

May 2008

Dear MSU Faculty and Staff:

Welcome to the summer time! I can remember as a new faculty member that my summer plans were always very ambitious - I as going to write a couple of proposals, finish off a couple of papers which had been sitting on my desk, spend more time with my family, take some vacation, and have all my notes prepared for the fall. Somehow, I just never seemed to get my summer "to-do" list done until around Christmas time. So, to all of you compulsive planners - may your summer be a productive one!

This next upcoming weekend is a historic one at Mississippi State University. Coach Ron Polk has been associated with Mississippi State baseball for the majority of his career, and this upcoming home series between MSU and Arkansas will be Coach Polk's last regular season home SEC baseball series. If you haven't come out to a baseball game yet this year, please be sure to come out and support our student-athletes and show Coach Polk our appreciation for his long term service to MSU. While we are on athletics - big congratulations go to our Women's softball team and Men's golf team who are both playing in the NCAA Tournament this weekend. Go Dawgs!

Many of our faculty and staff members have won awards and recognitions, so we have a long kudos list this month - Dr. Pat Cox, Biosafety Officer and Assistant Director for Regulatory Compliance, recently was recognized as a Registered Biosafety Professional (RBP). A RBP is an individual with a documented university education or specialized training in relevant biological safety disciplines who has submitted the application and been found to be eligible for registration by the ABSA Evaluation Board for Registration.

Ms. Becky Hagenston (English Department) won the Reynolds Price Short Fiction Award for 2008 for her story "The Secrets of Old-Time Science Experiments."

Mississippi State was recently asked to join the Federal Demonstration Partnership (FDP) as an institutional member. MSU will now join with nine federal agencies and over 100 other institutions around the country to contribute to our primary goals of increasing research productivity and decreasing administrative burden while maintaining effective stewardship of federal funds. The successful FDP member proposal effort was led by Ms. Robyn Remotigue, Assistant Director for the Office of Sponsored Programs Administration.

Mississippi State University is among the first group of universities designated by the National Security Agency (NSA) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) as a National Center of Academic Excellence in Information Assurance Research or CAE-R. This is quite an honor for MSU and recognizes the strong information assurance program we have here. The information security program is lead by Dr. Ray Vaughn, Billie J. Ball Endowed Professor, (Computer Science and Engineering).

Dr. Mimmo Parisi (Sociology and SSRC) has been selected to receive the 2008 Rural Sociological Society (RSS) Excellence in Extension and Public Outreach Award. Mimmo will receive his award at the annual Rural Sociological Society meeting in June.

Congratulations to all on a job well done!

So, what things are on my summer "to-do" list? One of my goals is to ensure that we are putting policies and procedures in place that will continue to build on and expand our research infrastructure. There are three main areas that need some immediate attention: institutional research focus areas, promotion criteria for research faculty and staff members, and overhead distribution policies between research centers and academic units. These are all significant issues which affect a large portion of our research community, and it is critical that we develop creative ideas and solutions that will allow us to continue to build our research enterprise.

In order to begin to address these three critical areas, I asked Deans and Center Directors to nominate faculty and staff members to serve on three summer-time working groups for each of these topics. After soliciting nominations, I worked with my senior staff in ORED to select 9 to 10 people from the nominations to create a diverse set of representatives to serve on these working groups. I am going to ask each group to develop a set of recommendations on these topics which will be shared with the research community for comment by early Fall. Each working group will convene between mid-May and mid-August, so these will not be permanent committees. Thus, I want to assure you that there will be plenty of opportunity for comment and feedback on these recommendations prior to any sort of formal implementation or changes.

Generally, most of us would agree that MSU cannot be "all things to all people" in research and scholarly activity. As you are probably aware, it is very challenging to choose institutional focus areas in which we can be nationally known. However, it is critical that we go through the exercise of identifying areas of both current and future research strengths. While some of this was done as part of the FutureState 2015 strategic plan, it is important for us to carefully choose a small set of research focus areas for future strategic investment and growth. Dr. Glenn Steele, William L. Giles Distinguished Professor, will chair this particular working group.

Several years ago, MSU adopted a set of uniform criteria for promotion and tenure for faculty members in tenure track positions. We have not developed a similar set of criteria for promotion of faculty and staff members in research positions (such as Assistant Research Professor). In order to ensure that faculty and staff progressing up the research track also have a uniform set of

procedures for promotion, we need to comprehensively look at all of the criteria currently used for promotion and suggest modifications to the policy as needed. Dr. Robert Moorhead, Billie J. Ball Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering, will chair this working group.

MSU faculty members are extremely talented at securing research funding and writing grants in support of their scholarly work. A significant amount of our grant activity occurs in our research centers - which allow researchers from a variety of disciplines to work together to solve more comprehensive problems and tackle those research issues near the boundaries between disciplines. However, conflicts arise when trying to decide how much of the returned overhead funds is allocated to a research center and how much is allocated to an academic unit. In my conversations with other Vice Presidents for Research, this is a common problem at many research institutions. I am asking this group to examine our current policies and suggest any changes that should be made to minimize the conflicts revolving around overhead distribution between centers and academic units. Dr. David Shaw, William L. Giles Distinguished Professor, will chair this particular working group.

Thanks to those of you who filled out our ORED survey. We are compiling the results and will report back to you with a summary in my June newsletter.

So, whatever is on your summer list - good luck getting every item done!

Go Dawgs!

Kirk.