



Office of Engaged Learning Newsletter

Issue No. 8 | Fall 2024

Fall 2024 was a fantastic season for the Office of Engaged Learning, marked by the launch of the Pathways to Business and Industry (PBI) initiative, the First Year Research Experience (FYRE), and the Mustang Mentors peer mentorship program. This issue celebrates the impactful work of Cox School of Business faculty and their FYRE student, the success of 63 matched peer-mentoring pairs, and introduces our new PBI Peer Academic Leader. It also features the transformative power of mentor-mentee relationships, the Big iDeas Pitch Competition winners from Family Weekend, and our academic and innovation contributions to the ACC—highlighting how SMU students are competing, beyond the ball. *Dr. Jennifer Ebinger, Executive Director.*

Newsletter Highlights

Mentorship

Entrepreneurship

Student & Staff Spotlights



Walker Homan and Bianey Rojas form an unexpected friendship through Mustang Mentors (read more on p.2)

Upcoming Events:

January

1/23 & 1/24 Engaged Learning Fellowship Info Sessions

1/27 E-Launch: Building A Pitch

1/30 & 1/31 Summer Research Info Sessions

1/30 PBI Social Event

February

2/6 & 2/7 Curriculum vitae (CV) workshops

2/12 PBI Zoom In on CCPA

2/12 Big iDeas Pitch Practice

2/14 Big iDeas Business Plan Competition

2/21 TGIF in the Scholars Den with PBI

2/26 PBI Degree Planner Workshop

2/27 & 2/28 Personal Statement workshops

March

3/4 PBI Stepping Blocks Workshop

3/5 Mustang Mentors Cohort Event

3/4 PBI Stepping Blocks Workshop

3/13 & 3/14 Research Poster Design Workshops

3/27 & 3/28 Elevator Pitch for Researchers Workshops

April

4/1-4/3 ACC Inventure Competition

3/31-4/4 Research & Innovation Week

4/1 Undergraduate Research Poster Session

4/15 ELF Summer Submission Deadline

4/15 PBI Stepping Blocks Workshop

June/July

Summer Research Intensive and Symposium, NSF REU Data Science for Social Good in Dallas and Beyond

Featured Events:

Big iDeas Business Plan Competition

Friday, February 14, 10 a.m.-1 p.m.
Fondren Library West 211 (Texana Room)

Undergraduate Poster Session

Tuesday, April 1, 2-5 p.m.
Frances Anne Moody Hall Atrium

See the full list of events and register on SMU360



Mentorship Highlights

Mustang Mentors Peer Mentoring Program

Walker Homan and **Bianey Rojas** (featured on the cover) are members of the inaugural **Mustang Mentors Peer Mentoring** cohort, which now has 68 members and continues to grow. The two were paired based on shared academic interests and goals, such as being Economics majors and being transfer students. However, it is the different perspectives they bring to their mentorship that makes their connection unique.

“This program connects you to people you otherwise wouldn’t have met. If you can be a peer mentor in Mustang Mentors, just do it. Especially if you’re a transfer student, it’s just nice to have one more friendly face on campus,” says Walker.

Bianey describes how Mustang Mentors has deepened her sense of belonging at SMU. “Being a commuter, I would come to campus for class and then go back home, but through this mentorship program and the events, it has given me a reason to stay and meet other people in the program.”

Peer mentoring empowers students like Walker and Bianey to make the most of their SMU journey. To learn more about Mustang Mentors, visit our website at smu.edu/mustangmentors.

Pathways PAL

The **Peer Academic Leaders (PALs)** program at SMU plays a critical role in supporting students across campus. This year, **Pathways to Business and Industry (PBI)** partnered



with PALs to create a dedicated role for helping students looking towards careers in business and industry. The inaugural PBI PAL is **Tiffany Nguyen**, a sophomore majoring in Computer Science and Data Science with a minor in Cognitive Science. Tiffany’s diverse academic background and guidance from her own peer mentors as a THRIVE Scholar and Rotunda Scholar informs her approach to mentorship. Her computer science courses are preparing her for a future in business and industry. “Computer Science at SMU gives me a balance of technical, leadership, and communication skills...I realized I could be a software engineer at a finance firm, combining the business and technical aspects I love.”

Tiffany meets with students weekly to provide mentorship and support. To schedule a meeting with Tiffany in Blanton or the Scholars Den, e-mail tnguyen@smu.edu.

Fall Highlights from Mustang Mentors



This fall, **Mustang Mentors** have been building connections and fostering community through engaging events. Mentors and mentees kicked off the semester with a lively pizza social in the Scholars’ Den, where they met for the first time. Mentors gathered for leadership training sessions and shared a meal together, while mentees enjoyed a creative and relaxed evening of cookie decorating and socializing. From insightful discussions to moments of camaraderie, the semester has been both enriching and rewarding for everyone.

Entrepreneurship Highlights

Big iDeas Pitch Contest



The annual Big iDeas Pitch Contest was held on September 29 during SMU Family Weekend. 18 SMU students gave 90-second pitches for their business to a panel of judges.

