



## Closing out the academic year and looking ahead

June 6, 2025

To the UT Southwestern Community:

As we conclude the 2024-2025 academic year and welcome the start of summer, I want to thank each of you for your dedication and service to UT Southwestern and to our mission of promoting health and a healthy society. This has been a year of meaningful progress and, as in years past, I am writing to provide an overview of the milestones and achievements we have collectively made in education, research, and clinical care.

### Leadership Appointments

The strength of UT Southwestern stems from the contributions of our entire campus community – faculty, staff, learners, and trainees alike. In support of our shared work, we welcomed several new leaders this year whose efforts will help guide our institution going forward.

**Ralph DeBerardinis, M.D., Ph.D.**, a Howard Hughes Medical Institute Investigator and a member of the National Academy of Medicine (NAM), was named Director of the Eugene McDermott Center for Human Growth and Development in addition to his ongoing leadership role within the Children's Medical Center Research Institute at UT Southwestern. Dr. DeBerardinis is widely recognized for his groundbreaking discoveries in cancer metabolism and brings deep scientific leadership to this vital area of our work.

**Jiang He, M.D., M.S., Ph.D.**, also a member of the NAM and an international leader in chronic disease prevention, joined us from Tulane University to serve as Chair of the newly established Department of Epidemiology in the Peter O'Donnell Jr. School of Public Health.

In our education mission, **James H. Willig, M.D., M.S.P.H.**, arrived as Associate Dean for Undergraduate Medical Education. Dr. Willig previously led the undergraduate medical curriculum across four campuses of the University of Alabama at Birmingham. In July, **Wendy W. Chapman, Ph.D.**, will assume her role as Associate Dean for Health Informatics and Director of the Center for Clinical Informatics. Dr. Chapman, a member of the NAM, brings significant experience in clinical natural language processing and health data infrastructure, most recently from the University of Melbourne.

Searches are currently underway to identify new **Chairs for the Department of Anesthesiology & Pain Management** and the **Department of Biophysics**. Additionally, we are narrowing our search, led by Executive Vice President for Health System Affairs Jonathan Efron, M.D., for the **Vice President and CEO of William P. Clements Jr. University Hospital**. We hope to share the outcome of that search later this summer, as well as soon name the

new **Vice President and Chief Financial Officer** for UT Southwestern, the result of a national search led by Holly Crawford, M.B.A., Executive Vice President for Business Affairs.

## Notable Honors and Recognition

Several members of our campus community received regional, national, and international honors this academic year for their outstanding accomplishments, which have advanced the legacy of discovery, education, and expert, compassionate care that defines our institution and, in turn, enhances our reputation for excellence. Among those recognized:

**Zhijian “James” Chen, Ph.D.**, Professor of Molecular Biology and a member of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) and NAM, received the 2024 Albert Lasker Basic Medical Research Award – considered the nation’s highest honor in biomedical science – for his discovery of the cGAS enzyme and its role in immune defense. Last month, he was elected to the Fellowship of the Royal Society, the United Kingdom’s national academy of sciences and the oldest scientific academy in continuous existence. In this past year, he was also recognized with the Paul Ehrlich and Ludwig Darmstaedter Prize, Germany’s most distinguished award in medicine.

**Carlos L. Arteaga, M.D.**, Director of Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center and Associate Dean of Oncology Programs, and **David Mangelsdorf, Ph.D.**, Chair and Professor of Pharmacology, were elected to the NAM. With these additions, and the arrival of Dr. Chapman later this summer, UT Southwestern’s total NAM membership will be 24. Dr. Mangelsdorf is also a member of the NAS and a Howard Hughes Medical Institute Investigator.

**Samuel Achilefu, Ph.D.**, inaugural Chair of Biomedical Engineering, was elected to the National Academy of Engineering, UT Southwestern’s first such recognition. A pioneer in cancer molecular imaging and nanotherapeutics, Dr. Achilefu is also a member of the NAM and a Fellow of the National Academy of Inventors.

In recognition of clinical excellence, [22 UTSW nurses](#) were named to the **Dallas-Fort Worth Great 100 Nurses list** – the highest number in our institution’s history, reflecting the vital contributions of our nursing professionals in delivering outstanding care.

