1) How do you pronounce your last name?

President Smatresk said that his last name is a Swedish word that means “small swamps or bogs” and it’s pronounced SMAH-tresk.

2) How do you see UNT outshining your old institution, UTA?

President Smatresk joked that when people do really well at UTA, they are rewarded with the opportunity to come to UNT.

He went on to say that he wants UNT to be the best and to own the North Texas region and Metroplex. He wants students to think, “I didn’t have to go to UNT; I got to go to UNT as a first-choice institution.”

UNT has so many natural advantages. I have never been on a campus where there was a better sense of community, he said, and not every university is like UNT. There is a family feel. The students get it; I have heard it from faculty and staff members; I have felt it as I’ve walked through the university. That culture of caring for each other, supporting each other, and letting our students feel that we actually care about their academic progress is something special and it’s a cornerstone that will propel this institution to greatness, he said.

Competing with name brand recognition will mean making sure UNT is not the “best-kept secret” anymore and broadening our network, he said. To build prosperity in our region and make this a wonderful place for our grandchildren, UNT has to know how to be a great partner. By being a great partner, people will value what we have and they will come to us with their business, he said.

The key to going from where we are now to moving toward Tier One status is:

- Identify key partnerships
- Invest in the future success of our region
- Claim the region and let no one push us out.

UNT has the best education and the best opportunity to deliver a quality experience, he said. We will have to build up some programs to national...
prominence and strengthen some of our already strong programs. By working together to implement around a solid foundation of operations, we can achieve our goals in a reasonable amount of time and emerge as the go-to place, he said.

3) What was your greatest accomplishment at UNLV and what do you want to accomplish at UNT?

President Smatresk said that no president ever does anything by themselves; there is a team. So if anyone has an accomplishment; it’s the accomplishment of many people working together. If a leadership team is aligned, and the faculty and staff are aligned, you can run far, he said.

At UNLV, they were a little complacent when I got there, he said. They had been used to mediocre growth and had taken for granted that the growth would always be there and the money would always come. Then, in 2007 and 2008, the world changed. There was a recession and Las Vegas was very close to the epicenter of that recession. In that recession, UNLV lost 43 percent of its state funding in a three-year period. The best thing that happened, though, was that at UNLV, we used the opportunity when we were facing a financial and a budget change to really work together, he said. We pulled together as a team as opposed to falling apart and we found strength in that, he said. We trimmed programs that weren’t sustainable; found wonderful ways for everyone to stay on the team and contribute; and squared away our vision of what we could do and what we needed to become to be solid and strong again. More quickly than anyone imagined, UNLV began growing up and out again — in a very strategic way, he said.

When I walked into UNLV, if you read an article in the newspaper, it was bad. As I left, it was very clear that the community turned to UNLV as the first place to look for partnerships, for economic development, for hope, for developing the region, and for transforming a first generation population into a workforce that would lead us into the future. That culture change was real; it was heartwarming; and it continues to transform UNLV, he said. I think you have much of that here at UNT now. But as we face challenges, we are going to take this as an opportunity to build community and not segment ourselves.
4) **What do you see as the direction of UNT’s current Equity and Diversity initiatives?**

President Smatresk said that he was sad to be losing Vice President Gilda Garcia. Gilda has done a great job, and I will just say “Thank you for what you have done,” he said.

There is an equity and diversity plan, and it’s solid. It’s built around five main values and goals that I think we can all own and appreciate as a university community. I am a believer in the power of higher education to change lives and to be a force for good in the world. I am dedicated to the idea that there is nothing more transformational than a great education, he said. When first-generation students — who have no idea that they could even go to college — receive their degrees and go on to do wonderful things, it doesn’t just change them. It changes their whole family tree, and their family history will be forever altered by that experience. That’s what America is all about — finding opportunity, growing, and doing something wonderful for your community and your family. It’s a value that we need to have for our faculty and staff, he said. We need to work and improve continuously on our diversity and inclusiveness, and that sense of community. I believe is the most important piece of our mission for students.

5) **What are your thoughts and plans for the UNT Libraries?**

President Smatresk said libraries are an important core to the development of any research university and an element of the scholarship that we need to promote for our students and our faculty. But we must marshal our resources wisely, he said. We’re facing a threat from the publishers because the costs of serial publications rise at a rate of 15 percent per year. How do we manage it? How do we provide the scholarly tools that people need and balance that wildly inflation spiral against the demands of the rest of our campus?

In a university of this size and scope, our size is a natural advantage — especially with the student fees that are collected to support the library — to try to figure out a way of scaling library support services to the demand that’s created, he said. If we can keep that relationship on an even keel and make sure that we are using our resources effectively, we can continue to improve the quality of the library and the services we offer, even as we grow.
6) Will there be layoffs due to the budget situation?

President Smatresk said at this time he is not anticipating layoffs due to the budget situation. We do have a budget situation and unfortunately, we don’t actually know the scope of it, he said. I would identify this as a short-term problem. Are we going to have to square ourselves away? Yes. Are we going to have to do a little trimming? Yes.

