



SMU

*Office of the President*

November 8, 2012

TO: The University Community

FROM: R. Gerald Turner, President

Because SMU is committed to providing the best possible environment for students to achieve their educational and personal goals, we are ever mindful of the importance of examining how our campus community welcomes and benefits from its racial diversity, and how our minority students feel about their campus experiences. As SMU's mission statement says in part: "Among its faculty, students, and staff, the University will cultivate principled thought, develop intellectual skills, and promote an environment emphasizing individual dignity and worth."

A positive step toward self-examination occurred with the recent town hall meeting, "The Elephant in the Room: Battling Bias," sponsored by the Student Senate Diversity Committee, Association of Black Students, College Hispanic American Students, Asian Council and other student groups. In that setting, members of our minority community shared perspectives, concerns and information about their campus experiences, including those reflecting misunderstandings or stereotypes that make it more difficult for them to enjoy our academic and social environments to their fullest.

Since my arrival on campus in June 1995, the President's Commission on the Status of Racial Minorities at SMU has examined the experiences of our diverse students and has made recommendations to me each May on addressing areas of needed improvement. As we strive to continue increasing the diversity of our campus, and to improve the environment for those who are valued members of our minority community now and in the future, I am asking Tony Tillman, current Commission chair and assistant provost, to convene a special working group of the Commission to understand better the experiences of our minority students, faculty and staff. It will consist of a diverse group of students, faculty and administrators and will report its recommendations to me by May 1, 2013.

From time to time members of the special working group might call on you for your insights. I will appreciate all the cooperation you can provide for them on this important effort. Our desired outcome will be to strengthen SMU even more as a caring community embracing principles and conduct that support the high purpose of education and the well-being of all our students.

Thank you for your assistance in support of University goals.