## Milestones in Education and Training

In March, students in the UT Southwestern Medical School Class of 2025 matched to more than 80 residency programs across the country, including many of our most highly regarded peer institutions. Seventy-five of our graduates will remain at UTSW-affiliated residency programs, which continue to be ranked among the best in the nation.

This spring marked a historic milestone as the **Peter O’Donnell Jr. School of Public Health** graduated its inaugural class. The cohort included 28 Master of Public Health graduates, four Master of Science in Clinical Investigation graduates, and the school’s first Ph.D. in Public Health. **UT Southwestern Medical School** awarded 226 degrees, and the **Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences** conferred 84 degrees during May commencement ceremonies. In December, the **School of Health Professions** awarded 134 degrees.

Our academic excellence continues to be recognized nationally. In the 2025 *U.S. News & World Report* Best Graduate Schools rankings, UT Southwestern Medical School was placed in Tier 1,

encompassing the top 16 research-intensive medical schools nationwide. The School of Health Professions' Physician Assistant program was ranked No. 8 (tie), and the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences' Biological Sciences program ranked No. 25 (tie).

## Breakthroughs in Scientific Discovery

The quality and breadth of our basic and clinical research programs continue to distinguish UT Southwestern. A few examples of discoveries made during the past year highlight that vitality:

- 1. Orphan drug could improve radiation efficacy in lung cancer.** Seeking a way to improve radiation outcomes for lung cancer patients, **Yuanyuan Zhang, M.D., Ph.D.**, Assistant Professor of Radiation Oncology, and **Dr. DeBerardinis** led research that identified lipoylation as a key metabolic pathway that allows cancer cells to survive radiation. They then identified an FDA-designated orphan drug that showed promise in enhancing response to radiotherapy in preclinical models. These findings were published in [Science Advances](#). [Learn more.](#)
- 2. Cryo-EM reveals new insights into vitamin K action.** Working with UTSW's Cryo-Electron Microscopy Facility, **Xiaofeng Qi, Ph.D.**, Assistant Professor of Molecular Biology, used high-resolution imaging to determine how the enzyme gamma-glutamyl carboxylase (GGCX) interacts with vitamin K in the process of carboxylation. The team also discovered cholesterol within the structure, suggesting it plays a previously unrecognized role in vitamin K-dependent pathways. These findings, published in [Nature](#), could inform the development of next-generation anticoagulants. [Read more.](#)
- 3. New class of species-selective antimalarials identified.** Researchers in the labs of **Margaret Phillips, Ph.D.**, Chair and Professor of Biochemistry, and **Joseph Ready, Ph.D.**, Professor of Biochemistry, identified a novel class of orally active compounds (piperidine carboxamides) that selectively inhibit malaria parasite proteasomes without affecting mammalian counterparts. In a study published in *Cell Chemical Biology*, the team used high-throughput screening and cryo-electron microscopy to pinpoint a previously uncharacterized binding site on the *Plasmodium* proteasome. The findings offer one of the first examples of a parasite-selective, resistance-averse lead compound with potential for combination malaria therapies. [Read more.](#)
- 4. Researchers identify protein linked to neurodegenerative disease.** **Chun-Li Zhang, Ph.D.**, Professor of Molecular Biology, and his colleagues discovered GADD45G, the protein product of the *Gadd45g* gene, and its role as a master control switch for reactive gliosis, a key feature of many neurodegenerative diseases that can disrupt the connections between neurons, increase neuroinflammation, and fuel apoptosis, or programmed cell death. Targeting this protein could improve outcomes for patients with Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and other conditions. Their findings were published in [Neuron](#). [Learn more.](#)
- 5. Clinical trials offer roadmap for improved breast cancer treatments.** **Heather McArthur, M.D., M.P.H.**, Professor of Internal Medicine in the Division of Hematology and Oncology and Clinical Director of the Breast Cancer Program at Simmons Cancer Center, co-led a clinical trial, published in the [Journal of Clinical Oncology](#), on a shorter, simpler, and less toxic treatment protocol for women with triple-negative breast cancer that produced

similar outcomes to the current standard of care. In addition, she co-led an international phase three clinical trial, the results of which were published in [Nature Medicine](#) and demonstrated the benefit of administering immunotherapy along with chemotherapy before surgery in patients with breast cancer at high risk of spreading. [Read more.](#)

Beyond the many discoveries reported by UTSW investigators over the past year, we also celebrated two milestone anniversaries.

