



Associate Vice Provost and Dean of Admission & Student Financial Services

Leadership Profile

Fall 2026



Executive Summary

Southern Methodist University (SMU) invites nominations and applications for the inaugural position of Associate Vice Provost and Dean of Admission & Student Financial Services (AVP/Dean).

Founded in 1911, SMU serves 12,556 students, including 7,677 undergraduates and 4,879 graduate and professional students, across eight degree-granting schools: the Cox School of Business, Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences, Dedman School of Law, Lyle School of Engineering, Meadows School of the Arts, Moody School of Graduate and Advanced Studies, Perkins School of Theology, and the Simmons School of Education and Human Development. An R1 institution, SMU advances high-impact research powered by interdisciplinary collaboration. The University enrolls students from all 50 states and more than 90 countries, including nearly 1,000 international students and 19% of undergraduates receiving federal Pell Grants.

Located in Dallas, Texas, SMU benefits from a unique position at the intersection of educational excellence and economic opportunity. Dallas-Fort Worth, one of the nation's fastest-growing and most dynamic metropolitan regions, provides unparalleled access to industry leaders, major employers, entrepreneurial ventures, and cultural institutions. At a time when many regions face demographic challenges, Texas remains among the nation's strongest markets for higher-education enrollment growth, creating a favorable environment for institutions with ambitious enrollment goals. SMU draws strength from this vibrant ecosystem and seeks to further unlock Dallas's potential by becoming a destination for top talent and creating reciprocal partnerships with the city, making this an exciting opportunity for an experienced and ambitious leader to seize the moment and help shape the University's future.

It is indeed an exhilarating time on the Hilltop, and SMU looks to the future with great optimism and excitement, alongside high expectations. Building upon the momentum of record applications, enrollment, retention & graduation rates, fundraising, and growing national visibility, new senior leadership has helped energize the campus and its community. The University just released its next strategic plan, [*Mustang Charge: Accelerating SMU to the Forefront*](#), which defines SMU's strategic ambitions and commitment for the years ahead. Centered on transformative teaching and programs, research that matters, athletic impact, exceptional experiences, and principled leadership, Mustang Charge seeks to position SMU as a nationally recognized research university while advancing academic excellence, lifelong student success, and institutional distinction. Under the leadership of President Jay Hartzell and Provost Rachel Davis Mersey, SMU is committed to delivering a top-tier educational experience that prepares graduates to thrive in their careers, lead lives of purpose, and make meaningful contributions to their communities and professions.

To support SMU's aspirations, SMU's Division of Enrollment Services (DES) will continue to evolve as an integrated enrollment enterprise that partners with and supports the campus community. This structure elevates key leaders into broader institutional roles; integrates recruitment and affordability strategies; strengthens enrollment and financial planning; and aligns systems and operations to support enrollment growth, student success, and long-term fiscal sustainability.



The successful candidate will be expected to provide strategic and operational leadership for Undergraduate Admission and Student Financial Services. Reporting to the Vice Provost for Enrollment Management, the AVP/Dean will manage a staff of 75 full-time employees and is accountable for effective recruitment and admission of new undergraduate students; compliant, strategic administration of financial aid for undergraduate and graduate students; and excellent customer service that creates a seamless student experience from first contact through graduation.

The new AVP/Dean will inherit high-functioning units that have delivered incredible results despite tremendous headwinds. Success in the role will require a leader who can balance strategic vision with operational excellence, foster collaboration across organizational boundaries, and position Admission and Student Financial Services as essential drivers of SMU's academic ascent and national reputation. The ideal candidate will bring energy, expertise, and commitment to accelerate the University's upward trajectory and advance strategic priorities; have experience leading organizations through periods of transformation, growth, and organizational change; and have a track record of identifying new opportunities and developing creative approaches to achieve a competitive advantage. A leadership style that is approachable, authentic, relationship-oriented, optimistic, forward-looking, energetic, and embraces innovation will be an asset for the role.

To submit a nomination or express personal interest in this position, please see Procedure for Candidacy at the end of this document.



