

June 2008

Dear MSU Faculty and Staff:

I can still picture it in my mind - the pulsing rock music, the spotlights on stage, the Master of Ceremonies wearing a tuxedo and telling jokes that resulted in a few polite chuckles, TV cameras catching every part of the ceremony, and an audience dressed in their Sunday best. What was this? Not the Oscars or the Golden Globes - but the 2008 Challenge X Awards Dinner in Washington, DC. Administrators, faculty members, sponsor representatives and student team members were there from all 16 Challenge X teams.

Challenge X was a four-year competition where student teams were given a Chevrolet Equinox and had to redo the entire vehicle in a hybrid fuel format. Mississippi State University was one of 16 schools that competed for all four years, and we were selected as the overall winner for both 2007 and 2008. It was great to see the students on the team and the faculty advisors be congratulated on their winning car by the Secretary of the Department of Energy. It was also equally gratifying to finish ahead of schools like Penn State, the University of Wisconsin, and the University of Michigan. Congratulations to all of the faculty, staff, and students who represented MSU in the Challenge X competition - it was a great day to be a Bulldog! Special thanks go to Dr. Marshall Molen, DTI Professor in ECE, who served as Challenge X faculty advisor.

I did want to pass on some other kudos this month as well - Congratulations to MSU as a whole! For the 2007 - 2008 academic year, we had 117 doctoral students finish their degrees at MSU. A continual increase in the number of doctoral degrees awarded will be key to moving up to the next level in the Carnegie classifications.

- Congratulations also go to Dr. Burak Eksioğlu, who will receive the Institute of Industrial Engineers (IIE) Award for Excellence in the Teaching of Operations Research. Dr. Eksioğlu received his award last month at the international meeting of IIE.

In last month's newsletter, I gave some details on three working groups who will be spending the summer on topics such as university research focus areas, overhead distribution policies, and research faculty promotion issues. I would like to share with you the complete listing of these groups, and I would certainly encourage each of you to give any opinions you might have on these topics to one of the working group members:

Overhead Distribution Working Group Chair - David Shaw (dshaw@gri.msstate.edu), Director of GeoResources Institute
Art Cosby, Director, Social Science Research Center Carol Martin, Business Manager, Bagley College of Engineering David Lewis, Associate Dean, College of Architecture, Art, and Design Jonathan Pote, Associate Director, MAFES Administration Louay Chamra, Interim Department Head, Mechanical Engineering Roger King, Interim Executive Director, Center for Advanced Vehicular Systems Sarah Rajala, Dean, Bagley College of Engineering Susan Bridges, Co-Director, Institute for Digital Biology Walter Diehl, Interim Associate Dean for Research, College of Arts and Sciences

Research Faculty Promotion Working Group

Chair - Robert Moorhead (rjm@gri.msstate.edu), Associate Director, GeoResources Institute
Angela Robertson, Associate Research Professor, Social Science Research Center
Donna Reese, Associate Dean for Academics and Administration, Bagley College of Engineering
Jeff Lindner, Research Professor, Institute for Clean Energy Technology
Louis D'Abramo, Professor, Wildlife and Fisheries
Monty Hughson, Deputy Director, SimCenter
Ron Cossman, Associate Research Professor, Social Science Research Center
Shelly Hemphill Bock, Research Associate III, Research and Curriculum Unit
William Batchelor, Co-Director, SERC; Department Head, Agricultural and Biological Engineering

Research Focus Area Working Group

Chair - Glenn Steele (steele@bagley.msstate.edu), Co-Director, Sustainable Energy Research Center
Duane Gill, Associate Director, Social Science Research Center
Elton Moore, Associate Dean for Research and Assessment, College of Education
Joshua Chad Watson, Assistant Professor, MSU-Meridian
Lori Bruce, Associate Director, GeoResources Institute
Lynne Cossman, Associate Professor, & Interim Director of Women's Studies
Mark Horstemeyer, Professor of Mechanical Engineering
Ray Vaughn, Director, Center for Computer Security Research
Shane Burgess, Director, Life Sciences and Biotechnology Institute
Stephen Pruet, Interim Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies, College of Veterinary Medicine

In selecting members of the committees, my office solicited nominations from Deans and Center Directors. Additionally, for logistics reasons, we kept the working groups small (around 10 people) so that they could meet multiple times during the summer. As I mentioned last month in my letter (http://www.research.msstate.edu/pdf/colleagues/5_08_colleagues.pdf), once we have a suggested plan from these groups, we will be soliciting feedback from the university community. Our goal is to develop plans that will achieve reasonable consensus. We will continue to work on these topics until we reach this point. I will keep you posted as these groups work during the summer months, and I appreciate the willingness of the working group members to give of their time to assist us in moving research at MSU forward.

So, how is ORED doing at working with the campus research community? This was the focus of our recent survey, which was sent to the university community in late April and early May. This month, I want to share with you some general highlights of the survey, and discuss what we hope to do with this information.

We sent the survey to 1299 faculty members at MSU, with 521 faculty members completing their surveys, for a return rate of about 40%. By University Division, we had the following numbers of respondents - Academic Affairs (14), DAFVM (1), Agriculture and Life Sciences (66), Architecture, Art, and Design (10), Arts and Sciences (112), Business and Industry (40), Education (46), Engineering (60), Forest Resources (30), Veterinary Medicine (42), Information Technology (1), MAFES (32), Meridian (19), MSU Extension Service (8), Outreach and Continuing Education (3), Office of the President (2), Office of Research (35). Thus, I believe that we received an excellent cross section of campus for our survey respondents. Additionally, about 40% of the respondents indicated that they were involved in research through a center or institute - which illustrates the importance of our research centers to our research culture and achievement.

We received interesting information on proposal activities. In response to the question "About how many proposals do you submit to sponsored programs on an annual basis", 30.3% submit none, 42.6% submitted 1 to 3, 17.9% submitted 4 to 7, and 3.1% submitted 8 or more. The remaining responses were either not sure (3.6%) or no comment (2.5%).

Generally, faculty members were pleased with their experiences with Sponsored Programs Administration. In response to the question "Considering all of your experiences, please rate the overall quality of your relationship with the Office of Sponsored Programs Administration", 12.3% rated Excellent, 27.1% rated Good, 13.1% rated Average, 6.5% Fair, and 1.9% as Poor. The remaining responses were either not sure (1.2%), no comment (1%), or does not apply (0.6%).

We have a significant number of faculty members who make use of Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. 140 faculty members who responded to the survey indicated that they had submitted a protocol for review, and most faculty members felt that the IRB process was clearly laid out and well done. In a series of questions, 86.4% felt that the protocol was easy to find and complete, 87.1% felt that the questions on the protocol form were easy to understand, 80.7% that the submission and approval process was straight forward, and 77.1% that the requirements/contingencies for approval were reasonable.

So, how are we going to use this information to continue to improve our service to the university research community? I have asked each of the major service areas within ORED to summarize the survey results in their areas so that we can have a baseline from which to work. In this way, as we try new programs and new initiatives, we have a way to evaluate if we are making any progress. We will post these summaries, as well as specific action plans, on the ORED website in coming weeks. Additionally, we are looking at each of the free form comments that were turned in to ensure that we are taking into account all constructive suggestions for improvement. While the survey is useful, we appreciate suggestions any time so feel free to email me or drop by my office if you have ideas.

I hope that all of you will go out and enjoy the warm Mississippi summer. Football season is right around the corner, and the Fall Semester will be here before you know it.

Go Dawgs!

Kirk