After what was hopefully a happy, healthy and relaxing holiday break, we are back at work – UNT Health Science Center students have already returned to the classroom, while UNT and UNT Dallas students begin classes next week. This is a time of year when many of us focus on new initiatives and new goals as we work to make ourselves, our teams and our institutions better.

Last Friday we held a Senior Staff Retreat for my administrative team. The day-long event, held at UNT Dallas, provided an opportunity for candid dialogue and self-analysis. We discussed goals, opportunities, challenges, potential changes and how to become a truly unified UNT System alongside our member institutions.

I left the session feeling energized and optimistic – we have a group of talented, hard-working, dedicated people leading the organization. Add this “esprit de corps” amongst my senior team to the strong meeting I had with our three university presidents to close 2017, and you will see a group that appears primed to make great strides in 2018.

In the spirit of openness and collaboration, we have planned four upcoming Town Hall events with employees of the UNT System, UNT, UNT Health Science Center and UNT Dallas for late January and early February. Each Town Hall will include a panel discussion regarding System operations and how we can become a Best Place to Work. Both Regent Laura Wright – who had a successful career with Southwest Airlines – and I will participate in each panel discussion, drawing on our past experiences with workplace cultures. Each
of our Presidents will also participate in these discussions on their respective campuses.

Dates for the Town Halls are as follows (and you can expect further, campus-specific details to be delivered via email from each university very soon):

**Town Hall for the UNT System** (at UNT)
January 26
10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

**Town Hall for UNT**
January 26
1:30 – 3:00 p.m.

**Town Hall for UNT Dallas**
February 2
2:00 – 3:30 p.m.

**Town Hall for UNTHSC**
February 8
9:30 – 11:00 a.m.

**DECEMBER RECAP**

I participated in my first-ever UNT graduation on December 15, but it wasn't in Denton ... it was in New Orleans. Why? A perfect example of UNT President Neal Smatresk and his team listening to students and finding a solution.

UNT Vice President/Director of Athletics Wren Baker took to Twitter when the Mean Green's bowl match-up with Troy on December 16 was posted, and gathered feedback from graduating students who wanted to attend the game and don a cap and gown for graduation. The solution, hold an additional ceremony for those students prior to the New Orleans Bowl.

As a participant in alumni and donor activities in New Orleans, I was lucky enough to be part of this historic and customer-centric idea... participating in commencement alongside President Smatresk and Regent Wright. And while the Mean Green fell just short in the big game, the special graduation ceremony as part of Bowl Week showed how our leaders are willing to think outside-the-box in support of our students.
UNT held its traditional commencement ceremonies in Denton on Dec. 15 and 16 – celebrating the accomplishments of more than 3,400 students that received degrees, including 2,700+ undergraduate students, 600+ master’s students and more than 70 doctoral students. Families and friends of the graduates packed the Coliseum and Murchison Center on UNT’s campus, as our newest alumni were deservedly lauded for their hard work and accomplishments.

UNT Dallas also held a dazzling commencement ceremony on December 15. UNTD’s celebration featured husband and wife keynote speakers, The Honorable Michael L. Williams and The Honorable Donna N. Williams, as well as a heartfelt talk by student speaker Ruhama Tolossa. Tolossa shared the story of the journey of her young life, reflecting on her early life in Ethiopia and her family winning a lottery 17 years ago to move to the United States. She brought with her the book “It Takes a Village,” and shared remembrances from her childhood and her recent years at UNT Dallas.

While UNT Health Science Center does not hold a fall commencement ceremony, President Michael R. Williams and his team certainly closed the year with a flurry of activity. Work continues on our new M.D. School, in partnership with Texas Christian University. The required documentation was submitted to the accrediting body, the Liaison Committee on Medical Education and the proposal to add the M.D. degree to UNTHSC’s portfolio of programs was submitted to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. This a huge and exciting undertaking that will change medical education and healthcare in our region, as well as throughout the state.

**IN THE NEWS**

**FORT WORTH STAR TELEGRAM: JPS teams with UNTHSC for faster ‘bench to bedside’ clinical research**
UNT Health Science Center’s new partnership with JPS Health Network is expected to have a big impact on Tarrant County patients and anyone interested in new treatments for challenging diseases. UNTHSC has teamed up with JPS to establish the North Texas Regional Institutional Review Board, which cuts through the red tape requiring clinical studies involving humans to go through multiple approval processes by different institutions.

**DALLAS MORNING NEWS: Cops in UNT Dallas leadership academy want to help southern Dallas kids eat better**
Dallas Police Officers are giving back to youngsters in Southern Dallas that are suffering from malnutrition. The effort started with a partnership between Dallas law enforcement
agencies and the University of North Texas at Dallas. The university hosted an eight-week community leadership academy for police officers and neighborhood leaders.

**DALLAS MORNING NEWS: Is UNT on verge of golden era? Athletic director Wren Baker reflects on recent success**

UNT’s Vice President/Director of Athletics Wren Baker and head football coach Seth Littrell have been together in Denton for two football seasons = inheriting a program with a 1-11 record in 2015 and turning it into a program on the rise with back-to-back bowl appearances. The quick turnaround and bright future for Mean Green football led the Denton Record-Chronicle’s Brett Vito to ask if UNT is on the cusp of a golden era on the gridiron.

**HIGH FIVES**

UNT Dallas Professor of Counseling Jennifer Baggerly visited Puerto Rico for four days in the wake of Hurricane Maria in order to work with the children, parents, and training university students on the island who are studying social work.

On December 11, 2017, **UNT Health Science Center received its largest grant ever** -- from the Rutledge Foundation for Lacko Nanoparticle Delivery Research for $150,000.

**Researchers from the UNT College of Engineering’s Department of Materials Science and Engineering** have found a way to create an ultralight, highly heat-resistant, magnesium-based material by engineering bonds at an atomic level. **Their research has been published in the “Nature Communications” journal.**

**LOOKING AHEAD**

As part of our Best Place to Work initiative, System and campus leaders are planning the aforementioned series of Town Hall events. System and university leaders are also
preparing for next month's Board of Regents Meeting. The first quarterly board meeting of 2018 will be held at UNT Dallas on February 22-23.

Monday is also a holiday for the UNT System – Martin Luther King Jr. Day. The Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday celebrates the life and legacy of a man who brought hope and healing to America. At the UNT System we commemorate the timeless values Dr. King taught us through servant leadership – courage, truth, justice, compassion, dignity, humility and service.

I look forward to continued collaboration across the UNT System as we move into the New Year. Together we will accomplish more!

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