Role of the Associate Vice Provost and Dean of Admission & Student Financial Services

The Associate Vice Provost and Dean of Admission & Student Financial Services is a critical leadership position within Southern Methodist University and will play a central role in advancing the University's enrollment aspirations, both undergraduate and graduate and professional, during a period of institutional momentum, organizational evolution, and strategic planning. Reporting directly to the Vice Provost for Enrollment Management, the AVP/Dean serves as a key member of the enrollment leadership team and a trusted advisor to the Vice Provost, Provost, and other university leaders on matters related to admission, financial aid, affordability, enrollment strategy, and student financial services. The role offers a unique opportunity to shape the future of enrollment management at one of the nation's leading private research universities.

The AVP/Dean provides executive leadership for undergraduate admission, student financial services, financial aid, enrollment marketing and communications, student accounts, scholarship administration, and related enrollment operations. The AVP/Dean will lead a talented team responsible for recruiting, enrolling, and supporting students, while ensuring that admissions, financial aid, student financial services, and enrollment operations align with institutional priorities. While the Admission Office focuses on first-year and transfer students, the AVP/Dean will also be a key collaborator with graduate admission offices in the schools as recruitment strategies and tactics evolve. Additionally, Student Financial Services supports all undergraduate, graduate, and professional students. The AVP/Dean will be accountable for translating enrollment strategies into measurable outcomes related to enrollment growth, academic quality, student community, affordability, student success, and net tuition revenue. The individual will work closely with the Vice Provost for Enrollment Management and the Assistant Vice Provost for Enrollment Planning to translate enrollment, net tuition revenue, and financial aid strategies into effective operational plans and measurable outcomes.

The position currently oversees a large and complex organization with approximately 75 staff members across Undergraduate Admission, Enrollment Marketing & Communication, Financial Aid, Student Accounts, and the Mane Desk (one-stop service center). The new AVP/Dean will work closely with peers in the Registrar's Office and the International Office. This role interacts closely with Student Academic Engagement & Success to support student enrollment, advising, retention, and graduation, as well as with colleagues in the academic schools who facilitate graduate financial aid.

The AVP/Dean will represent SMU both internally and externally, working collaboratively with academic and administrative leaders across campus while serving as an ambassador for the University with prospective students and families, school counselors, community partners, professional associations, and peer institutions.

The AVP/Dean responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Provide strategic and operational leadership for undergraduate admission, student financial services, financial aid, enrollment marketing, student accounts, and related enrollment functions.
- Partner with university leadership to develop and implement recruitment and enrollment strategies that advance institutional priorities and achieve enrollment and net tuition revenue goals.
- Ensure strong alignment between admission and financial aid strategies, policies, and operations.
- Lead efforts to modernize systems, streamline processes, and improve service delivery through effective use of technology, analytics, and continuous improvement practices.
- Serve as a strategic advisor on enrollment trends, financial aid policy, student behavior, and market conditions affecting student recruitment and enrollment.

- Recruit, develop, and support high-performing teams while fostering a collaborative, student-centered culture focused on innovation, accountability, and results.
- Represent SMU with external constituencies and strengthen the University's visibility and reputation within the enrollment management profession.
- Serve as a senior leader for financial aid, ensuring regulatory compliance, responsible stewardship of financial resources, and effective administration of federal, state, institutional, and private aid programs.
- Collaborate with enrollment management, academic, and administrative leaders to strengthen the student enrollment experience, remove barriers to student progress, and support student success, persistence, and institutional goals.

Enrollment Management at SMU

The Division of Enrollment Services (DES) plays a critical role in advancing Southern Methodist University's mission and strategic priorities by recruiting, enrolling, and supporting talented students from across the country and around the world. The division supports a student population of 12,546, including 7,677 undergraduates and 4,879 graduate and professional students. Through close collaboration with academic and administrative partners, Enrollment Management at SMU advances institutional goals related to enrollment growth, academic quality, student success, access, affordability, and financial sustainability. DES serves to “Make it easier for Mustangs to be scholars” – a purpose statement that seeks to align administrative operational effectiveness with student academic success.

