

Weekly Update | September 13, 2024

Provost and Senior 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 submit your ideas through our story form via the button below. Suggestions received before noon on Tuesday will be reviewed and considered for publication in that week's Friday newsletter. Others will be held until the following week.

[Submit your story](#)

Previous newsletters are [available here](#).

Today's update falls into five categories: 1) Fall 2024, 2) Academic Excellence, 3) Road to R1: Research and Scholarly/Creative Excellence, 4) Inclusive Excellence, and 5) News and Noteworthy.

Fall 2024

Board of Trustees Meeting recap

This week, I had two opportunities to provide Academic Affairs updates to members of SMU's Board of Trustees.

Committee on Academic Affairs

In Thursday's committee meeting, my update covered three topics. I began by sharing information about the incoming undergraduate and graduate student classes and highlighted outcomes across each point in the student lifecycle, including recruitment/enrollment, retention, graduation and employment. I then provided leadership updates on the three dean searches underway (this week's updates on the Cox dean search can be found below), and concluded with a look ahead to three topics we plan to cover in December's Board meeting: 1) this year's *US News and World Report* rankings, 2) faculty workload and salary/merit study, 3) SMU's Common Curriculum and Study Abroad.

Full Board meeting

In this morning's meeting, I shared a consolidated version of my presentation to the Committee on Academic Affairs with the full Board of Trustees.

Cox School of Business Dean Search Committee kick-off meeting

As announced at the beginning of summer 2024, Dean Matt Myers requested to step down from the deanship at Cox School of Business by the end of this 2024–2025 academic year.

To commence the Cox School dean search activities this fall semester, we completed listening/learning sessions in late August with a broad range of Cox and SMU stakeholders to inform the position description. Information learned from those meetings has been used to inform the marketing for the position, which will begin this month.

The [assembled search committee](#) held its first in-person meeting this week on September 11, where I delivered the formal charge, and additional listening/learning sessions have also been scheduled to take place this month with SMU and Cox School Executive Board members.

Thank you to the search committee members for agreeing to participate in this important search, and thank you to Jason P. Nance, Judge James Noel Dean of Dedman School of Law, for serving as the search committee chair.

We will continue to share updates regarding this search in upcoming newsletters.

Office of Business and Finance announced changes to employee benefits

On Wednesday, September 11, the Office of Business and Finance [sent a message](#) to University employees regarding the benefit package benchmarking process and benefit enhancements that will be effective January 1, 2025.

As mentioned, every two years, SMU evaluates its benefits package by comparing our offerings with other leading higher education institutions as well as top employers in DFW. This summer's benchmarking review concluded that SMU's benefits continue to be competitive.

As we move into the upcoming calendar year and open enrollment period, the following enhanced benefits will be offered effective January 1, 2025.

- Annual vacation days for eligible staff will increase from 10 to 12 days for employees in their third through fifth year of employment.
- Paid parental leave will increase from two to three weeks.
- A fertility and family planning benefit will be added to the existing medical plan administered by BlueCross BlueShield of Texas.
- A voluntary short-term disability plan benefit option will be introduced.

Additionally, premiums for health plans offered by SMU through Blue Cross Blue Shield will see a slight increase of 3%, well below the national inflation average of 7%.

Human Resources will share more details on benefits during October's open enrollment period. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please reach out to HR at SMUHR@smu.edu.

Academic Excellence

Moody School welcomes new and returning Ph.D. fellows to campus

Last Thursday, September 5, Dean Robin Poston and I welcomed incoming Ph.D. students selected for fellowships by the Moody School of Graduate and Advanced Studies as well as returning Moody School Fellows at a reception in Frances Anne Moody Hall. These students were selected for fellowships to support them throughout their studies for their exceptional promise and accomplishments as scholars and researchers. They represent their fields' future leadership, and we are glad to have them studying with us, supporting the outstanding research and teaching of SMU faculty. Eighty-five Ph.D. students are supported by these fellowships, including 15 incoming students. School and college deans were also present to welcome fellows who will be studying in their schools' and college's programs.

Council on General Education course proposal dates

The Council on General Education has solidified its fall meeting schedule and course proposal review dates. Meetings are scheduled throughout fall 2024 as follows: September 6, September 27, October 18, November 8, and December 6. Course proposal reviews will be held during the September 27 and November 8 meetings.

All faculty members who would like their courses to be considered for Common Curriculum (CC) requirements are encouraged to [submit a proposal](#). All proposals must be electronically submitted before the meeting deadline, as feedback may be requested.

For more information, please visit www.smu.edu/council. If you have any questions, contact the Office of General Education at gened@smu.edu.

Office of General Education hosting training series for faculty and staff

The [Office of General Education](#) has multiple training sessions available to faculty and staff this fall. Training sessions will be offered on SMU's Common Curriculum (CC), departmental responsibilities regarding the CC, and course and experience proposals.

If you are interested in attending a training, [registration is available on SMU360](#). After registering, you will receive reminder emails leading up to the event, an Outlook calendar invite, and any resources used or distributed during the training. All workshops will take place on the first floor of the Laura Lee Blanton building.

Any questions, comments, or concerns can be directed to gened@smu.edu.

Reminder: Expanded testing services and updated policies at the University Testing Center

The University Testing Center (UTC) is embarking on its third year of operation and is now in [phase three of its rollout](#). As part of phase three which launched this summer, the UTC expanded credit-by-exam offerings for SMU students and community members and began supporting placement tests for chemistry, math, and second language courses. This fall, the UTC will offer limited make-up testing services to support faculty with test administration.

