

## Weekly Update | November 3, 2023

**Elizabeth G. Loba, Ph.D. Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs**

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 toward achieving the goals that fall within our four priority areas through 2025: 1) Academic Excellence, 2) Road to R1: Research and Scholarly/Creative Excellence, 3) 2016 – 2025 Strategic Plan and 4) Inclusive Excellence.

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 five categories: 1) Fall 2023, 2) Academic Excellence, 3) Road to R1: Research and Scholarly/Creative Excellence, 4) Inclusive Excellence, and 5) News and Noteworthy.

### Fall 2023

#### **Dean of Perkins Search Committee members and search consultant announced**

This week, I launched and charged the search committee for the next dean of the Perkins School of Theology on Thursday, November 2.

Assisting SMU in the search will be Dedman Law alum Willie Funk, managing vice president of [R. William Funk & Associates](#). This premier firm specializes in higher education leadership search consulting and has deep experience with dean searches. I am most impressed by Willie's understanding of the current landscape of theological education, his experience bringing together a broad range of stakeholders to coalesce around a shared vision for leadership, and his overall enthusiasm for working with our faculty to help shape SMU's bright future.

I would like to take a moment to thank our [search committee members](#) for committing their time and service to filling this crucial leadership position. Additionally, I would like to thank Peter Moore, Associate Director of the O'Donnell Data Science and Research Computing Institute (and former provost *ad interim*), for serving as search committee chair.

## **Simmons School of Education Executive Board recap**

On Thursday, I joined Stephanie Knight, Leon Simmons Endowed Dean at Simmons School of Education and Human Development's fall 2023 Executive Board meeting. President Turner was called away on short notice; so, I provided a university-wide update focused on the dedication of Frances Anne Moody Hall, SMU's invitation to join the ACC in 2024, and upcoming fall events, such as the Tate Lecture Series, SMU's Celebration of Lights and December Commencement. I also gave an update on the *SMU Ignited* campaign, with gifts and pledges exceeding \$1.1 billion as of the September Board of Trustees meeting.

During my remarks on Academic Affairs, I reviewed SMU's undergraduate and graduate enrollment outcomes for fall 2023, updated board members on the 2024 *US News and World Report* rankings outcomes, and discussed some exciting advancements in research that will support our goals for even greater excellence, including: 1) the [\\$30 million gifts from the O'Donnell Foundation](#) to endow the O'Donnell Data Science and Research Computing Institute (ODSRCI) and to support the Initiative for Digital Innovation in Engineering and Computer Science, 2) [Neena Imam's recent appointment](#) as the Peter O'Donnell, Jr. Director of the ODSRCI, and 3) the Biden Administration's announcement that [SMU's proposal for a Texoma Semiconductor Hub](#) has been awarded official Tech Hub designation, making it one of 31 U.S. Tech Hubs to spark innovation and development across the country.

## **Faculty Senate meeting update on changes to Carnegie Research Classification**

During Wednesday's Faculty Senate meeting, Michael Harris, Professor and Department Chair in the Simmons School's Department of Education Policy and Leadership and Faculty Senate President, invited me to give a brief update on the changes announced this week to the Carnegie Research Classification system.

The [American Council on Education](#) (ACE, which now oversees the Carnegie Classification system) announced on November 1, that beginning in 2025, they will reduce the number of criteria utilized to determine R-1 from 10 to two: 1)  $\geq$  \$50 million in research expenditures annually and 2)  $\geq$  70 research doctorates awarded annually. Using SMU's data from academic year 2022 – 2023, for example, SMU would have achieved R-1 status under these new criteria with \$58 million in research expenditures and 139 doctoral degrees conferred.

These changes will make for a more straightforward and transparent target for those institutions that have it in their mission to prioritize research and aspire to R-1 status. ACE does not anticipate a significant increase in the number of R-1 institutions as a result of these changes; however, there is still much we do not know. We will continue to monitor the situation and keep you updated as more information becomes available.

We do not anticipate the Carnegie Research Classification changes will have a significant impact on our goals for research. We will continue to pursue and expect to attain R-1 status.

## **Pass/fail grading option deadline moved to align with Withdrawal deadline**

The offices of Student Academic Engagement and Success (SAES) are pleased to announce that the pass/fail declaration deadline, which has typically aligned with the deadline to drop a course without academic record, has been moved later into the semester to align with the deadline to withdraw from classes and/or the University. As the University moves into future semesters, the

pass/fail declaration deadline will continue to fall in this latter part of the semester. By changing this policy, SMU hopes to provide students with academic continuity alternatives other than simply withdrawing from a course.

The pass/fail grading declaration deadline for fall 2023 classes is now Tuesday, November 21, 2023. We ask that faculty with students who wish to switch to a pass/fail grading option give serious consideration to these requests.