Undergraduate Admission

The Office of Undergraduate Admission is responsible for attracting, enrolling, and supporting academically talented students whose interests, aspirations, and experiences align with SMU's distinctive educational culture. The division oversees all aspects of first-year, transfer, and international student recruitment and enrollment, as well as admission operations, enrollment communications, campus visit programs, and yield initiatives. Through strategic recruitment efforts and a highly personalized approach to student engagement, the office has played a central role in supporting SMU's growing national visibility and enrollment momentum. Prospective students benefit from a collaborative approach between the central admission office and school-based recruiters to provide a meaningful and authentic picture of the academic and campus opportunities available at SMU.

SMU welcomed its largest first-year class in history in Fall 2026, enrolling 1,821 new first-year students and 368 transfer students. The entering class continues to demonstrate exceptional academic preparation, with an average ACT score of 32 and an average SAT score of 1400 among students reporting scores. Students entered SMU with an average high school GPA in the A-minus range, and more than 80 percent completed Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) coursework. The class represents broad geographic diversity, with 40 percent of students coming from Texas and 4 percent from outside the United States.

Areas within Undergraduate Admission include: First-Year Admission, Transfer Admission, International Admission, Admission Operations, Campus Visit, and Event Programs.

Enrollment Marketing and Communications

Enrollment Marketing and Communications develops and executes integrated strategies that promote awareness, interest, application, and enrollment among prospective students and families. Through a blend of digital marketing, communications strategy, content development, social media engagement, and prospect outreach, the team communicates SMU's value proposition to audiences across the enrollment funnel.

The unit works closely with partners in admissions, financial aid, and enrollment services to support recruitment and enrollment objectives while strengthening the university's visibility and reputation among prospective students and key influencers.

Financial Aid

Student Financial Services serves as the university's primary resource for financial aid and student financial support programs. The office administers federal, state, institutional, and private financial assistance programs for undergraduate and graduate students while guiding students and families as they navigate the financial aspects of an SMU education.

Approximately three-quarters of incoming students receive some form of scholarship or financial assistance. Student Financial Services plays a critical role in supporting the university's commitments to access, affordability, student success, retention, and responsible stewardship of financial resources while ensuring compliance with a complex regulatory environment. Fourteen percent of first-year students and 31% of new transfer students qualify for federal Pell Grants, reflecting a financial aid strategy focused on student success, retention, graduation, and reducing student indebtedness. More than 420 incoming students are first-generation college students, and recent entering classes have included the largest number of Pell Grant recipients in SMU history.

Areas within Student Financial Services include: Undergraduate Financial Aid Services, Graduate Financial Aid Services, Fund Management & Scholarship Administration, SFS Systems & Operations, Communications & Compliance.

Student Accounts

Student Accounts manages billing, payment processing, account management, tuition and fee assessment, and related student account services. Serving primarily current students and families, the office works closely with Financial Aid and other university partners to create a seamless and transparent financial experience from enrollment through graduation.

The office plays an important role in supporting student retention and satisfaction by delivering services efficiently, administering accounts accurately, and managing university receivables effectively.

The Mane Desk

The Mane Desk serves as the front door to the Division of Enrollment Services, providing a comprehensive one-stop service experience for prospective students, current students, families, alums, and campus partners. The office addresses inquiries and resolves issues related to admissions, financial aid, student accounts, registration, enrollment, and related services.

By integrating expertise across multiple functional areas, The Mane Desk enhances service delivery, improves the student experience, and provides accessible, student-centered support throughout the enrollment lifecycle.



Opportunities and Expectations for Leadership

Southern Methodist University strives to be at the forefront of America's universities, winning in teaching, research, athletics, and the arts; delivering exceptional experiences; partnering with the Dallas community; and empowering well-rounded, principled leaders who are driven to tackle the world's most important challenges. The newly released [*Mustang Charge: Accelerating SMU to the Forefront*](#) establishes the framework to be strategic, entrepreneurial, and nimble, directing SMU as it focuses on immediate priorities and continues to evolve with and ahead of the needs of the future. The plan includes five key imperatives:



1. Transformative teaching and programs
2. Research that matters
3. Athletic impact
4. Exceptional experiences
5. Principled leadership

