1) **Walmart and McDonald’s employees are getting pay raises, what about the low paid UNT employees?**

President Smatresk said that as of next year [FY 2016], the university hopes to offer merit raises and has already set money aside in the budget, but it won’t just apply to the lowest paid employees.

The university is struggling with ensuring market competitiveness in wages, he said. Earlier this year we set base salaries for faculty members who are on a tenure track and for lecturers. That was in response to market forces and being able to keep people here. It’s my understanding — after having listened to a lot of departments — that we’re not always competitive in market ways. Sometimes we’re losing people to other universities and to local industry because they have talents that can cross back and forth. Where that’s the case, we are attempting to put market competitive salaries into our planning cycle so that we can keep the best people here performing at a high level at our university. It’s a fine-grain exercise and it’s also part of an ongoing exercise that we’re going to be announcing soon, which involves university-wide reclassification so that we are better able to have benchmarks and baselines for salaries in the different units in the positions that we have. A lot is going on and I think that we will be making significant progress. It’s going to take us about a year to really march through it, so work through your supervisors if you feel there are systemic challenges in your particular areas, he said.

2) **Can you please address all of the administrative changes that are occurring? Are more changes on the way?**

President Smatresk acknowledged that we’ve made a number of administrative changes. The ranks of the vice presidents has changed quite dramatically. At the dean rank, changes have been primarily through natural attrition.

Some of that turnover is quite normal. Some of that turnover, in my opinion, has been to improve teams and the quality of the university, he said. With every hire we make, we want that hire to count. With every hire we make, we are bringing in a new team member. I want a great team that is unafraid to have a good dialogue, is unafraid to make suggestions about improvements to the university, and offers me the wisdom and guidance from their area that helps us to ultimately make better decisions. Where we don’t see that happening, we make changes.
I said something at one of these luncheons and I’m going to say it again — and I think that it may explain to some of you why there have been changes. What I told you is that I really believe in what we do as an institution. I love our mission. In my words — not in the canned mission statement that’s on our website — our mission is:

- To give our students the best education that they can get
- To provide Texas with a workforce that can build a prosperous future
- To change the lives of our growing first-generation population in this state so that those students will live better lives; their moms and dads will live better lives; their brothers and sisters will have a higher chance of going to college and; they will become a role model in their community

When we do all those things and when we are deeply committed to it, I think everything else falls into place. But there are folks who have forgotten it and that’s sad. There are folks who may not get up every day and say, “I’m here to make a difference and I’ll build the best university I know how. And I’ll be part of this team and I’ll work my fingers to the bones because I believe in what I do.” If you can’t be motivated by the mission we have, then you should look for another job, he said. And I don’t say that in a mean way, but we’re part of a band of believers and when you build a community based on a common vision and a common set of beliefs and core values, you can move mountains. But we can’t do that if we’re pulling in different directions.

So, I’m looking for a team that believes in and shares the values that I think have made this university the most caring university I have ever been part of. That’s what I look for and I think when we don’t have a team that works like that, we do a disservice to you and our students. If you’re wondering why there are changes, we will make changes until we think we have that great team in place and that will occur wherever it has to occur. As we clear one set of challenges, we may find some more. Personally, I hope we are over them soon. I would love to think next year that we’ll start the year with a team full of committed individuals and we won’t be looking back anymore. We’re going to be looking up.

3) **When are we going to get baseball?**

Rick Villarreal, UNT’s athletic director, said his priority in taking over the program was to deal with pressing issues. The first and foremost issue was to put the women’s sports program on a more level playing field, making sure they have good quality facilities and resources. Now North Texas Athletics is now number one in Title IX, he said.

The second priority, Villarreal said, was to build a new football stadium and athletic center to better recruit and support student-athletes.
Villarreal said there are donors who are ready for baseball and corporate sponsors ready to back and name a facility, so it’s a matter of getting thorough the university’s financial challenges before taking action. Getting a baseball program is still a priority.

