

April 2008

Dear MSU Faculty and Staff:

Greetings from the Office of Research and Economic Development! We are in the "home stretch" for the end of this academic year, and I know how busy everything gets. I remember well all of the grading that had always accumulated at the end of the semester, and I wish you luck getting everything done in preparation for graduation in early May.

One of the things I really like about working at a university is the opportunity to attend a wide variety of different events - from lectures by leading scholars to SEC athletics to music and fine arts performances.

This last weekend, in conjunction with other Super Bulldog Weekend events, the Library held its annual Charles A. Templeton Ragtime Music Festival on campus. During the festival, world-class musicians come to campus for a weekend to play ragtime music - which featured several outstanding piano players playing upbeat music (think of Scott Joplin and music from the movie "the Sting"). So, next year, when the Ragtime Music Festival comes around - I would encourage you to participate in some of the program and hear some exceptional musical performances.

One of the major roles of the Office of Research and Economic Development is to provide effective services that will allow each of you to pursue your scholarly work. In order to do this well, it is important that we find creative ways to obtain feedback from you on things we are doing well and things we can improve. In an attempt to figure this out, we have instituted a two-step process that will identify both areas of excellence in ORED and areas for improvement. In the first step, we identified three small (10 persons each) focus groups that represented a broad cross section of the university research community. Dr. Lynne Richardson, Dean of the College of Business and Industry, developed a set of questions that she used with each focus group to assess both knowledge of and quality of various support services offered by ORED. We took the notes from these meetings, and are using these to develop a campus wide survey to obtain more focused feedback.

The Social Science Research Center (SSRC) is helping us to put together and administer the survey to the university research community. The SSRC will build an email list for the web-based survey, and will send it out for comment near the end of April. It will be anonymous like other campus surveys. However, you will receive an email from the SSRC asking you to fill out the survey. A week later, the system will automatically send another email out to anyone on the email list who has not filled in the survey, and will repeat this a couple of times. Thus, no one is looking at the email addresses of who has sent one in and who has not - this is generated automatically. Following this procedure, we will then generate a report which will be posted on the ORED website (and will be summarized in a future Dear Colleague Letter) which describes not only the feedback, but what action items are warranted from the survey results. While I know that some of you may be "surveyed out", I would like to encourage you to help us to do a better job by taking 15 minutes and filling this out.

"We are #1! We are #1" - the chants were heard all over our office in mid-March when the Chronicle of Higher Education ranked Mississippi State University as the top university in the U.S. in terms of federally directed funds (or earmark projects if you prefer a different term). As you are aware, federally directed projects are a hot topic in Washington, D.C. these days, and are often one of the major issues that come up on the campaign trail for presidential and congressional candidates. I would like to take this opportunity to share some of my thoughts on these monies and how they benefit Mississippi State and the State of Mississippi.

First, federally directed funds are not simply blank checks. There is a misconception that monies that the university receives for these types of projects have little or no accountability. Indeed, quite the opposite is true. Before we even ask our congressional delegation to assist us with a potential project, the research team has already communicated with the program managers at the targeted federal agency. Often, the federal agency welcomes these funds, as it allows program managers to have more funds to pursue their research agendas at colleges and universities. By the time the funds are awarded, there is a good working relationship between our researchers and the program directors at the agencies. This communication continues throughout the project, as it does with any other research project.

Second, faculty performance expectations from federally directed projects are the same as funds garnered through the traditional peer-review process. There is no difference in our expectations that faculty members mentor graduate students, publish peer-reviewed journal articles, and seek other sources of research support as they build their research programs. Likewise, the funding agencies also expect similar deliverables as they would any funded research projects.

Third, federally directed projects allow us to build research infrastructure that is often built using other monies at our peer and peer+ competitors. In many of the areas that we have been successful with federally directed funds, other states have invested substantial resources in the research universities to build infrastructure. As an example, the State of North Carolina has invested millions of dollars in building up the biotechnology infrastructure in the state. The State of Ohio has invested heavily in high performance computing infrastructure. Other states have similar programs. In Mississippi, we also need to be developing critical research infrastructure, and federally directed funds allow us to do this.

Fourth, MSU is more competitive for peer-reviewed research funds than we were eight years ago. Generally, about 30 to 35% of our new grants and contracts at MSU are from federally directed projects, and this doesn't seem to be changing significantly from year-to-year. In 2000, we did about \$100M in new grants and contracts, and this past year we did \$185M. Thus, somewhere in excess of \$110M this last year was competitive funds garnered through the peer-review process.

So, I hope that each of you is proud of our #1 status in federally directed funds. I believe that we use these monies wisely, that they benefit MSU and the State of Mississippi, and that they are helping us to build better research infrastructure at Mississippi's largest research university. I would be remiss without acknowledging the team work which goes into securing these funds - from the PI's working with program officers to the senior university officials (Deans and Vice Presidents) who work hand-in-hand

with our federal delegations - who work together to ensure that we provide good projects for them to fund. Finally, none of this would happen without the hard work of our lobbyist in Washington, DC - Dr. Marty Fuller - who helps make all of this happen.

So, good luck in the final days of the 2007 - 2008 academic year, and remember - we are #1!

Go Dawgs!

Kirk