Within this context, the Associate Vice Provost and Dean of Admission & Student Financial Services will be expected to address the following leadership opportunities:

▪ **Advance SMU's ambitions.**

SMU is positioned for a significant period of institutional transformation, creating a compelling opportunity for the AVP/Dean to help shape the next five to ten years of institutional growth amid strong support from the president, provost, donors, and the board. Capitalizing upon recent momentum, the successful leader will further define enrollment management as a strategic driver of SMU's academic ascent and national reputation. This will require expanding the University's reach beyond its traditional Texas base while bolstering a robust transfer culture, maintaining strong engagement with Dallas, and leveraging the city's unique opportunities to differentiate the student experience. Success will be measured not simply by enrollment volume but by attracting students who choose SMU for its strong academic programs and interdisciplinary opportunities. The AVP/Dean will serve as a strategic thought partner to university leadership as SMU defines the enrollment strategies necessary to support its continued rise on the national stage.

Given the strategic importance of enrollment and tuition revenue to the institution, SMU requires a leader with deep expertise in enrollment strategy, financial aid leveraging, and enrollment analytics. The next AVP/Dean must be capable of making data-informed decisions, interpreting market dynamics, and balancing enrollment growth, student quality, access objectives, and financial sustainability within an increasingly complex landscape.

As a highly visible ambassador for SMU, the AVP/Dean will be an effective storyteller—bringing energy, authenticity, and ambition to the work of inspiring students, families, counselors, partners, and peers to see SMU as a destination of extraordinary possibility.

- **Build an integrated admission and student financial services model.**

The strategic integration of admission and financial aid is essential to achieving SMU's aspirations. The AVP/Dean will build a more unified enrollment operation in which recruitment, admission, financial aid, student financial services, compliance, marketing, and operations work together rather than as separate functions. The successful leader will have the opportunity to establish new structures, improve collaboration between teams, build shared accountability, and create a seamless student experience that extends from first contact through graduation.

The AVP/Dean will be an effective change manager who can unite teams, build trust, and create alignment across functions. Success will require bringing together admissions and financial aid professionals around shared goals while maintaining morale, supporting staff development, and fostering a culture in which individuals feel valued, heard, and connected to a common mission.

- **Lead the evolution of financial aid strategy.**

The position oversees a significant financial aid operation with more than \$400 million in federal, state, and institutional aid annually. It will have the opportunity to help the institution shape a student community that advances SMU's academic, financial, and mission-driven priorities. Financial aid is among the university's most important strategic tools for shaping enrollment outcomes, enhancing affordability, supporting access, and achieving net tuition revenue objectives. The AVP/Dean will help ensure that financial aid investments align with institutional priorities and evolving market realities. The AVP/Dean must understand the finances of a private, tuition-driven institution, be able to engage in nuanced forecasting, produce reliable aid budgets, and use data to explore opportunities that further distinguish SMU's merit and need-based financial aid programs. The ability to connect enrollment strategy, student behavior, affordability, and institutional finances is essential for success. Equally important will be establishing policies, processes, and performance expectations that mitigate institutional risk while advancing enrollment, affordability, and student success goals.

- **Leverage data, technology, and innovation for competitive advantage.**

SMU's newest leaders are unleashing the momentum of an aspirational university community and a thriving city to drive SMU forward. For the Division of Enrollment Services, that means developing innovative approaches to recruitment, financial aid, and marketing to continue the University's upward trajectory. The AVP/Dean will lean into optimizing existing technologies such as Slate, leveraging predictive analytics resources, and exploring emerging AI-enabled solutions to enhance decision-making, improve operational efficiency, and ensure a seamless journey from prospective student to alums. The new leader will foster a culture in which data informs decision-making at all levels while ensuring analytics remain connected to institutional priorities and student outcomes.

The launch of the University's new strategic plan offers an opportunity to modernize enrollment marketing. The AVP/Dean will partner with colleagues in central marketing and communications to identify emerging student markets, personalize recruitment and communication strategies, and foster innovative, creative marketing to enhance student and family engagement. The AVP/Dean will cultivate a culture of experimentation and creativity as well as continuous assessment to strengthen SMU's value proposition and position the University to compete effectively in an increasingly dynamic higher education landscape.

