



OFFICE OF THE
**Provost and Vice President
for Academic Affairs**

EAST TEXAS A&M

Good afternoon, Academic Affairs!

I hope this finds you well! I can't believe that we are already a third of the way through the semester. And wow! A lot is going on. Here are just a few of the many important and exciting updates I would like to share with you.

- Great news! East Texas A&M University has been elevated to an R2 research university. This Carnegie classification of institutions of higher education through the American Council of Education gives this designation to universities that demonstrate a high level of research and identifies our commitment to doctoral education, external funding, and ongoing scholarship. Congratulations, Lions; well done!
- Dr. Eric Branscome has recently moved into a new position on campus as the Special Assistant to the Provost Office. Now through the summer semester, he will focus on SACSCOC and compliance topics, policy review for academic affairs, and continue his work as director of the QEP. Dr. Branscome came to ETAMU in 2021. Both here and in his prior role at Austin Peay State University in Tennessee, he has led various SACS-related committees and projects such as co-chair of the Institutional Effectiveness Assessment Committee (APSU), QEP Committee (APSU and ETAMU), and SACSCOC Assessment Subcommittees. At ETAMU, he led the team of music faculty to redesignate the Music Department as a School of Music, helped to start the new Mariachi program, and oversaw the development and implementation of our new QEP. Dr. Branscome shared that while he has deeply enjoyed his time in the School of Music, he is excited to branch out to be of service campus-wide for colleagues and broader initiatives.
- I am excited to share that we will be welcoming Dr. Sri Beldona to the Lion family in March as the new Chief Academic Officer for our Dallas campus and Special Assistant to the President. This is a new leadership position in which Dr. Beldona will build and nurture connections with Dallas metropolitan industry partners to support the university's goals in academic offerings, philanthropy, and student career preparedness. In this role, he will work collaboratively with vice presidents, deans, and the Dallas Chief Operating Officer, as well as faculty, staff, and external partners to ensure the alignment of

programs and initiatives with local market needs and institutional priorities. Dr. Beldona comes to us with an impressive background in both academic program and industry partnership building. I look forward to seeing all that he accomplishes as our institution continues to grow in the metropolitan area. To read more about Dr. Beldona and this role, please navigate to the [posted news story](#).

- Registration for the Spring 2025 Investing in You events is now open (see below). The Investing in You: Junior Faculty Career Development and Support Initiative is designed to advance the careers of junior faculty at East Texas and is centered around the core competencies of enhancing performance, optimizing talent, and fostering collaborative relationships.
 - **The Faculty Compass: Aligning Your Time with Career Goals** – 3/4/2025 (via Zoom)
 - **Charting Your Course: Building a Research Agenda for Impact** – 4/22/2025 (via Zoom)
 - **Collaborate and Connect: Cross-Disciplinary Research Meet-Up** – 5/6/2025

Registration is open to all and can be made using the following:

<https://forms.gle/eb5xN3MmBZzoreTN7>

For any questions see the attached flyer or contact Dr. Sharonda Pruitt at sharonda.pruitt@tamuc.edu.

- Provost Fellows Dr. Brian Zator and Dr. Flavia Belpoliti have been working hard on the creation of the Faculty Success Center, aimed at providing resources for faculty in a centralized location. While building the website is underway, they have established an advisory board of the following members:
 - COB: Dr. Robert Rankin
 - CID: Dr. Jennifer Hudson
 - CASNR: Dr. Desire Djidonou
 - COSE: Dr. Ayman Elzohairy
 - COEHS: Dr. Vipa Bernhardt
 - CHSSA: Dr. Flavia Belpoliti and Dr. Brian Zator
 - Faculty Senate: Dr. Tami Morton

A heartfelt thank you to those who agreed to serve! Drs. Zator and Belpoliti will provide informational presentations this semester to the Dean's Council, Faculty Senate, and Department Head Council as they work on this exciting project for all faculty. Feel free to reach out directly to Brian or Flavia with any questions or if you would like to get involved in the early stages of developing the Faculty Success Center.

- As you most likely know, the President and I have been committed to addressing concerns regarding faculty salaries. The first step was to collect and analyze the data. Thus, after hiring a third-party consultant who specializes in this type of work, I have now met with the Faculty Senate President, Dr. Yasmin Atinc, and Dr. Carrie Klypchak, the Budget Director for the Faculty Senate, along with our consultant, to review the initial results. Given that the survey looks at both aggregated and individual data, we are working closely with HR at our institution. I anticipate that we will have the consultant on campus in March or April to meet with the Faculty Senate, and possibly, offer open meetings for faculty. There is no doubt that there is a critical need to engage in thoughtful discussion, and I have asked the Faculty Senate to provide overall recommendations on how to best distribute the funds based on the current faculty data in relation to CUPA and available permanent funding set aside for faculty salaries. Please make sure to stay in touch with your faculty senators!
- I am excited to share with you that Dr. Flavia Belpoliti will chair the new committee on open educational resources (OER) at our institution. Other members include Dr. Willie Edwards, Sarah Northam, Dr. Beth Bailey, and George Swindell. Thanks to those who volunteered! This committee will work closely with all stakeholders, including students and faculty, to set goals for implementing OER and support increased use. Please reach out directly to the chair at Flavia.Belpoliti@tamuc.edu with any questions or if you would like to join this team.
- In the next several weeks, a new position in our division will be posted: Assistant Vice Provost for Academic Affairs. We'll be doing a national search, with the plan to have the selected candidate start no later than July 1. This is a full-time position that will report to the Senior Vice Provost (Dr. Ricky Dobbs) and will be responsible for providing the vision and implementation of a comprehensive approach to student success at East Texas A&M University. This position will provide leadership for the Student Success Center and supervise academic coaching, college advising, career preparedness, tutoring, and other key activities centered on cultivating student success. The Assistant Vice Provost will also oversee the work of identified retention-related task forces and committees, develop and facilitate training to help other constituents support students, and work across institutional divisions to improve student outcomes. The Assistant Vice Provost will need to effectively navigate and communicate processes and expectations through programming and coordinate communication and responses to student needs across academic affairs, student affairs, athletics, and other stakeholders. If you are interested in student success, I hope you take a moment to review! Please reach out directly to Dr. Dobbs with any questions at Ricky.Dobbs@tamuc.edu.

On a final note, I want to remind everyone that I always like to hear from you and learn about your thoughts, concerns, and wins. To schedule a time to chat, please email Cynthia.Rhodes@tamuc.edu. As always, thank you for all that you do for our students, each other, and our institution.

tvh