UT Southwestern's **Department of Molecular Biology** marked 30 years since it was founded. Under the continuous leadership of **Eric Olson, Ph.D.**, its inaugural Chair, the Department has built an international reputation for its research on gene regulation and groundbreaking work in muscular and cardiovascular diseases, among other important areas. A daylong symposium organized to honor this anniversary drew more than 800 scientists, highlighting both high-impact work within the Department and contributions from leading scientists at other institutions who joined the celebration.

The **Cecil H. and Ida Green Center for Reproductive Biology Sciences** celebrated its 50th anniversary, continuing its legacy of groundbreaking fundamental research on women's reproductive health. Now under the direction of **W. Lee Kraus, Ph.D.**, the Center has evolved into a dynamic hub of 84 scientists, clinician-researchers, trainees, and staff, making important contributions to our understanding of the molecular mechanisms that regulate reproduction.

We can all take pride in knowing that the discoveries made by our faculty and their teams continue to advance insights into basic biological processes and the fundamental basis of disease, as well as bring hope and the possibility of improved treatment to patients worldwide.

### **Progress in Patient Care**

This past year, we commemorated the **10th anniversary of the opening of William P. Clements Jr. University Hospital (CUH)** – a milestone in UT Southwestern's clinical transformation. Since opening, CUH has experienced a continuous increase in annual inpatient admissions, Emergency Department visits, and procedures and surgeries. The hospital's sustained excellence in patient satisfaction, safety, and quality was nationally recognized again this past year by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Leapfrog, Healthgrades, Press Ganey, and *U.S. News & World Report*, which has named CUH the No. 1 hospital in Dallas-Fort Worth for eight consecutive years with the most nationally ranked specialties of any hospital in Texas. Rankings for the coming year will be released at the end of next month. This year also saw the completion of a comprehensive renovation of Zale Lipshy Pavilion, including 10 newly updated operating rooms.

UTSW recently earned The Joint Commission's Gold Seal of Approval as a **Comprehensive Cardiac Center**, placing us among just 24 hospitals nationwide to receive the CCC designation, which represents the highest standard in cardiovascular care. This is a testament to the skill and collaboration of our physicians, nurses, and other team members across multiple departments, whose collective efforts make it possible to deliver the very best outcomes and experiences for our patients.

We have continued to make investments aimed at expanding access and the impact of our Health System. In October, UT Southwestern and Children's Health broke ground on a transformative **pediatric campus** on our North Campus across from CUH. The new campus will enable us to provide the best care possible for the growing number of children in North Texas,

while also accelerating the momentum of our training and research programs focused on advancing pediatric care over the long term. Last month, we announced the third and largest nine-figure philanthropic gift as part of a capital campaign undertaken jointly by UTSW and Children's Health to support this ambitious project. In recognition of the Moody Foundation's gift, the hospital at the new pediatric campus will be named Moody Children's Hospital upon completion in 2031.

In Fort Worth last month, we began construction on a \$177 million, 65,000-square-foot **Radiation Oncology campus**. Set to open in 2028, the facility will offer advanced cancer therapies, including the city's first MRI-guided precision radiation treatment. It will be directly connected to our Moncrief Cancer Institute and will feature cutting-edge equipment, including linear accelerators, PET imaging, and a brachytherapy suite. This is part of a larger plan for clinical expansion in Fort Worth and Tarrant County, where more than 20% of our patients live.

### **Planning for the Future: Introducing the Six-Year Strategic Plan (2026-2032)**

Over the past several months, scores of colleagues – led by Steering Committee co-Chairs **Lora Hooper, Ph.D.**, Chair of Immunology, and **Thomas Wang, M.D.**, Chair of Internal Medicine – updated our institutional **Six-Year Strategic Plan**. This forward-looking blueprint guides UT Southwestern's priorities across education, research, clinical care, and administrative operations. As a long-standing practice, the plan is refreshed every two years, with an interim checkpoint review to ensure we remain aligned with our goals and responsive to emerging needs.