- **Guide and support a dedicated team.**

While contributing to the long-term strategic vision for enrollment management, the AVP/Dean will also be responsible for the day-to-day operational oversight of the admission and student financial services units. The

staff has experienced organizational changes, shifts in federal policies and regulations, new technologies, and evolving institutional priorities. The AVP/Dean will inspire confidence and excitement about the division's future direction through decisive, out-of-the-box thinking about roles, responsibilities, and workflow. The AVP/Dean must be able to translate broad institutional goals into actionable plans, establish priorities, monitor results, and deliver measurable outcomes. It will be important for the leader to be visible, responsive, approachable, and willing to engage directly with staff at all levels. The ideal leader will combine ambition and a forward-thinking orientation with humility, a commitment to inclusivity, and a willingness to learn. The AVP/Dean must be capable of making difficult decisions, communicating challenging messages effectively, advocating for the division's interests, and maintaining focus amid competing priorities. The AVP/Dean will elevate performance by investing in staff development and remaining an authentic, accessible, and mission-driven leader.

- **Strengthen strategic partnerships across campus.**

The realization of SMU's ambitious goals will require stronger partnerships with academic and campus leaders and a collaborative, externally engaged culture for the Division of Enrollment Services. The AVP/Dean will be a visible, present, and engaged campus partner who listens well, builds consensus, navigates competing priorities, and fosters productive relationships with faculty, administrators, staff, and senior leadership. The AVP/Dean will build and lead a collaborative framework to facilitate the effective sharing, interpretation, and use of enrollment, market, and student success data to support informed decision-making.

As the composition of the student body becomes increasingly important to SMU's academic ascent, the next leader will need to work closely with deans, associate deans, faculty, and school-based recruiters to recruit students who can thrive academically while contributing to the University's distinctive culture. Success will depend on recognizing the unique needs and priorities of individual schools, aligning enrollment strategies with program capacity and growth objectives, and fostering a shared sense of ownership for recruitment outcomes. The AVP/Dean will create structures for regular communication, joint planning, and collective problem-solving so that schools and central enrollment functions operate as one team guided by institutional priorities, shared accountability, and mutual trust.



Professional Qualifications and Personal Qualities

Southern Methodist University seeks a strategic, collaborative, and forward-looking enrollment leader to serve as its next Associate Vice Provost and Dean of Admission & Student Financial Services. The successful candidate will be both a strategic thinker and a hands-on leader who demonstrates a desire to win and achieve, cares about staff, and can make work fun. A master's degree is required; an earned doctorate or other terminal degree is preferred. In addition, the successful candidate will demonstrate many of the following professional qualifications and personal qualities:

