September 28, 2012

Dear students, faculty and staff:

In the past few weeks our campus community has been shocked and saddened by allegations of two sexual assaults that have resulted in the indictment of an SMU student and most recently the arrest of another. In an educational community that values and expects the highest level of mutual respect, personal responsibility and behavior that upholds the law, these allegations are especially troubling. As the criminal process moves forward, we continue to offer counseling and support to those affected, as well as to provide information to all students on procedures for reporting sexual misconduct.

I am asking members of the University community to re-acquaint themselves with the options and procedures for reporting sexual misconduct, information shared through the Code of Conduct in the Student Handbook, orientation sessions, Wellness classes, University websites, and crime alerts. Such resources explain the conduct review process through the SMU Code of Conduct as well as the option to file criminal or civil charges, which proceed separately and independently of SMU. Like all colleges and universities that receive federal funding, SMU is required by federal law under Title IX to investigate complaints of sexual violence and to provide an internal grievance procedure. Independent of this requirement, SMU is committed to fostering a healthy and supportive environment, to holding members of the community accountable if they violate the rights of others, and to providing care and counseling to the victims of sexual misconduct. At the same time, we encourage respect for the rights of all concerned while investigations and processes unfold.

In view of recent questions about how universities, including SMU, address sexual misconduct, I am appointing the President’s Task Force on Sexual Misconduct Policies and Procedures. As the name implies, the charge of the task force will be to examine SMU’s procedures and policies in comparison with benchmark practices to determine if any updates or changes are needed, taking into account adherence to state and federal laws, especially Title IX. Although
our procedures are examined regularly, and mirror those of many other institutions, the task force will be a timely opportunity to broaden deliberations and conversation on this critical matter. Its focus will include not only how sexual misconduct allegations are addressed at SMU, but also how the University can strengthen prevention and education on this important topic.

The task force will be co-chaired by Lori White, vice president for Student Affairs, and Kelly Compton, SMU alumna, trustee and chair of the Board’s Students Affairs Committee. Members will include students; faculty; administrators in areas such as Institutional Access and Equity (Title IX coordination), the Health Center, Residence Life and Student Housing, and law enforcement. The Task Force also will include representation from victims’ support organizations. In its work, the Task Force will call upon other local and national experts as resources.

As we have dealt with the tragic issue of sexual assault over the past few weeks, we have appreciated expressions of concern from among our constituents and others who share our deepest commitment to the welfare of our students. We will further appreciate thoughtful input as we move forward with the deliberations of our task force. Our desired outcome will be to strengthen the University as a caring community with high standards of conduct that support the high purpose of education.

Thank you for your assistance in support of University goals.

Sincerely,

R. Gerald Turner
President