



Michael T. Stephenson

Dear colleagues,

Welcome to the spring 2023 semester! I hope your holiday break was restful, and you were able to spend precious time with friends and family.

I wanted to take some time to communicate my academic priorities for the semester. Although this is a lengthy email, I ask that you take the time to read it in full, as it's important information for you to have as we begin the new semester.

Spring 2023 Priorities

Provost's Innovation Fund. In part to support strategic priority 2-goal 1 "Academic Excellence," I am pleased to establish the Provost's Innovation Fund (PIF) to further elevate our faculty and support our new R2 and HSI designations. PIF will be multi-faceted, but the first initiative is to fund the BRIDGE program (**B**uilding **R**esearch, **I**nnovation, **D**iscovery, and **G**rowing **E**ngagement) with \$500,000 in one-time funds to identify and invest in strategic areas of innovative, interdisciplinary research. The goal is to become increasingly competitive for interdisciplinary national awards, and that typically requires an infusion of funds to establish preliminary research with evidence of successful outcomes. Details for this program will be released in late February.

Course Evaluation Best Practices. As we did with the academic policy working group in spring 2022, I have appointed a task force for spring 2023 to review course evaluation practices and processes. I am primarily interested in which best practices and/or tools we should implement, how to appropriately evaluate teaching effectiveness, and how these impact FES. The committee will make recommendations by April 15, and I have asked that their recommendations be presented to the university community for discussion before summer break. I anticipate resuming discussions in fall 2023. A special thanks to Faculty Senate for identifying faculty nominees for the committee. The members are:

- Aneika Simmons, interim associate vice provost for faculty success, ex officio convener
- Somer Franklin, associate vice president, Academic Affairs, ex officio content resource
- Brian Miller, director for research and strategic support, SHSU Online, ex officio content resource
- Todd Primm, professor, biology
- Emily Cabaniss, associate professor, sociology
- Katie Jean Shinkle, assistant professor, English
- Adannaa Alexander, clinical assistant professor, public health
- Abbie Strunc, department chair, teaching and learning
- Shar Self, dean, business administration

Strategic Planning. As the University nears completion of its strategic plan, I want to thank everyone who has participated in the process for your collective effort and vision for the future of our campus. As our next step in Academic Affairs, I have asked the deans to begin the process of strategic planning within the colleges and academic units to align with the University's plan. Each college has the latitude to build out its plan in a way that meets its needs. In addition, I will host a meeting next month to go over the new plan and discuss how it translates to our academic units and colleges and the work we already do.

Learning Loss. Faculty continue to tell me that students are struggling much more than prior to the pandemic, and most agree there is a significant gap in certain communication and quantitative reasoning skills. We need to bring solutions to the table that will help students get up to speed on the skills they missed so they can be successful. Amy Salazar, associate vice provost for student success, will host a campus dialog this semester to better understand what faculty are experiencing, so we can begin to develop strategies and find ways to support both faculty and students. Dr. Salazar will compile a report and share her findings and recommendations with the campus community.

Announcements

To acknowledge the hard work of our non-tenure track faculty colleagues, I am pleased to announce that the Office of the Provost has established an annual Non-Tenure Track Teaching Excellence Award. The winner will be recognized at the President's Academic Awards Dinner in August and will receive a \$5,000 award. The call for nominations will be distributed later in the semester.

After a successful pilot year, the University will continue to support the university ombuds position, and Dr. Falguni Mukherjee will continue to serve in this capacity as a resource for staff and faculty at SHSU.

This Friday, SHSU and Blinn College will sign an MOU outlining a guided pathways partnership for eight degree programs. Additionally, the two institutions are pursuing a joint admissions program. SHSU will dedicate a recruiter to enhance our connection with Blinn College students.

2022 Accomplishments

I am incredibly proud of the progress we made as an institution on academic governance and transparency in 2022:

- After overcoming some obstacles, in the spring 2022, we passed updated policies on tenure and promotion, FES, and post-tenure review.
- Subsequently, in the fall 2022, faculty members worked on an accelerated timeline to finalize tenure unit standards to accompany the policies. Upon final review by general counsel, we will make those available to the entire campus by posting them on the Academic Affairs website.
- Collectively, a working group developed, and the institution adopted, [APS 210216](#) which formalizes a shared governance structure for policy review and implementation.

For all of your work on these, thank you! I know that we all agree how important these fundamental operational policies are for transparency, equity, and shared governance. These were big steps for our institution.

Sincerely,

Michael T. Stephenson
Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

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