- **Commitment to SMU's mission and future aspirations:** An appreciation for SMU's distinctive identity as a top-tier research institution and the unparalleled advantage of studying in Dallas. Energy, expertise, and a commitment to accelerate the University's upward trajectory and advance strategic priorities.
- **Strategic leadership:** Understanding of the critical relationship between admission and financial aid and ability to align admission and financial aid practices with institutional priorities and long-term enrollment goals. Experience leading organizations through periods of transformation, growth, and organizational change while maintaining constituent engagement and operational effectiveness. A track record of identifying new opportunities and developing creative approaches to achieve a competitive advantage.
- **Enrollment management expertise:** Significant progressive leadership experience in admission, financial aid, enrollment management, or related fields within higher education. Demonstrated success in developing and implementing comprehensive enrollment strategies that advance recruitment, enrollment, retention, affordability, and revenue objectives. Fluency with institutional finance, compliance, and regulatory and policy trends affecting financial aid. Understanding of enrollment trends, demographic shifts, student behavior, and market dynamics. Skill in managing selectivity, class size, demographic composition, quality, discount rate, and net tuition revenue.
- **Sophisticated, enterprise-level use of data, analytics, and technology:** Demonstrated capacity to leverage data, technology, market intelligence, enrollment analytics, predictive modeling, financial aid information, and emerging tools as strategic assets to inform institutional priorities, guide executive decision-making, and deliver measurable enrollment outcomes. Ability to synthesize complex information into clear, actionable insights for senior leaders and campus partners.
- **Collaborative, and people-centered leadership:** Proven ability to build trust-based partnerships across academic affairs, student affairs, finance, athletics, information technology, and other campus constituencies while leading complex administrative operations with discipline, transparency, and accountability. Demonstrated success improving systems, processes, technology, and service delivery; advancing innovation and continuous improvement; and fostering collaboration across units. Ability to develop high-performing teams through mentorship, clear expectations, investment in professional development, and sustained engagement. A leadership style that is accessible, collaborative, and nimble.
- **Executive presence and interpersonal communication skills:** Exceptional written, verbal, and interpersonal communication skills, with the stature, confidence, and credibility to serve as a compelling representative of the University with prospective students and families, school counselors, community partners, professional organizations, and peer institutions. Demonstrated ability to engage diverse audiences, command a room, build confidence among key constituencies, and translate complex enrollment and financial topics into clear, persuasive, and actionable messages for senior leaders, campus partners, students, and families.
- **Personal qualities:** Optimistic, forward-looking, embraces innovation, and is energized by ambitious goals. Approachable, authentic, and relationship-oriented. Intellectually curious and adaptable. Comfortable navigating complexity, ambiguity, and change. A willingness to jump in to get the work done. Sound judgment, resilient, humble, and integrity. Sense of humor.

About Southern Methodist University

Overview

SMU is a nationally ranked private university located in Dallas, Texas. Founded in 1911, the University serves 12,556 students, including 7,677 undergraduates and 4,879 graduate and professional students, across eight degree-granting schools: the Cox School of Business, Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences, Dedman School of Law, Lyle School of Engineering, Meadows School of the Arts, Moody School of Graduate and Advanced Studies, Perkins School of Theology, and the Simmons School of Education and Human Development. The University enrolls students from all 50 states and more than 90 countries, including nearly 1,000 international students and 19% of undergraduates receiving federal Pell Grants.

SMU is entering one of the most transformative periods in its history. In 2025, the University welcomed President Jay C. Hartzell, Executive Vice President and Provost Rachel Davis Mersey, a new Director of Athletics, and four new deans. More recently, the University has recruited a new senior vice president for Development and External Affairs and a University vice president and CEO of The Dallas Office. Together, this leadership team has helped energize the campus around a shared vision of academic excellence, research growth, innovation, and institutional ascent.

The University has announced its next strategic framework, centered on transformative teaching and programs, research that matters, athletic impact, exceptional experiences, and principled leadership. Academic excellence, lifelong student success, a strong Mustang culture, and partnership with Dallas will serve as key enablers.

To inform this new plan, SMU has undertaken one of the most comprehensive engagement efforts in its history, gathering more than 9,000 survey responses and conducting extensive interviews and listening sessions with faculty, staff, students, alums, trustees, business leaders, and external partners.

Across this input, a clear and consistent theme has emerged: strong pride in SMU's momentum, paired with ambition to further elevate academic excellence, enhance the distinctiveness of the student experience, deepen engagement with Dallas, and modernize systems to support collaboration and impact better.

Early successes reflect strong confidence in SMU's direction and the momentum behind its continued ascent, including the O'Donnell Foundation's transformational investment to launch interdisciplinary academic programs in energy that connect business, engineering, and the sciences and strengthen SMU's ability to attract exceptional students and faculty; the launch of new undergraduate degrees; operational improvements to support global talent; and the creation of The Dallas Office to expand coordinated, outward-facing partnerships with the region. Together, these efforts signal both the community's shared priorities and SMU's ability to move quickly from vision to action.

A nationally ranked teaching and research university and a member of the prestigious Atlantic Coast Conference, SMU recently completed a multi-year campaign, SMU Ignited: Boldly Shaping Tomorrow, which surpassed its \$1.5 billion goal three years ahead of schedule, ultimately raising \$1.64 billion, the most successful fundraising effort in SMU's history.