Leaders serving on 12 subcommittees and workgroups contributed a broad range of perspectives. While each group focused on its respective area of responsibility, several themes emerged as shared institutional imperatives. Chief among these was the importance of harnessing the potential of **artificial intelligence** to advance almost all dimensions of our work, including discovery, clinical decision-making, educational programs, and operational efficiency.

The continued importance of our commitment to **recruiting and retaining exceptional learners, providers, researchers, and staff** who bring talent, integrity, and purpose to our shared mission was reaffirmed as another strategic cornerstone for the future. The final Six-Year Strategic Plan will be shared with everyone on campus later this month. Once it is available on our intranet, I hope you will take the time to review it and understand how the work you do is ultimately tied to our high ambitions for the future of UT Southwestern.

### **New Initiatives**

While UT Southwestern already boasts a rich spectrum of established programs across its departments and centers, we continue to identify new areas with potential for transformative advances, whether in science, in patient care, or in the other ways we carry out our institutional mission. We established three new programs in the past few months that hold that promise.

The first, the **Center for Cellular Therapies and Cancer Immunology** within Simmons Cancer Center, builds on established expertise to develop innovative approaches to cell-based therapies such as CAR T that enhance effectiveness and extend applications to the treatment of a wider range of cancers, autoimmune disorders, and possibly other nonmalignant conditions. As previously announced, **Jaehyuk Choi, M.D., Ph.D.**, an expert in cancer immunology, joined UTSW from Northwestern University in April as the inaugural Director of the Center. Dr. Choi's

pioneering work in cancer immunotherapy will drive the new Center's multidisciplinary approach, initially focusing on solid tumors.

We also launched an **Innovation Hub** in May to facilitate the rapid testing and implementation of ideas for novel approaches to address a broad range of needs. This hub, identified as a key priority in the forthcoming Six-Year Strategic Plan, will serve both the internal needs of UT Southwestern and foster commercial development aimed at external stakeholders to generate new revenue streams to support our mission. I am pleased to announce the recruitment of **Daniel Hommes, M.D., Ph.D.**, as our Vice President and Chief Innovation Officer to lead this initiative. Dr. Hommes joined UTSW in May, bringing a combination of deep academic, clinical, and entrepreneurial experience from his roles at UCLA and the University of Leiden in the Netherlands as well as the private sector.

Finally, in recent months, planning has advanced to establish the **UT Southwestern Center for Prostate Cancer Care** as a priority that will continue into next year. By expanding and coordinating efforts among the departments involved in the evaluation and treatment of patients with prostate cancer – one of the most common cancers in men – we will streamline and increase access to our comprehensive expertise and supportive services for this condition.

All of these new initiatives have been made possible to a significant degree by the philanthropic support of our generous community friends.

## Federal and State Legislative Update

The **89th regular session of the Texas Legislature** concluded this week with several important outcomes that support UT Southwestern, including full funding for our mission-specific formula tied to the growth of our research programs and the exceptional performance of our research community. We also secured support to expand our work in advancing cell therapy and related efforts. In all, we will see a 16% increase in state support for our academic and research missions over the next biennium. We are deeply grateful to the Legislature for its confidence in UTSW and for supporting our efforts with this increase.

I note that the Legislature also appropriated funding for the initial operations of the Texas Behavioral Health Center, with the anticipated completion of construction of the adult towers this summer. Although UTSW led the efforts to plan, design, and oversee construction of this facility on behalf of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), the Legislature has decided to direct HHSC to take responsibility for the initial operations. I am extremely proud of the many members of our campus community, including those in the Department of Psychiatry, the Health System, and Business Affairs, among others, who dedicated their time and expertise to planning, designing, and constructing this much-needed hospital to care for individuals with serious mental illness. I would like to recognize, in particular, the leadership of **Hicham Ibrahim, M.D.**, Vice President and Senior Executive Officer for Ambulatory Services, **Becky McCulley, M.S.N., RN**, Vice President for Clinical Programming and Facility Development, and **Juan M. Guerra Jr., M.B.A.**, Vice President for Facilities Management, who have helped make this outstanding facility a reality.