We will have to make sure that we are running a fiscally sound operation and that we have predictable budgeting because we can’t implement any plans if we don’t know where the budget is going. My first job is going to be to make sure that our revenue flows and expenditures match, he said. In time, we want to be able to develop a strategic surplus so we can reinvest to water the “green spots” on campus.

7) Our pay is below the Texas state university level. Can you do anything to adjust it?

President Smatresk said the pay may be low in some areas and it may be high in others. There are differences in titling administrative job descriptions and staff job descriptions that we have trouble accounting for. Until I see good, clear data, I will not make a “shoot-from-the-hip” decision, he said.

There is a system-wide study on state compensation and I am concerned about our competitiveness. I want good people to be compensated in a way that makes them stay so that we retain our best faculty and staff, he said. Until there is a more detailed analysis of pay structures, I wouldn’t hazard a guess as to whether we will authorize anything beyond the type of merit that was offered this past year, he said.

8) How about a baseball team?

President Smatresk joked that his best leadership training came from serving as president of the Arlington Central Little League and coaching for 14 years. So obviously he loves baseball.

He said that as we continue on in Conference USA, we would love to have a “full set.” We need to make sure that if and when we add the team, we have the financial support and that we don’t ever have to make a compromise between improving the quality of athletics and improving the quality of academics, he said.
We need to proceed cautiously and look for donor support, and as revenues rise to develop that support, it would be a good thing to add, he said.

9) Will UNT streets be worked on any time soon?

President Smatresk said that UNT must work very closely with the Denton Chamber of Commerce and the city government to ensure that the services this campus needs and deserves are being delivered because we are the bread and butter of this community and we are the economic driver of this community. Taking care of UNT isn’t a cost, it’s an investment.

James McGuire, vice chancellor for administrative services, said there is a lot of work going on around campus, specifically on Highland Street, and the UNT System and UNT are in consultation with the city about the coordination of that work. Last year, the campus completed the master plan update. We are looking for ways to implement the emphasis on pedestrian and bicycle safety and to improve the exterior of our campus. We feel that there is an opportunity and we’re in discussion with the city.

President Smatresk added that he liked how UNT looks when approaching the campus from the Denton Square and would like for UNT to look like a destination from the I-35 side, rather than a place to drive by. He likes the idea of a town and a campus village surrounding the university. As the economy is improving, we would look to private donors and master developers to help us with those types of projects, he said. He wants to look more to public-private partnerships to help develop campus amenities.

President Smatresk took the following questions from the audience.

10) What makes UNT distinct?

President Smatresk reiterated that UNT’s sense of community and dedication to students are unique. It’s not often that you see a university of 36,000 that’s a flagship university, that’s this big and that’s in a more rural, suburban setting. That’s unique and I’m not sure how we should leverage that yet, he said. Another opportunity we have is that while there are few universities in the region, we own the north part of the North Texas region and we can own the entire part of the Metroplex. There is a huge opportunity for strategic growth and development of the campus, he said.
I also feel like this university has a healthy alternative culture and a huge creative population. I think that our evolution will be the mash-up of creativity and technology. Technology now enables creativity in the modern world. I think we can take this combination and give it a really unique flavor. And I think it’s an opportunity that plays off the attributes of this region.

11) What are your hobbies and what’s the last book you read?

President Smatresk said the last book he read was science fiction because he loves that genre and is a voracious reader.

He said he also loves to cook and has had a lifelong passion for photography. He was almost an art major instead of a biology major.

12) President JFK had his first 100 days action plan. Do you have a similar action plan, and if so, how is it going?

President Smatresk said an action plan rarely survives the first battle. Right now, the plan is:

- Getting to know this campus
- Getting to know the players and components
- Hearing the individual mix of problems
- Trying to engage and build partnerships and networks.

My focus is to engage with local chambers and business and leadership groups while also meeting with internal groups. I need a snapshot of the university to pinpoint opportunities and challenges so that we can create a solid implementation plan for moving us ahead as early as next fall, he said.

In September, I will give a State of the University address in the place of Convocation so I can lay out what we are going to do for the next year, he said. Working backward from that, we want to have a practical budget and an understanding of what we can implement over the short run so we can plan accordingly.

The questions below were submitted but not answered during Staff Sack Lunch due to time limits.

13) What are your thoughts on closing the university for Spring Break and Good Friday?
The university usually closes the first Monday of Spring Break each year. With supervisor approval, staff members can take other days off during the week using vacation or comp time, according to Human Resources.

Good Friday falls on a regularly scheduled class day, so the campus usually remains open for normal business hours to avoid disrupting classes or students' education. Those who observe Good Friday for religious or cultural reasons can take the day off for personal observance if they have their supervisor's approval and use vacation or comp time, according to HR.

State law establishes the overall number of state-funded holidays each year, but it allows higher education institutions flexibility to apply the allowed number of closure days to their operating calendars. In developing the university’s holiday schedule, UNT gives ultimate consideration to its academic mission and calendar, and it involves several university groups in the review process.

14) What are the implications of UNT being a “green” school and having fracking in such close proximity?

UNT has a well-deserved reputation for being green. The university is among the leaders in reducing energy use, expanding classes on environmental programs and supporting sustainability. While fracking is heavily debated, it is a regulated activity and leases require that all city, state and federal regulations must be met.