

Welcome Back Message
August 25, 2025



SOUTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

Office of the President

Dear Southwestern Community,

Welcome to the 186th academic year at Southwestern University!

This fall, we welcome new students, families, faculty, staff, and trustees into a place rooted in nearly two centuries of academic rigor, curiosity, and care. Our mission remains clear: to cultivate a vibrant, inclusive environment where thoughtful exchange, civil discourse, and a passion for lifelong learning define the *Southwestern Experience*.

Move-in day and Welcome Week were full of energy and optimism. Watching students greet new roommates, hug their families goodbye, and step into their next chapter with excitement, and perhaps a little nervousness, was a beautiful reminder of why we're here. Special thanks to the football team for braving the Texas heat to move in our newest students.

There are many challenges facing higher education today, and we will overcome them together. Across the country, institutions are navigating financial headwinds, demographic shifts, and a cultural landscape that demands both clarity and compassion.

We begin this academic year having successfully completed our *Thrive* Campaign, the most ambitious fundraising effort in the University's history. With \$161 million raised, we have not only surpassed expectations, we've secured new scholarships, funded transformative campus spaces, and expanded opportunities for our students. We will celebrate this achievement during Homecoming Weekend, and I look forward to recognizing all who helped make this milestone possible.

Strategically, we are now entering the final year of our Tactical Plan. Over the past four years, the Plan has supported critical investments in student life, academic excellence, inclusive practices, physical and technological infrastructure, and our faculty and staff. Our progress has positioned us for the next phase of institutional planning and impact.

This year, Academic Affairs will lead the development of a new Academic Strategic Plan, a critical companion to our operational goals that will shape the future of teaching and learning at Southwestern and will be pivotal in the formation of our next five-year Tactical Plan. We are making tangible progress on Southwestern University 560. This summer, we signed a Master Development Agreement with Arterra and are nearing a finalized partnership with the City of Georgetown to build its new Customer Service Center on our property. Construction on the development is scheduled to begin in 2026.

Mood-Bridwell Hall has officially reopened, welcoming faculty back just in time for the start of the academic year. The renovation honors the building's historic character while introducing bright, modern interiors designed to support collaboration and creativity. In October, we will also celebrate the opening of the new Lord Café on the first floor of Mood-Bridwell. It will serve coffee, tea, sandwiches, and pastries. Just outside, the long-awaited new parking lot is now open.

And there is more to come. Construction is well underway on two new residence halls and the Dorothy Perry White Welcome Center, all scheduled for completion this December. This semester is the last time students will live in Ruter. As part of our ongoing commitment to inclusive storytelling and meaningful commemoration, the naming of the residence halls will be guided by the work of the Commemorative Landscape Task Force. This fall, the Southwestern community will be invited to engage with the naming process.

Over the summer, we completed fundraising for a new multi-purpose sports complex, which will provide our athletes and the entire community with a space to gather and compete. Football will be played on campus a year from now, marking the first time in 76 years.

We will also launch a new financial literacy program this semester, thanks to a generous gift from NexBank. Developed in partnership with Student Life, the Center for Career & Professional Development, and University Relations, this initiative will empower students with essential skills in budgeting, saving, investing, and navigating financial decisions with confidence. In addition, we plan to continue to build on our Outdoor Adventure offerings, including a Spring Break trip to Hawaii. Lucky students!

At Southwestern, every member of this community, students, faculty, staff, alumni, and families, has a role in sustaining our culture of mutual respect and open inquiry. Let us enter this year with the shared commitment to uphold that culture and to lead with purpose and imagination.

Let us recommit to the values that define us:

- Cultivating academic excellence
- Promoting intellectual and personal growth
- Fostering diverse perspectives
- Honoring the dignity of all persons
- Encouraging activism in the pursuit of justice and the common good

I look forward to connecting with you throughout the semester, at lectures, performances, sporting events, or even during my Monday morning walks around campus. Starting September 8, join me and my bulldog, Miss Twinkles every Monday at 7:00 a.m. on the patio outside the Cove to start the week together.

Thank you for all you do to make Southwestern a place of light, learning, and belonging.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laura Skandera Trombley". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Laura Skandera Trombley
President, Southwestern University