The UTC has also updated policies regarding test submissions and registrations. Course instructors must submit exams at least five business days in advance and upload testing documents to the UTC

portal at least two business days in advance for test registration and submission. Students must register at least three business days before their test. This will allow the UTC to serve the maximum number of students effectively and efficiently.

User videos and step-by-step instructions for using the UTC Portal are available for both [students](#) and [professors](#) on the [UTC website](#). UTC staff members are available for one-on-one consultations by appointment virtually or in-person during UTC operating hours, 8 a.m. – 4 p.m. weekdays.

Road to R1: Research and Scholarly/Creative Excellence

Oklahoma technology leader James Grimsley named Texoma Semiconductor Tech Hub Regional Innovation Officer

James Grimsley, a technology leader for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma with roots in entrepreneurship, industry and higher education, has been named the inaugural regional innovation officer (RIO) of the Texoma Semiconductor Tech Hub (TSTH). As RIO, Grimsley will provide the vision and strategy for the Tech Hub and manage the day-to-day operations.

Grimsley will serve in his new position while continuing as executive director for advanced technology initiatives for Choctaw Nation, a TSTH consortium member. He is a nationally recognized expert on policy and technology related to advanced aviation and aerial mobility, including drones and autonomous systems.

[Learn more about James Grimsley and the TSTH here.](#)

SMU and University of California San Francisco researchers publish report on mitochondrial changes in glioblastoma formation funded by the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT) and the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS)

Researchers in the Department of Biology at Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences Zhihao Wu, Floyd B. James Assistant Professor; Ting Cai, Research Associate; Bei Zhang, Provost Science and Engineering Postdoctoral Fellow; and Yinglu Tang, O'Donnell Data Science and Research Computing Institute Graduate Scholar; alongside Winson S. Ho and Rongze Olivia Lu, from University of California San Francisco, have recently collaborated to publish an impactful research study.

Their study explains the profound impact of the ribosome-associated quality control (RQC) pathway on the development of glioblastoma. This research also delves into a fundamental question in cancer biology: how do cancer cells sustain a high mitochondrial membrane potential while decreasing oxidative phosphorylation? Their manuscript is included in a recent issue of [eLife](#) and was funded by the [Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas](#) (CPRIT) and the [National Institute of General Medical Sciences](#) (NIGMS).

Inclusive Excellence

Office of Diversity and Inclusion to kick off Inclusive Leadership Series September 16

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion and the Department of Athletics are co-sponsoring the event “Kids These Days: Relating to Gen Z” as a part of their Inclusive Leadership Series. This event will feature Betsy Butterick, a coach and instructor who teaches communication effectiveness. The session will provide tools to better communicate, connect, and coach Gen Z students, student-athletes and team members.

The session will take place on Monday, September 16, from 11:30 a.m.–1 p.m. in the Miller Boulevard Ballroom at the Armstrong Fieldhouse. If you are interested in attending, please [register here](#).

News and Noteworthy

First installment of the 2024-2025 O’Donnell Institute Seminar Series happening next week

The 2024-2025 O’Donnell Institute Seminar Series is starting the academic year with its first event on Wednesday, September 18, in Moody Hall, Classroom 126. Light refreshments will be provided at 1:45 p.m. with the presentation to follow from 2–3 p.m.

Professor Eric Larson, from the Department of Computer Science at the Lyle School of Engineering will present on “Ubiquitous Machine Learning: Deep Data Representation for Next Generation Systems.”

Universal AI University to partner with SMU

Former executive director of the Caruth Institute for Entrepreneurship and professor at Cox School of Business, Simon Mak, has been named the founding vice chancellor of [Universal AI University](#) (UAIU) located in Karjat, India.

UAIU focuses on producing students who are either AI developers or AI power users in the fields of technology, design, social and liberal arts, behavioral sciences, management, music, and sound and cinematics. Recently, UAIU entered into an academic collaboration with SMU. This agreement was led by Mary and Richard Templeton Dean Nader Jalili from the Lyle School of Engineering and Professor Mak, marking Universal AI University’s first collaboration with a Texas private university. Areas of collaboration between the two universities will include the development of student mobility programs, research projects, joint academic and scientific activities, and potential exchange of teaching personnel.

Professor Mak worked at SMU for 20 years and was a graduate of both the Cox School of Business and the Lyle School of Engineering. While we will miss his presence and contributions on campus, we are excited for the next step in his professional journey.



Office of Global, Online and Continuing Education launches new online Master of Public Policy

The Office of Global, Online and Continuing Education (GOCE) is pleased to announce that its new online Master of Public Policy program has officially launched this semester and has met its anticipated enrollment goals for fall 2024. This hybrid program engages students online in addition to bringing them to the Hilltop for two on-campus immersion experiences. The first immersion experience will be September 13–14, where students will hear from guest speakers like Dallas Mayor Eric Johnson and Texas State Representative Rafael Anchia, tour the George W. Bush Presidential Museum, learn from Bush Institute experts, and participate in policy workshops and simulations. GOCE is looking forward to the continued success and growth of this program.

For more information about GOCE's Master of Public Policy program, contact Dr. Evangeline Chiang at echiang@smu.edu.

Sincerely,

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

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