In addition to appropriating funds to support UTSW, the Legislature promulgated several new laws that may affect aspects of our campus operations, including mandated changes to faculty senates at state universities and disclosure requirements for the use of artificial intelligence in

clinical services. We will undertake a thorough review of these new laws over the summer to understand their implications and identify any necessary actions to ensure compliance.

On the federal front, we continue to monitor developments that could significantly impact UT Southwestern. We remain focused on the administration's efforts to cap **facilities and administrative cost recovery** for federally funded research – an action that, if implemented as proposed, would significantly hinder our ability to provide the essential services our faculty and their teams rely on to carry out National Institutes of Health (NIH)-funded research at current levels. Although the courts have stayed this action and litigation is ongoing, we have actively communicated with our congressional delegation and leadership – both individually and in collaboration with peer institutions – to underscore the serious impact a cap, or broader reductions in NIH funding, would have on our ability to drive the discoveries essential to advancing treatment, cures, and disease prevention, as well as maintain American competitiveness.

As Congress proceeds through the budget-making process, we are following developments closely to identify any changes that might negatively affect reimbursement for our clinical services and have potential consequences for our entire institution. We remain optimistic that through continued advocacy and partnership, we will see outcomes that strengthen and sustain our research and clinical missions well into the future. I am very appreciative of the efforts of **Angelica Marin Hill, M.B.A.**, Vice President for Government Affairs and Policy, and her team as we endeavor to work with policymakers in both Austin and Washington, D.C., on issues that may impact our ability to deliver on our institutional mission in all its dimensions.

## Financial Performance

I am pleased to report that UT Southwestern remains on a strong financial footing. In planning for the current fiscal year, we developed a budget that prioritized funding for a merit program and accounted for significant inflationary pressures, resulting in a budgeted margin of just 1%. Thanks to strong revenue growth, disciplined expense management, and the hard work of the entire UTSW community, we now anticipate a positive margin of approximately 3% or more – the threshold necessary to maintain our long-term institutional strength.

As we work to complete the FY26 budget, we remain focused on our key priorities, including continuation of our merit program. As noted, we are closely monitoring developments in the federal budget, which could potentially change our financial outlook. A workgroup led by **W. P. Andrew Lee, M.D.**, Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, Provost, and Dean, UT Southwestern Medical School, and **Ms. Crawford**, identified ways in which we might mitigate the impact of potential reductions in NIH funding specifically. Should new financial challenges arise, whether limited in scope or more far-reaching, I am confident we will find the means to address them through discipline and mission-based decision-making, just as we did during major past challenges, including the last Great Recession and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Recognizing Service and Strengthening Our Workforce

This month, during **Employee Recognition Week**, we will not only celebrate colleagues for their long-term service to UT Southwestern but also recognize them for their exceptional contributions to our mission. This year, 213 employees – including, for the first time, faculty members – will be recognized June 10-11 for 60, 45, 40, 35, 30, and 25 years of service, with

127 new members joining the Quarter Century Club. Then on June 17, we will gather in the Tom and Lula Gooch Auditorium to present the inaugural **UT Southwestern Pinnacle Awards**, honoring employees from across our campus and regional facilities who embody the highest standards of excellence, innovation, teamwork, and compassion.

As part of our ongoing talent acquisition strategy, we expanded our [Follow Your Spark](#) **national awareness campaign** this year. The campaign has helped drive a 53% increase in new users to our website and extended our reach through 15 strategically selected academic conferences, where we connected with more than 120,000 individuals. These efforts are part of a broader strategy to raise awareness of UTSW as a great place to work and train – and they are already contributing to successful faculty and staff recruitment. Several new hires, learners, and trainees have been “sparked” by our initiative, as exemplified by a nearly 20% year-over-year increase in applications to our Graduate School.

### **Building on Our Momentum for the Future**

As we reflect on this past year, I am deeply grateful for the dedication to excellence, innovation, and collaborative spirit that define our community. Every achievement, large and small, is a result of your hard work. While we know the coming academic year will present new challenges requiring creativity, teamwork, and resolve, I have no doubt that, together, we will continue to accomplish great things. I plan to write again, as we begin the new fiscal year in September, to highlight institutional priorities. I hope that, in the meantime, you enjoy the summer and find time to spend with family and friends.

Daniel K. Podolsky, M.D.  
President  
UT Southwestern Medical Center