SMU's connection to Dallas is one of its defining strengths. Anchored in one of the nation's fastest-growing and most economically vibrant metropolitan regions, the University is uniquely positioned to expand learning, research, partnerships, and career pathways through its proximity to leading businesses, healthcare systems, arts institutions, civic organizations, and entrepreneurial networks. The University's impact also extends through a powerful alum base of approximately 140,000 worldwide, including more than 64,000 in the Dallas-Fort Worth region.

The University's physical footprint includes its 234-acre main campus in University Park, as well as facilities east of Central Expressway that have become an important hub of academic, creative, and operational activity, positioning the University for future growth. In addition, SMU Taos, a 432-acre satellite campus near Taos, New Mexico, provides both classroom and experiential learning opportunities for SMU students during January, May, and summer terms in a historically and culturally significant setting. With 788 full-time faculty and 1,739 staff and administrators, SMU offers the scale and sophistication of a comprehensive private university while preserving the connectedness and agility of a more intimate academic environment.

Mission

Southern Methodist University will create, expand, and impart knowledge through teaching, research, and service, shaping world changers who contribute to their communities and excel in their professions in a global society. Among its faculty, students, and staff, the University will cultivate principled thought, develop intellectual skills, and foster an environment that emphasizes individual dignity and worth. SMU affirms its historical commitment to academic freedom and open inquiry, to moral and ethical values, and to its United Methodist heritage.

Core Values

SMU embraces excellence, integrity, intellectual freedom, open dialogue, diversity, and inclusion.

- **Excellence:** We cultivate an enduring spirit of inquiry, innovation, and creativity, fostering impactful research, inspired teaching, and life-long learning.
- **Integrity:** We value truth and conduct ourselves with honesty and strong moral and ethical principles.
- **Intellectual freedom:** We embrace freedom of ideas and expression. SMU was founded by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, to promote higher education and freedom of inquiry and remains secular in its teaching. We respect people of all backgrounds and beliefs, and work with academic zeal and tenacity to improve the world.
- **Open dialogue:** We welcome opportunities to exchange diverse perspectives and pledge ourselves to civil discourse.
- **Diversity and inclusion:** We are all strengthened by different perspectives based on our varied identities and life experiences, and we embrace the worth and dignity of all people. SMU students say it well: Every Mustang is valued.

Academics

SMU's strength lies in fusing teaching and research into breakthrough academic experiences. This balance is rare among national institutions, yet fitting for a university like SMU that values balance and breadth in education. SMU offers more than 100 majors and 85 minors to choose from, as well as double- and triple-major opportunities and accelerated degree and Honors programs across the following schools and colleges.

[Cox School of Business](#)

[Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences](#)

[Dedman School of Law](#)

[Lyle School of Engineering](#)

[Meadows School of the Arts](#)

[Moody School of Graduate & Advanced Studies](#)

[Perkins School of Theology](#)

[Simmons School of Education & Human Development](#)



Strategic Plan - Mustang Charge

Mustang Charge: Accelerating SMU to the Forefront defines SMU's strategic ambitions and commitment for the future, challenging what lies ahead for the University. The plan serves as a strategic roadmap for the future, establishing a clear framework to accelerate SMU's rise among America's leading universities. Grounded in academic excellence, innovation, and institutional ambition, the plan challenges the University community to build upon the distinctive strengths of the Mustang experience while advancing SMU's national prominence in teaching, research, athletics, and community engagement.

The plan envisions SMU as a nationally recognized research university distinguished by academic excellence, transformative student experiences, innovative scholarship, athletic achievement, and principled leadership. Through strategic investments and a commitment to continuous improvement, SMU seeks to attract exceptional talent, strengthen student outcomes, expand research impact, and deepen its engagement with Dallas and the broader global community.

Developed through an extensive engagement process involving more than 9,000 members of the SMU community, *Mustang Charge* reflects a shared vision for the University's future and its commitment to becoming a leading institution of national and global impact.