Congratulations to the winners:

- **Ryland Adzich**, The Creative Destination
- **Yaw Botang**, InfoSavvy
- **Zain Dhatwani**, Apni Duniya
- **Mason Dierkes**, Elusive
- **Isabella Fleet**, TIMIO News LLC
- **Bryce Harper**, Urban Crusader Technology
- **Kennedy Honors**, Sallie's Halo
- **Jude Lugo**, Lecture Logger
- **Emiliano Hernandez Posada**, Terra Social Impact
- **Anish Senthilkumar**, The Active Mind Initiative
- **Speed Gregory**, Speed's Meats
- **Nrithi Subramanian**, Mantra and Co.
- **Ephraim Sun**, Fuselink.ai

The next opportunity to pitch is at the **Big iDeas Business Plan Competition** Friday, February 14, 10 a.m.-1p.m. 4 minute pitch + 2 minute Q&A. Applications are open now until February 7 at smu.edu/bigideas

Big iDeas E-Launch

This semester, the Big iDeas E-Launch sessions, led by Entrepreneurship Fellow, **Neha Husein**, empowered student innovators to workshop and refine their business ideas. Through interactive sessions, students gained practical insights into ideation, market segmentation, research, and more. E-Launch is a workshop series that exists to provide students with tools, mentorship, and guidance to help turn their business into a reality.

Alumni Spotlight

Josh Baier ('24) founded **TIMIO News**, an innovative platform designed to provide users an unbiased news feed using GenAI to analyze news articles from across the web. Baier's journey with TIMIO began



as a student in the Big iDeas program, where he developed foundational components of his business and won funding at the Big iDeas Business Plan Competition. Now, with a team of SMU students (Abbie Ellermeier, Isabella Fleet, and Justus Woods), TIMIO is inspiring other students to take part in Big iDeas.

The TIMIO News app is available for download on Android and Apple. To hear more about Baier's story, watch the full interview on YouTube.



ACC Inventure Competition

The **ACC InVenture Prize** is an innovation competition in which teams of undergraduates representing each ACC university pitch their inventions or businesses before a live audience and a panel of judges. Teams compete for \$30,000 in prizes and a chance to be the next ACC InVenture Prize winner. Last year, **Mason Morland ('24)** represented SMU for the first time in the competition with SteadiSpoon, a self-stabilizing utensil mobility aid.

For a chance to represent SMU at the ACC Competition in April 2025, undergraduate student teams (and Spring 2024 graduates) are invited to apply for the virtual SMU pitch-off. Only the top applicant teams will be invited to pitch and only **one** team will win the spot to compete at the ACC InVenture. The application is due January 6th.

To apply, visit smu.edu/bigideas.

Student and Staff Spotlights

Student Spotlight



Mustafa Haque '27, majoring in Civil Engineering and Public Policy with minors in Mechanical Engineering and Environmental Engineering, exemplifies academic and professional excellence. For two years, he has worked as

an undergraduate research assistant to Dr. Janille Smith-Colin, Assistant Professor in Civil and Environmental Engineering, whose research focuses on using interdisciplinary methods to explore the societal impacts of infrastructure. Mustafa has presented at the American Society of Civil Engineers Texas Section Conference and the Greater Dallas Planning Council. This semester, he joined the OEL's Student Media Team where he produces video and written content to spotlight the achievements of fellow students pursuing impactful academic endeavors.

Welcome new ELFs!

Fall 2024 Engaged Learning Fellows:

- **Hala Arnouk** (Mentor: Hiroki Takeuchi, Political Science)
- **Aguer Atem** (Mentor: Jill Kelly, History)
- **Na'Ni Caliste** (Mentor: Dustin Grabsch, Education)
- **Andrew Castles** (Mentor: Devon Smith, Film)
- **Anna Foweather** (Mentor: Sarah Kucker, Psychology)
- **Meredith Hughes** (Mentor: Austin Baldwin, Psychology)
- **Katy Merchant** (Mentor: Sarah Kucker, Psychology)
- **Jordan Naivar** (Mentor: Mark Allen, Advertising)
- **Swarangi Potdar** (Mentor: Ian Grieve, Art)
- **Mireya Sanchez** (Mentor: Fernando Clark, Sociology)
- **Vivian Thai** (Mentor: Elizabeth Berk, Sociology)
- **Mahima Quazi** (Mentor: Xiao Yang, Earth Sciences)
- **Maddie Wathanacharoen** (Mentor: Sarah Kucker, Psychology)

The next ELF application cycle closes February 15.

Spring ACC Conference

SMU has been invited to send five undergraduate researchers to present on the 19th annual **ACC Meeting of the Minds** conference at the University of Pittsburgh from March 28-30, 2025. Students selected will be announced soon.

Faculty Spotlight

Dr. Maria Langlois (L), Assistant Professor of Marketing in SMU's Cox School of Business, and **Dr. Milica Mormann (R)**, Associate Professor of Marketing at Cox, are



mentoring **First Year Research Experience (FYRE)** student **Ariadne Aramayo** in the program's inaugural year. Dr. Langlois, who earned her Ph.D. from INSEAD Business School in France, researches consumer behavior, focusing on decision-making and its impact on financial and physical health. Dr. Mormann, with prior appointments at the University of Miami, Stanford, and Caltech, studies how visual and attentional processes shape consumer decisions. Together, they oversee student research on how consumer interactions with marketing materials affect decision-making, offering insights to enhance well-being and inform business practices.

Taos Summer Experience

Join us for an unforgettable summer in Taos! OEL is partnering with University Honors & Scholars Programs to offer a 4-week immersive, hands-on learning experience from May 16 – June 17, 2025.

Highlights include:

- Small, dynamic classes led by expert faculty
- Complete two, 3-credit hour courses & multiple CC proficiencies
- Earn 2 honors credits if part of UHP
- Complete a research project that enhances grad school applications and job prospects.
- Financial aid scholarships and funding support available

APPLY TODAY! Visit smu.edu/taos

Support OEL

It costs approximately \$2500 to fund a student project. Want to make a difference? smu.edu/givenow

