

March 2007

Dear MSU Faculty and Staff:

Greetings from the Office of Research and Economic Development! I believe that the time between Spring Break and Graduation is often the busiest time during the academic calendar with a great deal of “end of the academic year” events and festivities – including the annual Research Awards Banquet.

During this time each year, the Office of Research and Economic Development in partnership with the Division of Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary Medicine hosts a banquet to recognize research award winners from each academic college at the faculty, staff, graduate student, and undergraduate student level. These awards are based on peer nominations with final selections by each college. Additionally, each academic unit can submit one nomination for the Ralph E. Powe Award, given annually to the MSU faculty member who has demonstrated significant career achievement in research. Indeed, the Ralph E. Powe Award is the highest award given at MSU to recognize research excellence. I am very pleased that the 2007 Ralph E. Powe Award was presented to Dr. Louis D’Abramo, William L. Giles Distinguished Professor of Fisheries and Wildlife. An announcement briefly listing some information about Dr. D’Abramo, including the names and affiliations of all of the research award winners is on the university website at <http://www.msstate.edu/web/media/detail.php?id=3803>.

There are several other national awards that have been garnered by our faculty and staff during the last month:

\* Dr. Deborah O. Lee, Associate Professor in the Library and Associate Director in the Center for Teaching and Learning, was selected as a Fellow in the 2007 Frye Leadership Institute. Her selection as a Frye Fellow carries with it participation in a two week intensive residential program which brings together mid-level professionals from libraries and information technology to examine some of the pressing national issues in regards to information resources.

\* Dr. Andrzej Sygula, Associate Professor of Organic Chemistry and Dr. Peter Rabideau, Professor of Organic Chemistry, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, recently had their work on buckybowls featured in Nature (Vol 446, March 22, 2007) under “Research Highlights”. Nature is one of the most highly read scientific publications in the world.

I would like to continue to highlight research achievements of our faculty, staff, and students, so please continue to send me items of national interest, and I will be sure to include these each month in my letter.

In the remainder of the March letter, I would like to spend some time discussing my thoughts on growing our research funding base. Last year, Mississippi State University brought in just under \$155M in new research awards, which set a new record for the

university. This is a testament to the outstanding job that our faculty and staff do at attracting outside funding for our scholarly activities. While I am very proud of our success in this area, I do believe that within the next 5 years we can surpass the \$200M threshold in annual research awards. If we are going to be able to achieve this goal, there are several barriers that will need to be overcome. First, we need to improve information flow from the ORED to the faculty and staff highlighting research opportunities in a timely fashion. Second, we will need to find ways to expand our research portfolio to increase our funding from federal agencies with large research budgets such as DARPA and NIH. Third, we will need to have as many faculty members as possible with some participation in funded research, regardless of discipline. Fourth, and in many ways the most important, it will be critical for the senior administration to work with our deans and department heads to remove as many artificial barriers as possible which stand in the way of faculty and staff scholarship.

There are no “quick” solutions to any of these four items, but we have put some programs into place that will lay the groundwork for a \$200M per year research enterprise. In order to facilitate improved communications between the ORED and particular faculty groups, we have set up three separate list servers which are in research topical areas which have been traditionally underserved by the ORED. The first list servers have been set up in the Humanities, Business and Economics, and the Sciences. We will be adding additional list servers as well over the next couple of months. Each month, the ORED will send out an announcement with a listing of grant opportunities that are appropriate to each area. The announcements will also be posted on the ORED website under the “Research Funding” button at the top of our website. We sent the first monthly announcement to the Humanities list server in February, and will be sending the first monthly announcement to the Business/Economics and Sciences list servers later this week. Dr. Kirk Schulz will be responsible for sending out announcements to the Humanities list, Dr. Sandra Harpole will be responsible for sending out announcements to the Sciences list, and Dr. Melvin Ray will be responsible for sending announcements out to the Business/Economics list.

In order to assist MSU in increasing our research presence in federal agencies such as DARPA, Dr. Gary Butler, Director of Technology in ORED, has assembled a small team of faculty leaders in engineering and science who meet bi-weekly to examine upcoming DARPA opportunities. The DARPA group, dubbed the “A-Team”, then works to pull together proposal teams with the right expertise on campus to respond to the RFP and to meet with appropriate program managers. Thus, the purpose of the A-Team is not to write the proposals, but instead to assist us in identifying key individuals on campus who can contribute to a larger proposal effort. If this approach is productive, then in future months the ORED will form other small groups of faculty and administrators who can assist MSU in responding quickly to large proposal opportunities focused around other targeted agencies.

I have heard that one definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different end result. As such, we are going to need to try different approaches if we are to keep growing our research programs and move toward a \$200M

goal. While the focused list servers and the “A Team” approach may seem like relatively small things, they are different approaches than we have tried in the past, and I believe will help us to engage more of the university community in scholarly research.

I wish everyone the best of success as this academic year comes to a close. As always, I welcome your comments and suggestions.

Go Dawgs!

Kirk.