President Smatresk added that the university has been hard-pressed for money and some donors are going to be critical to an effort to establish a baseball program, but Rick has made a good case. I think there are people who may think I don’t like any given sport or athletics. I care that we are successful and we have competitive programs. But I think that baseball rounds us out so, you’re not going to hear a “no” from me on this and I will be a willing partner with Rick on trying to get this to happen.

4) **Given the money we owe the state and the stagnancy of wages, what is the rationale of wasting resources mailing out unnecessary print magazines, flyers, etc.? It seems like the money could be spent in many other more efficient, productive ways?**

President Smatresk said there are 10,000 ways to spend money. You have to look at every dollar you spend and ask what are you doing with it? One of the first things I did when I sat down with Deborah (Leliaert, vice president for University Relations and Planning) and the University Relations, Communications and Marketing division is to ask, “What is our goal in doing this because it costs a lot of money? Why do we have billboards? Why do we send out alumni magazines? Why do we send out a research magazine? Why do we have fancy websites and social media? Why do we have ads on television during athletic events?” The answer to almost all of these questions is because it’s partly what the market demands to be a known university. We can debate the effectiveness of any single thing we do and we can probably live without any single thing we do, but, collectively, they are forms of communicating our message.

We need to continuously reassess our strategy. I don’t think we have hit our marketing points yet as strongly as we have to because we are still trying to sort out what we are becoming. I know that sounds a little odd. Are we the most creative university in the state of Texas? Are we the most caring university in the state of Texas? Are we the liberal arts campus and the arts campus for the state of Texas? Do we offer the best education in the state of Texas? Are we a global university in your backyard? Are we a first choice or are we a fallback? Those are all important talking points.

I don’t think we can afford to not be out in a variety of different print and electronic media. In this past year, I’m going to guess we’ve had about triple the media coverage that we’ve had in past years — not all of that has necessarily
been media I want, but most of it has been OK because of the way we handled it. We’ve shown people that we can roll up our shirt sleeves and get a job done.

Our most expensive endeavor is sending out 200,000 North Texan magazines for each issue. I have been stopped by numerous people in different parts of our great state who say, “I recognize you. You’re the President. I read that magazine you send me, cover to cover, and it really makes me feel connected.” I don’t know if I could monetize that because it does cost a lot to produce the magazine and send it. But I know that we don’t have the level of alumni engagement that we must have to be successful as an institution. So, I will leave no stone unturned to build the alumni giving and the alumni base. We’ve got a lot of young millionaires out there who have lost their way, maybe aren’t even proud of the university and think that they did it all by themselves. We’ve got to bring them back into the fold. We’ve got to love them. We’ve got to communicate with them and give them something back of value whether it’s through athletics, through events here, or through the communications that they receive. If we fail in that, our donor base will vaporize. So, we won’t stop spending money on that.

We may continuously try to refine our focus so that we’re spending it wisely but I believe that something is working. I don’t think you get 15 new national merit scholars for nothing. I’ve even heard faculty members say, “I’m not sure if those billboards do anything except when I drive by, it makes me feel happy.” That’s worth something! Are you proud of the place you are in? Are you proud that we’ve got a sign up in UTA’s backyard? And one right across the street from UTD! That makes me really happy! I’m going to keep us lit up and I’m going to keep on refining the message until we find the sweet spot. My personal favorite billboard is, “UNT Creativity. Established 1890.” We should let people vote on a website to let people tell us which messages stick.

I don’t think advertising and publications are a waste. I think it drives giving and it drives engagement. If I can identify that it’s a waste, we will stop doing it. There have been other areas where we have found waste and we’ve made major changes in those areas to recover those dollars to put them to their best use to effectively serve our students and this community.

5) What are you going to do for summer vacation?

My daughter is getting married in June so, I’m going broke and I’m going to Hawaii where she will be getting married. With a little luck, when we get back, we will move into the house we are trying to finish because I’m kind of tired of living in a rental house.