

## **SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO THE SOUTH CAROLINA ANNUAL CONFERENCE THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

Southern Methodist University (SMU) has served as a nonsectarian institution of higher learning since its founding in 1911. Guided by a mission to expand knowledge through research and teaching, SMU educates students with ambition and integrity, advances discovery that matters, and serves as a catalyst for positive impact in Dallas, Texas, and beyond.

With continued Methodist representation on the Board of Trustees and a longstanding commitment to welcoming students of all faiths, SMU honors its Wesleyan heritage while advancing as a nationally recognized private research university. Consistent with this heritage and tradition, SMU submits this report to the South Carolina Annual Conference.

### **Institutional momentum and leadership transition**

I was honored to begin my service as President of SMU on June 1, 2025. My first seven months have been focused on listening, learning, and building relationships with students, faculty, staff, alumni, trustees, and civic and community partners.

Even after a few short months, I can clearly see the distinctive qualities that define SMU and draw people to this community: academic excellence, a vibrant campus culture, deeply engaged alumni, and an unusually attractive position as a private research university rooted in one of the nation's most dynamic metropolitan regions. This combination, reinforced by a shared sense of purpose grounded in SMU's mission and values, fuels our momentum to expand SMU's reach and influence and help shape the future of higher education.

During this period, we welcomed outstanding new academic leadership to SMU. Rachel Davis Mersey joined the University as Executive Vice President and Provost, bringing deep experience in academic leadership, a strong commitment to faculty excellence and student success, and a collaborative approach that is well aligned with SMU. We also welcomed Bryan P. Stone as the Leighton K. Farrell Dean of Perkins School of Theology, whose leadership reflects a deep commitment to theological education, the life of the Church, and the formation of faithful leaders. In addition to Drs. Mersey and Stone, several experienced leaders stepped into key leadership roles at SMU: Janan Jayawickramarajah, dean of the Dedman School of Humanities and Social Sciences; Todd Milbourn, dean of the Edwin L. Cox School of Business; Michael Harris, interim dean of the Simmons School of Education and Human Development; and Damon Evans, director of Athletics.

### **Strategic planning and institutional priorities**

This fall, we launched a comprehensive, University-wide strategic planning process to guide SMU through its next phase of growth. The process is intentionally inclusive, drawing input (to date) from nearly 9,000 community members, including faculty, staff, students, alumni, parents, trustees, employers and the broader Dallas community.

The strategic plan will strengthen academic distinction and student success through transformative teaching and exceptional experiences; expanded interdisciplinary research and creative scholarship that matters; and the preparation of well-rounded, principled leaders who will make an impact in Dallas and far beyond. We expect to complete the plan in Spring 2026, providing a clear roadmap for aligning priorities, resources, and philanthropic support for the next decade.

### **Students, faculty, and staff**

SMU continues to attract academically accomplished and diverse students from across the nation and the world. For the 2025-26 academic year, the University enrolled approximately 12,500 undergraduate and graduate students representing all 50 states and more than 90 countries. A majority of undergraduates come from outside Texas, reflecting SMU's growing national profile.

Our faculty members, graduate students, and undergraduates are advancing research and creative work that addresses complex challenges in areas such as energy, health, security, education, public policy, and the arts – often in collaboration with industry, government, and nonprofit partners. This work strengthens SMU's academic reputation while contributing meaningfully to the economic and civic vitality

of the Dallas–Fort Worth region.

#### Research, philanthropy, and national standing

During the past year, the University successfully completed its most recent comprehensive campaign, SMU Ignited: Boldly Shaping Tomorrow, three years ahead of schedule, raising

\$1.64 billion in private support. The campaign strengthened the University’s academic foundation through investments in students, faculty, academic programs, research, and facilities, and positioned SMU for its next phase of growth and impact.

In 2025, SMU was designated a Research One (R1) institution by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. This designation reflects sustained growth in research activity, faculty scholarship, and external funding, as well as the collective efforts of faculty, staff, students, alumni, and supporters. Achieving R1 status marks an important step along the University’s trajectory to academic prominence and affirms SMU’s commitment to research that serves society and advances knowledge.

SMU continues to receive strong national recognition for academic quality, student outcomes, and research activity, reinforcing the University’s standing among leading private research institutions.

#### Perkins School of Theology

Perkins School of Theology remains central to SMU’s identity and mission, advancing theological education that is both deeply rooted in the Wesleyan tradition and responsive to the needs of the Church and the world. In 2025 and 2026, Perkins expanded access to theological education and strengthened institutional collaboration through several strategic initiatives.

Perkins formalized a three-year partnership with Methodist Theological University in Seoul to support student and faculty exchanges and collaborative global research. The School also launched an accelerated program with McMurry University, enabling qualified students to begin Master of Divinity coursework during their final undergraduate year, reducing both time to degree and cost. In addition, Perkins established a teach-out agreement with Memphis Theological Seminary, allowing enrolled students to complete their degrees at Perkins with full credit transfer, academic support, and tuition scholarships.

These efforts – along with many activities not spelled out here – reflect Perkins’ continued commitment to academic excellence, faithful leadership formation, and service to the United Methodist community through expanded reach and impact.

We remain deeply grateful for Perkins School of Theology’s enduring contributions to theological education and the life of the Church. As we move forward in this new chapter of leadership and planning, we do so with gratitude for the past and confidence in the future – focused on preparing students to lead lives of purpose, expanding knowledge that matters, and serving communities with integrity and care.

Sincerely yours,

Jay C. Hartzell President