Pierce: Hello and welcome to AcademiCast – Texas Tech University’s biweekly podcast series from the Office of the Provost. I’m Rachel Pierce, and I’ll be covering the top academic stories on campus. Later in the program, Provost Bob Smith will spotlight Integrated Scholar Valerie Paton, the vice provost for planning and assessment, interim dean of University College, and a professor of education.

First, the news...

On the heels of Valentine’s Day, a Texas Tech human sciences professor discusses her research into the life experiences of single women. Professor Elizabeth Sharp interviewed women who had never married and were in their late 20s and early 30s.

Sharp: We know that more and more people are either waiting to get married, or they’re not marrying at all. I just wondered with this growing number of people, what’s it like. And we looked at the women because it’s a different experience for women than men.

Pierce: Women shared their personal views and detailed interactions involving the subject of their singularity.

Sharp: They felt like even though their single status was very visible. People are always asking about it – ‘Oh, you’re 32; you have a great career; why aren’t you married?’ – these sort of questions that in one way they can be flattering, but in another way they can be frustrating if you hear this all the time. And at the same time that their status was visible, their life course – sort of how they’re living their lives – a lot of people didn’t understand. And that, I considered, was more invisible. So what’s it like to be 31 and not married yet? They felt a lot of people didn’t understand them. And part of the message was “why aren’t you?” as if this was a deficit.

Pierce: Sharp’s research is titled “I’m a Loser, I’m Not Married, Let’s Just All Look at Me’: Ever-Single Women’s Perceptions of their Social Environment.”

In other research news, a team of agricultural scientists at Texas Tech is digging deep into Lubbock’s soil. Over the next five years, the scientists will observe the US Department of Agriculture’s conservation land in the area as it is converted into cropland. The USDA is supporting the research project through a $480,000 grant.
Faculty members from the College of Mass Communications are collaborating with physicians from Brown University to train emergency department staff at Rhode Island Hospital. The training program – titled Project CLEAR! – aims to improve customer service and communication skills through simulations of patients’ experiences.

The Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education names Texas Tech’s law school as one of the top 20 in the nation for Hispanics. Landing at Number 16 on the list, Texas Tech was recognized for granting law degrees to more than 15 percent of Hispanic Texans in 2010. Texas Tech shared 16th position with the South Texas College of Law in Houston.

Dr. Valerie Paton fulfills many roles at Texas Tech: She serves as vice provost for planning and assessment, interim dean of University College, and associate professor in the College of Education. Her teaching, research and service contributions are spotlighted here by Provost Bob Smith.

Smith: Born and raised in Southern California, Valerie Paton has cultivated a commitment to the field of higher education. She began working at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles while pursuing a master’s in counseling psychology at Santa Clara University. She then continued her doctoral studies at USC and was eventually named assistant dean for student affairs.

Paton: I started my doctorate in theological ethics, and I loved it. I loved Old Testament literature and biblical archeology. I was promoted as assistant dean of students and had responsibility for student conduct, orientation a lot of student affairs areas. I began to see this sort of dissonance between my Ph.D. work and theological ethics and what I was doing administratively. But I felt like I was doing the right thing as assistant dean so I moved over to the college of education and pursued a Ph.D. in education with an emphasis in higher education law.

Smith: After earning a doctorate, Dr. Paton continued to teach and serve in administrative roles at USC before coming to Texas in the late 1990s.

Paton: From early on I was really attracted to law and policy issues in the higher education environment. From there on whether it be faculty or administrative roles, I found things that were intellectually engaging and challenging to do. And that’s sort of been my career path.

Smith: Dr. Paton joined Texas Tech in 2001, and seven years later, she was named vice provost for planning and assessment.

Paton: I am the first vice provost for planning and assessment at Texas Tech. My role has been to build an institutional effectiveness environment, and that environment includes
strategic planning and assessment of plans. So, if you make plans, the question is how are you performing against the plans? Once you know how you are performing, what you should do is know how you achieve your planned objectives. So it’s sort of a circle of continuous institutional improvement. I lead strategic planning; I lead academic and administrative assessments and institutional research, which provides all the data. So all those touch points that tell us how we are performing comes out of the institutional research office.

Smith: Vice Provost Paton continues to teach in the area of higher education at Texas Tech. Her collaborative research on distance learning meshes well with her scholarship.

Paton: We have a longitudinal study in distance learning. How do students learn online? What kind of interaction do they want with faculty, with students and with the content? Those are the three major areas in online learning interactions. My colleagues and I publish a lot in online self-regulation with William Land here at the college of education and Lucy Barnard Brak.

Smith: Dr. Paton has also made important service contributions to the university and her community.

Paton: My work in community and institutional engagement nationwide has been very important in terms of service. Locally, just in my private life, I am a member of the Salvation Army. That is a unique history that my family has. My husband’s parents and grandparents and great grandparents were Salvation Army officers. It is a history that allows one to think and consider values, core values and translate them into the relationships with the community. What does the community need, how do we come into an authentic relationship and make change together.

Smith: Considering all that she has accomplished, Dr. Paton believes that striving for balance goes a long way for others intrigued by the work of an Integrated Scholar.

Paton: I would encourage balance, I would encourage taking time and walking through the whole path and knowing it takes a long time to build an integration of theoretical and applied knowledge in any one field, and take care of your family and significant others as you go along.

Smith: Indeed, Dr. Paton herself has strived to achieve a delicate balance through her service to Texas Tech as an administrator, professor, researcher and community member. Simultaneously, she has seamlessly found ways to integrate all that she does in the areas of teaching, research and outreach.

Thanks for listening! I’m Bob Smith.

Pierce: Thanks, Dr. Smith!
You can learn more about Vice Provost Paton and other Texas Tech Integrated Scholars by visiting our website at academicast.ttu.edu.

And finally, AcademiCast would like to congratulate apparel design and manufacturing alumna Ashley Burghardt for her success on the reality TV program “24 Hour Catwalk.” Competing against three other fashion designers, Burghardt created a clothing collection in the span of just one day. Burghardt’s line topped her opponents’, and she strutted away with $10,000 in cash. “24 Hour Catwalk” airs on the Lifetime Network.

That concludes this edition of AcademiCast. If you would like to learn more about our program or the stories featured here, please visit our website at academicast.ttu.edu. Thanks for listening, and join us again in two more weeks for the latest academic news from Texas Tech University.