



Good morning, Academic Affairs!

I have many exciting updates to share, so let me jump right in:

- Since the Spring Assembly, many of you have reached out to share how you are meeting our students where they need us. I'll plan to share these stories of student engagement in the upcoming months, so keep sending them to me! Below are just several of these inspiring examples:
 - Dr. Rusty Fox, Counseling, taught a Student Services course this past Winter mini where he had students read the history of higher education and student services, as they learned about Astin's Involvement and Sclossberg's Maturing Theory. From there they applied it to the classroom, the library, and with advising, having an epiphany of how this field fits squarely within the business of transforming lives.
 - Dr. Stephen Starnes has been hard at work finding ways to incentivize students to engage in his Chem 1311 class. He has assigned three engagement points per week. Two are required (attendance and checking in with an LA every week) and the third can be gained through a multitude of activities including attending review sessions, going to tutoring, asking a question during office hours, finding errors in exams or keys, and more. Dr. Starnes is working on extra credit points as well. This all supports his plan to get everyone successfully through Chem 1311 without sacrificing class standards. This class is crucial for many students to succeed later in their major, so helping them learn the content through engagement is critical!
- There's no secret that Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a frequent topic of discussion throughout the higher education community. Thanks to the leadership of Dr. Sal Attardo and Dr. Benton Pierce, the AI Initiative has continued to expand at TAMUC. I am grateful for their willingness to nurture this enterprise from its conception, and I encourage you to take a closer look at the [website](#). The leadership baton has now been passed, and I am pleased to share that Dr. Kiki Hempelmann will serve as the next Director of the AI Initiative, with Dr. Omar El Ariss as the Assistant Director. If you want to know more about our AI efforts, have ideas about AI and our institution, or how to get involved, please reach out to Drs. Hempelmann and El Ariss.
- The three dean search committees have now finished their work and we are moving on to the public stage of the search. Thank you to all who served on these committees! Each committee did an excellent job of attracting a large national, diverse, and

competitive pool of candidates. Thanks to their meticulous review and discernment throughout the initial selection process, they identified exceptional candidates for consideration for this next stage of the search. I am excited as we move forward, bringing finalists to our campus for interviews starting this week and going through early March:

- CHSSA
 - Dr. Kyoko Amano
 - 2/14; NHS 160B
 - Dr. Orlando Perez
 - 2/19; NHS 160B
 - Dr. Mark Cooper
 - 2/21; NHS 160B
- CASNR
 - Dr. Ben Weikert
 - 2/26; Ambition A&B
 - Dr. Mark Kistler
 - 2/28; Ambition A&B
 - Dr. Jason Apple
 - 3/1; Ambition A&B
- Honors College
 - Dr. Erin Webster Garrett
 - 3/4; Location TBD
 - Dr. Linda Tredennick
 - 3/6; Location TBD
 - Dr. Karen Roggenkamp
 - 3/8; Location TBD

It will be important that we have strong campus support to identify the next leaders of these colleges! Please mark your calendars for 2:30-3:30 pm for each of the above dates to attend the Open Forums. I hope that you are able to attend and listen to candidates present their vision for their respective colleges and contributions to the strategic plan. There will also be plenty of time to ask questions and get to know the candidate better. In addition, for each college there will be identified time for faculty, staff, and students to meet with candidates in smaller group settings. Please do everything you can to meet with each candidate that is associated with your college! It is important to remember that while we are interviewing them, they are also looking at us and deciding what it would be like to join our institution.

You can find each candidate's CV and letter of interest on the [Ongoing Dean Search webpage](#) in addition to the dates/times and locations of each forum. Following each candidate's time on campus, there will be a survey for you to share your feedback. Your insights and perspectives will be invaluable in this critical decision. I look forward to seeing you at the open forums!

- I want to remind everyone about my open-door meetings again this semester. These are for you to chat with me about anything of interest to you. I would love to learn more about your research goals and interests, your teaching, ideas for campus improvement, or whatever else might be on your mind. I have set aside Tuesdays from 4-6 pm and Wednesdays from noon to 1 pm for these meetings. Other times are available upon request. Please email Cynthia.Rhodes@tamuc.edu to schedule a 30-minute appointment.
- Through attending various leadership meetings and staying abreast of national news in higher education, it is clear to me that now, more than ever, we need to focus on strategic innovation, meeting student needs for their future, and setting ambitious goals that we pursue without haste. While drive, commitment, and resilience are necessary, they may not be sufficient, as I have come to believe that practicing grace and kindness must also be included. So, as I come to a close, I wanted to share some of my current thinking with you. I offer a gentle push toward being kind and giving grace, not only toward our students, but also each other as faculty and staff. We never really know what another person is going through, or what their struggles are. So let's do our best to ensure that we care for one another, fostering belonging and welcoming all. The **Power of Kindness** can be shown through empathy, understanding, and even the smallest of gestures. Smiling at someone as you pass, offering to hold open the door, or emailing a thoughtful "thank you" note. **Giving Grace** is being kind, even when it might not be deserved; or forgiving, even when it may not be deserved. Let's offer others the benefit of the doubt as we all strive to do our best for our students and each other.

I'm reminded of the sentiment, "In a world where you can be anything, be kind." I urge you to show appreciation, practice gratitude, and be kind. This doesn't mean we let go of high expectations or the determination to meet our goals. We must keep working hard, as that is what our students deserve; but we can also care about one another as we commit to keep moving our university forward. We are better together, Lions, so let's spread kindness and grace wherever we go!

As always, thank you for your dedication and hard work as our institution continues to make great strides.

tvh

