



# Sam Houston State University

MEMBER THE TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

## OFFICE OF THE PROVOST

Michael T. Stephenson

Dear colleagues,

For most of us, today begins the sixth week of the semester while our medical school colleagues are already on week eight. All campuses are full of vibrant activity as we approach the midpoint of the semester. Here are a few updates that may be of interest.

### Student Success Markers

I am pleased to share this great news:

- 84% of students attending last spring returned this fall, the second highest in a six-year period;
- 75% of last year's freshmen returned this year, an increase of 1.9% over the previous year and the highest in a three-year period;
- 5,186 students are enrolled in one of 271 ACE (academic community engagement) courses, a 14% increase over last fall;
- 1,370 freshmen are enrolled in UNIV 1101, "Bearkat U," a 32% increase over last fall; and
- The First-Gen Center piloted its Trailblazer Mentoring Program with 70 first-gen freshmen and yielded a 93% retention rate.

These gains are important for our campus community and are consistent with our strategic priority to recruit, retain, and graduate our students. I thank you for being steadfast in making student access and student success an institutional priority.

### University Policy and SB18

I wanted to provide a brief update on [Senate Bill 18](#), known informally as the "tenure bill," which was signed into law this summer by Gov. Abbott. The bill codified tenure and post-tenure review into state law effective September 1. Changes to policies and procedures were needed both at the System and the University level to comply with the new law.

For the System, the TSUS Board of Regents approved changes to relevant rules and regulations at the August 10 board meeting.

For SHSU, the institution implemented an interim policy for [APS 980204](#) to meet the state's September 1 deadline. The most substantive change was to paragraph 4.02.b. The University will now follow [established procedures](#) and assemble a working group to deliberate and write a permanent policy. Once drafted, faculty will have the opportunity to read the proposed document and weigh in on the proposed changes before a final version goes to the Academic Affairs Council for a vote.

### IDEA Course Evaluations

Last spring, we convened a working group to make recommendations on course evaluation best practices. One recommendation was that the University pilot test a short version of the IDEA diagnostic feedback instrument.

Working with their deans, several academic departments have opted-in to a pilot test of the shorter "Teaching Essentials" version of IDEA. The pilot testing will occur at the end of this semester. Then, in early spring, I will ask participating faculty for feedback on the shorter

instrument to determine whether additional pilot testing for a student perceptions instrument is needed, or if we need to pursue other solutions. This is a significant decision for the institution, so your feedback will be instrumental.

For those interested, [here](#) is where you can review which items in the longer IDEA Diagnostic Feedback comprise the shorter 12-item Teaching Essentials measure (items labeled TE).

### **Student Well Being**

As many of you know, we are moving into the time that is often challenging for our students. Daylight begins to decrease and the weight of the exams and assignments sets in. Therefore, I wanted to remind you about the [mental health and well-being](#) webpage on our student success resource hub.

If you feel the need to refer a student for assistance, [this page](#) outlines four different ways for addressing students of concern. Thank you for all you do and the care you extend to your students and their well-being. This is why Sam is such a special place.

### **Another Record Year in Research Funding**

We set another record last academic year for external funding, this time with 91 proposals awarded for more than \$26 million, up 7% over last year. Moreover, 238 proposals were submitted, an increase of 25.6% over last year. Congratulations and thank you to all who are working so hard to obtain external funding.

This is an exciting time to be at Sam. I look forward to discussing these and other items later this fall when President White and I visit the colleges. Until then, I thank you for your dedication to our student-centered, community-engaged University.

With gratitude,



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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