



# Sam Houston State University

MEMBER THE TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

## OFFICE OF THE PROVOST

Michael T. Stephenson

Dear Academic Affairs faculty and staff,

Welcome to the fall 2023 semester!

### **Celebrations**

At the President's Academic Awards Dinner later this month, we will once again acknowledge the [accomplishments and honors](#) of our faculty colleagues. Among this year's awardees are our three newest Distinguished Professors: Dr. Julie Combs (COE), Dr. Joyce McCauley (COE), and Dr. Pam Zelbst (COBA).

We will also recognize the following for their outstanding contributions:

*Excellence in Teaching:* Dr. Kandi Tayebi, Professor, English

*Non-Tenure Track Teaching:* Ms. Adannaa Alexander, Clinical Assistant Professor, Public Health

*Excellence in Service:* Dr. Lisa Brown, Associate Professor, School of Teaching & Learning

*Excellence in Scholarly & Creative Accomplishments:* Dr. Helena Halmari, Regents' Professor and Distinguished Professor, English

*David Payne Academic Community Engagement (ACE) Award:* Dr. Brandon Strubberg, Assistant Professor, English

*Texas State University System Regents' Teacher Award:* Dr. Mary Petron, Professor, School of Teaching & Learning and Dr. Andrea Foster, Professor, School of Teaching & Learning

I am also happy to share that more of last year's freshmen are coming back than in previous years. The fall-to-fall retention for freshmen *to date* is 75.3%, the highest level in the past three years. The final number will be determined on the 12th class day.

As we welcome another record size freshman class to SHSU, a critical part of our first-year retention program is UNIV 1101, now called "Bearkat U." This year, we will teach over 1,250 students in Bearkat U - more students than any year prior. Thank you to those who are teaching a section! I am excited to be teaching one this year and cannot wait to meet the students. Additionally, Academic Affairs is participating in the inaugural [Bearkat Kickoff](#), a new freshman engagement and retention program, which runs Sunday, Aug. 13 through Thursday, Aug. 17. The purpose of Bearkat Kickoff is to prepare new freshmen for the fall semester.

### **Engagement Opportunities on Learning Loss and AI**

Thanks to all of you who have been so gracious and agile in your classes to address issues related to learning loss. I am encouraged by your willingness to address the matter head on. Based on your comments in last spring's learning loss forums, Academic Affairs has compiled resources that are being introduced this semester, including a series of four [professional development workshops](#). The [Student Success Hub](#), a centralized website where you can find information to assist your students, has been added to our website. Look for an email with more information from Dr. Amy Salazar in the coming days.

As you know, artificial intelligence (AI) generative models are now shaping conversations about how we teach and use AI in the classroom. While we have had a few months to process the implications, there is still much to learn. You have

two opportunities to hear more about AI this fall. The first event, a Conversations with Administrators sponsored by Human Resources, is scheduled for Tuesday, Sept. 12 at 2 p.m. on Blackboard. Then, a townhall sponsored by Academic Affairs on AI in Higher Education is scheduled for Tuesday, Sept. 19 at 2 p.m. in LSC Room 320 (and also streaming on Blackboard).

Details on these will follow in our weekly Tuesday morning Academic Affairs Newsletter. Additional resources on AI are available [here](#) (from PACE) and [here](#) (from NGL).

### **Welcome to Academic Affairs**

I am pleased to welcome Ms. Jeanine Bias to Academic Affairs as SHSU's Chief Experience Officer (CXO). She will help at the strategic level to facilitate the student experience and engagement from application to graduation as well as oversee the Veterans Resource Center, ELITE, and our HSI initiative. It is also a pleasure to welcome the SAM Center and Career Success Center into Academic Affairs. These units are critical to the success of our students so that they engage in curricular and co-curricular experiences, make timely progress toward their degrees, and find a successful post-graduation experience, whether it be in industry or further education.

### **System Policy and Post-Tenure Review**

To comply with state law, the Texas State University System Board of Regents recently revised the System's post-tenure review policy. We are now working with our Office of General Counsel (OGC) to identify areas where our university policy will change to comply with new state law. The revisions will go through our [standard policy approval process](#) once we have guidance from OGC. I would expect that the University policy will change only minimally, as our process is largely consistent with state law.

### **IDEA**

In the spring, one of the recommendations from the Course Evaluations Best Practices Workgroup was to pilot test the short version of the IDEA course evaluation tool. I am working with deans and department chairs to ascertain interest and will have updates for you when we hold our college meetings in October.

### **BRIDGE Program**

BRIDGE grant awards, funded from the Provost Innovation Fund, were announced in July. Read about the interdisciplinary teams and their projects [here](#).

### **Watermark**

This fall, COCJ, COM, and COBA are fully adopting the Watermark Activities module. The rest of campus will do so in the 2024-25 academic year. Faculty members in all colleges are welcome to begin entering their professional activity now, [using this guide](#). Watermark can be accessed [here](#).

It is an honor and a pleasure to have everyone back for fall. To the over 100 new faculty and staff joining us this academic year at SHSU, welcome to Sam. I wish each of you a safe, happy, and productive semester.

Sincerely,



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

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*This email has been approved for distribution to AA Faculty and Staff  
by Michael T. Stephenson, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs.*

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