

Dear MSU Faculty and Staff:

Greetings from the Office of Research and Economic Development! I trust that your semester got off to a good start as we march our way towards graduation in May.

One of the highest awards that can be earned by a young faculty member is a National Science Foundation CAREER Award. These awards, which are highly competitive, are given each year to faculty members across the United States following a rigorous peer-review process. Each proposal must address the integration of teaching with the proposed research project, reinforcing the synergy between scholarship and teaching which is a hallmark of a research university. I am very pleased to announce that we had three MSU faculty members win these awards this year – Dr. Alicia Beatty (Chemistry), Dr. Adrienne Minerick (Chemical Engineering), and Dr. Keith Walters (Mechanical Engineering). Please join me in congratulating these exceptional young faculty members on this wonderful achievement!

One of the items that I addressed in my introductory letter at the beginning of this year was communication with the faculty and staff at large. I will send a monthly letter out keeping you informed of key topics and changes occurring in research at Mississippi State. Additionally, if there are general topics which are timely and are generating some campus discussion, I will certainly include these in a letter as well. As such, the content will vary greatly each month – with the ultimate goal of keeping you informed and seeking your advice and suggestions on various topics of interest.

While the Office of Research has many different roles, one of the more unheralded responsibilities concerns our research support functions such as compliance, sponsored programs administration, biological and chemical safety, facility security, and appropriate animal care. Several years ago, when Mississippi State's research enterprise was much smaller, these types of activities were often done by faculty members who spent part of their time working with institutional compliance, and the remainder of their time doing research and scholarly work. However, as our research enterprise has grown to over \$150M per year, we have not grown the supporting units enough to handle the increased institutional responsibilities which are part of our maturation as a research university.

To keep pace with these changes, it is critical that MSU provide adequate funding for our research support units. In order to support you more fully as you seek to perform your research and scholarly activities, we are going to make several key changes as outlined below.

First, we are hiring an additional IRB Compliance Administrator to support the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This will give us two full-time support staff for IRB activities. In some benchmarking studies, universities with our research load typically have at least 4 to 5 full-time IRB administrators, so while this does not fully address this problem, we are taking a step towards a long term solution.

Second, we are hiring a full-time, experienced professional to serve as the university Biosafety Officer. This position was formally a part-time position that was done by a faculty member. Given our significant increase in bio-based research, this can no longer be accomplished by a part-time individual. By hiring an experienced professional in Biosafety, this will allow us to ensure that we are using best practices in all of our bio-related research endeavors.

Third, we are working to identify individuals who will serve as Assistant/Associate Directors in three major research support areas – Research Compliance, Sponsored Programs, and Office of Technology Commercialization. We need to have “two-deep” leadership in each of these critical areas so that we are not highly dependent on a single individual in a leadership position. In this way, we will be able to provide better support for faculty members seeking assistance in these three key areas.

Fourth, we recently hired an experienced Facility Security Officer. We were fortunate to attract Neil Lewis as our FSO, who had an extensive background in working with security prior to his move to MSU.

So what happens if we choose not to do these things and to invest our resources in other areas? Non-compliance can result in research being suspended at the university and impact academic programs in a number of areas including graduate students, theses, and dissertations. In short, if we hope to continue to make strides as a modern research university, providing appropriately trained professional staff members in research support units is a necessity for MSU.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my first month as Interim Vice President, and hope that you will continue to send me your ideas, thoughts, and suggestions for improvement.

Regards,

Kirk.