Leadership

Jay Hartzell, President



President Jay Hartzell serves as SMU's president. A nationally recognized economist and accomplished university leader, President Hartzell joined SMU on June 1, 2025, following distinguished service as President of The University of Texas at Austin, where he oversaw record levels of applications, enrollment, graduation rates, research expenditures, and philanthropic support. Before that, he served as dean of the McCombs School of Business and spent more than two decades on the faculty at UT Austin. He began his academic career as an assistant professor of finance at New York University's Stern School of Business. Under his leadership, SMU is pursuing an ambitious strategic path designed to elevate the University's academic standing, research profile, student experience, and national visibility.

Rachel Mercy, Executive Vice President and Provost



Executive Vice President and Provost Rachel Mersey joined SMU on June 1, 2025, and leads the academic enterprise across all schools and degree-granting units. A visionary academic leader and champion for high-impact teaching, research, interdisciplinary collaboration, and innovation, Provost Mersey previously served as Executive Vice President and Provost at The University of Texas at Austin, where she oversaw a broad portfolio that included enrollment management and the University's billion-dollar research enterprise. Earlier in her career, she served on the faculty at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, Media, and Integrated Marketing Communications, where she rose through the ranks to Professor and Associate Dean for Research.

Wes Waggoner, Vice Provost for Enrollment Management



Wes Waggoner serves as Vice Provost for Enrollment Management at SMU, where he leads the University's enrollment strategy and oversees Undergraduate Admission, Student Financial Services, the University Registrar, and the International Office. Since joining SMU in 2011 as Dean of Admission, he has held his current role since 2015 and was named Vice Provost & Chief Enrollment Officer in 2023. A seasoned enrollment leader, Waggoner previously served in admission and student counseling positions at TCU, the University of Tulsa, Tulane University, Fort Worth Country Day School, and The Episcopal School of Baton Rouge. Under his leadership, SMU has achieved record gains in enrollment growth and academic quality.



Dallas, Texas

Southern Methodist University is located in the heart of Dallas, one of the nation's most vibrant and economically influential metropolitan regions. Home to more than 8.3 million residents, the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex is the fourth-largest metropolitan area in the United States and a leading center for corporate headquarters, technology, healthcare, financial services, transportation, and entrepreneurship.

The region offers students unparalleled access to professional experiences and career opportunities. Dallas-Fort Worth is home to 24 Fortune 500 headquarters, including AT&T, American Airlines, McKesson, Texas Instruments, CBRE, Southwest Airlines, and Charles Schwab. This concentration of global employers, combined with a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem, creates exceptional opportunities for internships, experiential learning, networking, and post-graduation employment. As the nation's fourth-largest media market, Dallas is also a significant center of commerce, culture, and influence.

For professionals and families, Dallas offers an exceptional quality of life, with vibrant urban neighborhoods, family-friendly communities, highly regarded public and independent schools, and diverse housing options. Flourishing ethnic and international neighborhoods and communities contribute to a culturally rich environment shaped by global traditions, perspectives, languages, and cuisines. At the same time, the region's strong economy offers abundant opportunities for spouses and partners to pursue their own careers.

Dallas-Fort Worth is equally recognized for its cultural and recreational amenities. The 118-acre Dallas Arts District, the largest contiguous urban arts district in the United States, features world-renowned museums and performance venues. The region is also home to professional teams in every major North American sports

league, a nationally celebrated dining scene anchored by Tex-Mex and Texas barbecue, and iconic events such as the State Fair of Texas.

Few universities are as deeply connected to the economic, cultural, and civic life of their city as SMU. Together, these assets make Dallas an exceptional place to live, work, study, and lead while providing SMU students with opportunities that few universities can match.





Procedure for Candidacy

All applications, nominations, and inquiries are invited. Applications should include, as separate documents, a CV or resume and a letter of interest addressing the themes in this profile.

WittKieffer is assisting Southern Methodist University in this search. For fullest consideration, candidate materials should be received by November 16, 2026.

Application materials should be submitted using WittKieffer's [candidate portal](#).

Nominations and inquiries can be directed to Shelley Arakawa, J.D., and Ashlee Musser at:

SMU_AVPandDean@wittkieffer.com

Southern Methodist University will not discriminate in any employment practice, education program, education activity, or admissions based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, genetic information, or veteran status. SMU's commitment to equal opportunity includes nondiscrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.