Thank you for supporting this academic calendar change. FAQs about pass/fail grading are posted on the [Office of the Registrar's website](#).

### **Submit undergraduate retention concerns via the Retention Alert tool**

The Office of Student Success and Retention (SSR) invites you to use the rebranded [Retention Alert \(smu.edu/retentionalert\)](#) tool to pass along information when you learn of undergraduate students who may wish to leave SMU (temporarily or permanently). I encourage faculty, staff, and family members to utilize this intent-to-leave reporting tool so that our trained SSR staff or partner office representatives can provide these students with academic and personal support services. Should you have any questions about this system, please contact [ssr@smu.edu](mailto:ssr@smu.edu).

### **Provost monthly lunch at the Commons Table next week**

On Monday, November 6, from 12 – 1 p.m. I will be having lunch in the Faculty-Staff Dining Room located in Umphrey Lee. The “Commons Table,” designed by the Faculty Senate and the Faculty Club, is designated for community members who come to meals by themselves or in small groups and wish to socialize with others to better foster faculty and staff community. I look forward to seeing you there and hope you will join me for a relaxed lunch and conversation.

You [can purchase credits for SMU dining facilities online \(which includes access to the Faculty-Staff Dining Room\) here](#).

### **Meadows announces the inaugural Director of the Sexton Institute for Musical Theatre**

Meadows School of the Arts welcomes Joel Ferrell, the previous Associate Artistic Director at Dallas Theater Center, to the faculty as the inaugural Director of the Sexton Institute for Musical Theatre.

Ferrell was appointed to the directorship following the announcement of [G. Marlyne Sexton's \\$15 million gift](#) to create a specialized musical theatre program at Meadows. He will act as a professor of practice in Meadows' existing Division of Theatre as he works on establishing the new musical theatre program.

Welcome to the Hilltop, Joel. I look forward to seeing SMU's rich musical theatre tradition grow under your leadership.

## Academic Excellence

### **Simmons' Sport Management graduate program ranked #1 in Texas and #14 in the nation**

The Simmons School of Education and Human Development's Masters in Sport Management program has been ranked #1 in Texas, #3 among private universities in the U.S., #14 in the country and #18 in the world by SportBusiness. This London-based intelligence service provides data and analytics to the sports industry and uses its data expertise to evaluate the more than 200 post-graduate sport management programs that are considered highly prestigious among industry professionals.

This is the first time SMU's sport management program has submitted an entry to the SportBusiness Post Graduate Rankings, and we congratulate them on such a dynamic initial entry.

### **Top-ranking graduate program for video game development celebrates 20th anniversary**

The Guildhall, SMU's premier graduate-level video game development program, is celebrating its 20th anniversary this November. With highly experienced faculty and specializations in all four cornerstones of game development (art creation, level design, production and programming) the program has helped hundreds of students achieve rewarding careers in the gaming industry.

Its leading-edge curriculum and strong alumni network have established the Guildhall's reputation as one of the top graduate programs in game design, as recognized by [The Princeton Review](#). By May 2024, the program will celebrate its 1,000th graduate.

The Guildhall was initially established through the [Linda and Mitch Hart eCenter](#) at the request of the gaming industry to train its future leaders and is led by Director Gary Brubaker.

### **Moody School Three Minute Thesis Competition November 7 and 10**

SMU graduate students will present their research and compete for prizes at this year's [Three Minute Thesis \(3MT\) competition](#) next week in Moody Hall Auditorium. 3MT celebrates the exciting research being conducted by SMU graduate students and allows them to hone their communication and presentation skills.

First-round heats will take place Tuesday, November 7, from 9 a.m. – 12 p.m., and the finals will be held Friday, November 10, from 12-1 p.m. A light breakfast and coffee will be available for attendees before the first-round heats, and lunch will be available before the finals. A program for the first-round heats is available on the [3MT website](#).

The rules of the competition are simple: participants present their dissertation or thesis research in non-specialist language in less than three minutes with the assistance of one static PowerPoint slide. They are judged on the effectiveness of their presentation and their ability to convince the judges of the impact of their research.

All members of the SMU community are invited to attend.

# Road to R1: Research and Scholarly/Creative Excellence

## The Texoma Semiconductor Tech Hub and what it means for SMU

Last week, the [Biden-Harris administration announced](#) that SMU's bid for Tech Hub status had been awarded. In [last week's newsletter](#), I was thrilled to announce SMU's Texoma Semiconductor Tech Hub designation and to thank the members of the SMU-led coalition that came together to develop our proposal.

Now, I would like to take a moment to share a bit more about what this designation means for SMU.

