie Classification System, we recognize the value and importance of incorporating the arts, humanities, social sciences and professional schools into our ongoing and future conversations around academic excellence and resource allocation for later rounds of cluster hires. We have scheduled a Town Hall for Arts and Humanities on October 14 to focus on these topics. Be on the lookout for an invitation to participate as well as additional information in subsequent newsletters.

- **Search committees identified for two strategic searches** – This week, I invited committee members to serve on two strategic searches beginning this fall: 1) [Vice Provost for Research and Chief Innovation Officer](#) and 2) [Dean of the Moody School of Graduate and Advanced Studies and Associate Provost for Graduate Education](#). My thanks to Stephanie Knight, Dean of the Simmons School of Education and Human Development, for chairing the Vice Provost for Research and CIO search and to Tom DiPiero, Dean of Dedman College, for chairing the Dean of the Moody School and Associate Provost for Graduate Education search.

In consultation with our executive search firm partner Isaacson Miller, we are finalizing the committees' onboarding activities and schedule. I plan to formally charge members of these committees later this month and will provide additional information in subsequent newsletters.

News and Noteworthy:

- [KERA](#) and [Oncology News](#) reported on biology professor Dr. Robert Harrod's research on TIGAR, a protein found in cervical cancer cells. Dr. Harrod, Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in Dedman College's Department of Biological Sciences, found that when the protein was decreased, cervical cancer cells became hypersensitive to chemotherapy treatments.
- **2020 and 2021 Faculty Career Achievement Award Celebration** – This week, President Turner and I welcomed community members and distinguished guests to a ceremony honoring Dr. Caroline Brettell, University Distinguished Professor of Anthropology, and Dr. Tom Fomby, Professor of Economics as the 2020 and 2021 recipients of SMU's Faculty Career Achievement Award.

The Faculty Career Achievement Award was established in 2015, and during our Second Century Campaign, to recognize remarkable contributions across the scope of a career by a current tenured SMU faculty member to the teaching, scholarship and service missions of the University.

In extraordinary ways, spanning nearly four decades, Doctors Brettell and Fomby exemplify SMU's scholarly and creative aspirations. They are precisely the type of faculty members who have – and will continue to – lead us in our pursuit of even greater academic quality.

- **Provost Faculty Fellows – call for applications** – Last week, I sent out the following [call for applications](#) for two additional Provost Faculty Fellows during the 2021 – 2022 academic year: 1) Equity and Inclusion and 2) Faculty Awards and Fellowships.

All full-time faculty members can apply, with a primary focus on faculty who have demonstrated interest and experience in an area that matches one of the priority areas listed above with priority for instructional (non-tenure track) or tenured faculty. Questions and applications (due September 24) can be sent to Dr. [Paige Ware](#), Associate Provost for Faculty Success. Past applicants are encouraged to apply.

- **Search process for Director for Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE)** – Last week, we also announced an [open call](#) for faculty to apply for a three-year (renewable) appointment for the Director of CTE position effective January 10, 2022. The position will be vacant due to Dr. Michael Harris’s decision, after six years of outstanding service, to transition into a new role as Department Chair for Education Policy and Leadership Applications are due on October 1st.
- **Capital Campaign launch Friday, September 17** – As a reminder, SMU’s Capital Campaign 3.0 formally begins on Friday, September 17, with an outdoor kickoff ceremony and picnic. We hope you will make plans to attend this exciting event!

Sincerely,



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