



Michael T. Stephenson

Dear colleagues,

Last week, strategic plan co-chairs Gen. David Glaser and Dr. McCartney Johnson [let campus know](#) that SHSU's newest strategic framework will be submitted to the TSUS Board of Regents for their review in May. The [new framework](#) contains a revised mission and vision statement, a set of values on which our mission and vision are based, and four strategic priorities for the next 3-5 years.

While the university community will not build out the specific goals and objectives for the four strategic priorities until fall, most divisions – including Academic Affairs – are preparing now to align our strategy, budget, and priorities.

To that end, I am pleased to announce the positioning of individuals within the Office of the Provost and the Division of Academic Affairs to correspond with this anticipated action on the strategic plan. Because the university has been financially impacted by the pandemic, it was important we be a good steward of university funds and that these changes be budget neutral. After an exhaustive review of the Office of the Provost budget, I prioritized funding so no new base dollars are needed for the following changes. Moreover, I firmly believe these shifts will yield significant outcomes and mobilize our enrollment and retention.

Each of the following updates aligns with one of the four strategic priorities:

Strategic Priority 1 (Prioritize Student Success and Student Access)

Lt. Col. Joe Contreras, Chair of Military Science, has been appointed Director of First Generation Initiatives, effective June 16, 2022, upon his retirement from the U.S. Armed Forces. In his role, Lt. Col. Contreras will be responsible for establishing the new First Generation Center, which will provide service and outreach to our first generation student community and their families, in addition to coordinating and leading all first generation initiatives out of Academic Affairs.

As a first generation student himself, Lt. Col. Contreras brings significant leadership experience and an excellent track record with SHSU student success. Our award-winning ELITE and evolve programs, under the direction of Jose Herrera, will fall within his portfolio as well. Because I view the success of this work with first generation students to be critical to our future, Lt. Col. Contreras will report directly to me.

Additionally, I am pleased to announce that **Dr. Brian Loft**, Associate Professor of Mathematics, will serve as Assistant Provost for Sponsored Research within the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, effective May 1, 2022. As you may know, Dr. Loft led the university's efforts on the recently-completed Frontier Set initiative and directed our Engaging Classrooms QEP. Most recently, he secured a \$2 million SIP grant from the USDOE with Dr. Mary Catherine Breen to enhance the services and infrastructure for our Academic Success Center. This new position leverages Dr. Loft's visionary ideation, his outstanding grant skills, and our newly attained R2 status to take sponsored research for student success to the next level.

Strategic Priority 2 (Embody a Culture of Excellence) and Strategic Priority 3 (Elevate the Reputation and Visibility of SHSU)

Dr. Aneika Simmons, Professor of Management and Director of DEI in the College of Business Administration, will serve as Interim Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Success, effective August 1, 2022. Dr. Simmons's primary responsibility is to lead much-needed centralized efforts to help academic departments identify, recruit, and onboard new faculty. Additionally, she will focus her efforts on implementing programs that help faculty advance and develop in their careers, as well as nominate faculty who have extraordinary achievements for important and prestigious awards. The Professional Academic Center for Excellence (PACE), under the direction of Dr. Kevin Randall, will also be included in her portfolio.

Strategic Priority 3 (Elevate the Reputation and Visibility of SHSU) and Strategic Priority 4 (Expand and Elevate our Community Engagement and Service to the State and Beyond)

I am pleased to share that **Dr. Ken Hendrickson**, Professor of History and Dean of the Graduate School, will also take on the position of Associate Provost for Community Engagement. He will continue ably leading the Graduate School, but he will provide leadership and coordination to those academic initiatives that interface with our local communities.

In this capacity, Dr. Hendrickson will oversee a visioning process for The Woodlands Center (TWC) to maximize our engagement in the greater Houston area. Instructional delivery at TWC will not change significantly, but he will also work to make it a hub for strategic community partnerships in the greater Houston area, including The Woodlands and Conroe.

Finally, both the Center for Community Engagement (CCE), under the direction of Dr. Joyce McCauley as well as the Center for Law, Engagement, and Politics (LEAP) directed by Mike Yawn, will be in Dr. Hendrickson's portfolio. I am confident that this outstanding combination of people and programs will vertically advance our community engagement to an incredible level of excellence.

As our division and the university take these first steps to align with the strategic framework and priorities, I am encouraged by our unified mission for the future of Sam Houston State University and this special community. Thank you for your support as we build for the future.

Sincerely,

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

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