SMU will be leading a [41-member consortium](#) with members from private industry, local governments, colleges and universities, tribal communities and nonprofit organizations. Together, our consortium will strengthen and innovate semiconductor manufacturing by developing accessible labs with equipment for electronic design known as "Fablets". We intend to create more links between innovators, industry representatives, and venture capitalists around semiconductor technology to improve the supply chain and promote opportunities for learners at all skill levels to acquire new knowledge, degrees and certifications.

Because of this official designation, we anticipate that the Texoma Semiconductor Innovation Consortium (TSIC) may be eligible to compete for up to \$75 million in funding through The CHIPS and Science Act signed into law in August 2022.

I am incredibly excited about what this means for SMU and for our region and look forward to commencing work on the next series of projects to bring this proposal to reality.

## Inclusive Excellence

### Lyle School of Engineering's Thrive Scholars peer-mentoring program has grown exponentially since inception two years ago

The Thrive Scholars peer-mentoring program, which serves traditionally underrepresented students in the fields of engineering and computer science, has experienced significant growth in only two years. The program originally started in fall 2021 with just 29 students in the Caruth Institute for Engineering Education at Lyle School of Engineering. These students were supported by the Thrive Scholars program, which provides an inclusive and supportive academic environment designed specifically for first-year and transfer students who identify as first-generation college students, Pell Grant-eligible, or historically underrepresented race/ethnic groups in the fields of engineering or computer science.

This past September, the Thrive Scholars hosted their third annual induction ceremony, where 68 newly inducted students had the opportunity to meet their peer mentors, receive pins, and develop relationships with fellow incoming students.

Thank you to Dr. Kelyn Rola, Director of the Thrive Scholars Program, and Kathy Hubbard, Assistant Dean for Student Success and Inclusive Excellence at the Lyle School of Engineering, for overseeing and supporting this initiative in line with our goals for both academic and inclusive excellence.

### **Two members of Dedman School of Law accepted awards at the Dallas Volunteer Attorney Program's 2023 Pro Bono Awards event**

Dallas Volunteer Attorney Program hosted the 2023 Pro Bono Awards on October 27, to recognize outstanding legal professionals who serve the Dallas community by providing legal aid to those who otherwise might not have access.

Dedman School of Law Professor Joanna Grossman was named Lawyer of the Year. In the past year, she completed over 260 hours of volunteer legal work in the areas of probate and family law.

Laura Burstein, Director of Public Service at Dedman School of Law, accepted an award on behalf of the law school for Outstanding Virtual Clinic Sponsor. During the 2022-2023 school year, Laura organized and conducted 10 pro bono clinics that enabled law students to help over 500 clients in the DFW area.

### **Two Dedman School of Law students awarded prestigious scholarships from the Dallas Hispanic Bar Association**

The [Dallas Hispanic Bar Association](#) (DHBA) hosted its 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Noche de Luz on October 14. The annual gala brings together legal professionals and current students from around the DFW area to celebrate professional work and cultural heritage and to network. Winners of awards and scholarships distributed by DHBA are announced during this event.

Congratulations to Dedman School of Law students Valeria Villagomez and Karen Bulnes, who were each awarded Dallas Hispanic Bar Association scholarships!

## **News and Noteworthy**

### **SMU Vice President receives prestigious national recognition from National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA)**

Dr. K.C. Mmeje, SMU's vice president for Student Affairs, has been named a recipient of the 2024 Pillars of the Profession Award by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Foundation. The award acknowledges remarkable individuals within the student affairs and higher education community who demonstrate exceptional contributions to both the profession and the organization.

Dr. Mmeje will be recognized along with his fellow honorees at the upcoming 2024 NASPA Annual Conference in Seattle by the NASPA Foundation Board of Directors.

Congratulations, K.C., on this incredible recognition and for all the work you do for SMU and our students!

## **Sport Management Alums and Intern living the dream with Texas Rangers**

Seven SMU Sport Management Program alums and one current student from Simmons' Department of Applied Physiology and Sport Management are working for the newly crowned World Series Champion Texas Rangers organization.

These eight Mustangs are working in various areas of the Rangers organization from corporate partnerships and new business development to sales and media marketing.

To alums Matt Nichols, Laci Taylor, Sydney Teske, Parker Johnson, Sam Gunning, Kent Yamamoto and Abby Casillas, and current student Louie Deckas, congratulations! I hope you have enjoyed this historic run.

## **Graduate Student Night at the SMU vs. North Texas football game**

The Moody School of Graduate and Advanced Studies is partnering with SMU Athletics to celebrate Graduate Student Night at the SMU football game against the University of North Texas on Friday, November 10, at 8 p.m. Graduate students will each have access to two free tickets to the game and will sit together in a reserved section. The ticket link has been sent to current SMU graduate students by email.

Sincerely,



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

**World Changers Shaped Here**