

# 2017 Annual Letter from the Vice President for Research

Dear Colleagues –

It has been an extraordinary privilege to serve for the past year as Vice President for Research at Saint Louis University. As you know, President Pestello and Provost Brickhouse hired me a year ago to grow the scale and eminence of SLU's research enterprise. It has been an exciting and uniquely challenging year, and I am proud of all that we have accomplished together thus far.

Now beginning this second year I would like to take a moment to share some thoughts on our accomplishments in academic year 2016-2017 and sketch out priorities for 2017-2018.

## ACADEMIC YEAR 2016-2017

In March we reorganized into the Office of the Vice President of Research, a unified office with four working groups designed around the ways faculty approach research and scholarship. These working groups include the Research Strategy Group (RSG), which works with faculty in all aspects of research program development and proposals; the Research Integrity and Safety Group (RIS), which is responsible for making our safety and integrity processes easier to navigate; the Research Innovation Group (RIG), which oversees university research commercialization and engagement with the St. Louis innovation community; and the Research Accounting and Postaward Group (RAP), which supports central accounting and award management functions.

## **RESEARCH PROCESSES, INFORMATION SYSTEMS, AND GRANTSMANSHIP**

A key element of building an ambitious, collaborative, and enabling environment for research is to make SLU's research support structures efficient, easy to navigate, and accessible.

First, the Magis Operational Excellence Sponsored Research Committee, under the leadership of Professors Enrico DiCera and Riyadh Hindi, put forward three recommendations: simplification of our processes for applying for and managing grants; replacement of our electronic grants management system (eRS); and the reorganization of grants support staff around campus. The first of these is underway: we will replace eRS with a new system from InfoEd mid-year. This new system will enable us to make grants management easier and will provide you with better information about your grant funds.

Second, to help faculty increase success rates of proposals we launched a new grantsmanship training program with three pilot programs: a NSF CAREER Workshop led by Dr. Saran Twombly, former NSF Program Director; a NIH R-Series Workshop with guest lectures from Professors John Tavis and Joel Eissenberg from the School of Medicine; and a summer workshop specific to faculty in the Doisy College of Health Sciences and the College of Public Health and Social Justice. Combined, 50 faculty participated in these workshops.



Based on the success of these pilots, we have scheduled this fall a variety of topical workshops and a weekly “Research Café” that mix topics of interest with opportunities to connect with collaborators from other departments.

## **SEED FUNDING & COLLABORATIONS**

Faculty need resources to launch new research programs. In October we launched the Spark Microgrant Program to provide easy access to small amounts of funding at the beginning of a project. We have awarded more than 50 microgrants of about \$1,000 each on topics ranging from health and criminal justice to religion and law.

We were also able to increase the amount of funding in the President’s Research Fund (PRF) to \$650,000 from OVP’s budget and \$150,000 from the Vice President for Medical Affairs/Dean of Medicine, for a total of \$800,000 awarded in FY17. We have seen a 9:1 return on investment from the PRF since its inception in 2009. Growing the PRF is among my top priorities.

Equally important has been building connections among groups of faculty with shared research interests. For SLU to thrive as a growing research university, we need opportunities to learn from and collaborate with one another. To foster these collaborations we have brought together groups of faculty interested in topics such as mental health, wound healing, geospatial science, research computing, urban challenges, and food and water issues. Supporting interdisciplinary groups of faculty is one of OVP’s most important functions—please let us know if you have ideas for other topical groups that we could help convene.

## **FIVE YEAR RESEARCH GROWTH PLAN**

Most significantly, at the request of President Pestello, we developed and are now launching a Five Year Research Growth Plan. The Five Year Plan calls for us to dramatically grow the scale and eminence of SLU’s research enterprise toward the longer term ambition of becoming the world’s leading Jesuit research university. Over the next five years, we will accomplish three major goals:

- Grow SLU’s research enterprise from \$50 million to \$100 million annually
- Build a set of university-wide strategic research initiatives in which SLU can distinguish itself as a leading destination for faculty, students, and funding.
- Generate real impact in tackling social and scientific challenges through partnerships with regional research institutions, industry, and investors.

I look forward to sharing more detail on the plan this Fall and will share regular updates on developments and progress against our goals over the course of 2017-2018.



## ACADEMIC YEAR 2017-2018

The coming year will be critical in generating momentum to set us on a path to growth. Following are some of the key priorities for 2017-2018:

### **INCREASE THE NUMBER AND SUCCESS RATE OF PROPOSALS**

Successfully competing for external funding provides resources to invest in our faculty, students, and infrastructure, as well as prestige and recognition from the public and academic communities. While funding is not synonymous with research excellence, given the breadth of our research interests and ambitions we must grow the number of funded awards so that we can sustainably provide faculty with access to the resources needed to pursue excellent, impactful research. As part of the Five Year Plan, we are working with each dean to set goals for the coming year and will provide any and every support needed to enable our faculty to increase the number and success rate of external proposals. This will include comprehensive research administration support, grantsmanship training, seed funding, collaboration opportunities, and access to relevant funding opportunities and funding agencies for which we have engaged a leading consulting firm, Lewis-Burke Associates. We are also working on improving incentive structures and removing other obstacles to pursuing and managing funded research.

### **LAUNCHING STRATEGIC RESEARCH INITIATIVES**

As part of the Five Year Plan, SLU will launch several major research initiatives over the next years that will combine internal investments, external funding, new faculty hires, and philanthropic investment. Since I arrived, I have asked you individually and in groups where we are or could be distinctive given our mission and identity as a Catholic, Jesuit research university, our physical locations in St. Louis and Madrid, and relationships with businesses, non-profits, and other universities in our region.

As noted above, over the past year OVPR convened groups of faculty from across the university which have shared scholarly and scientific research interests. Later in the Fall, we will launch a more formal process through which faculty can propose research programs as potential university-level research priorities. This will be a competitive, multi-year process with increasing levels of investment for projects that demonstrate broad faculty engagement, strong leadership, and compelling business models.



Igniting Discovery, Transforming Lives

## REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

In addition to building an ambitious, collaborative, and enabling culture within SLU, we are raising our external profile in the St. Louis region. For example, around research innovation earlier this month OVPR hosted a gathering of leaders in research commercialization, regional universities, innovators, and venture capitalists around the question of how SLU might reinvent commercialization as it is typically practiced at universities. In the coming year we will explore new approaches to licensing, intellectual property, partnerships with industry, investors, and entrepreneurs, and collaborations between faculty and student entrepreneurs.

In terms of research partnerships it has been gratifying how enthusiastic partners such as the Danforth Plant Science Center, the Missouri Botanical Garden, the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, Washington University, and Cortex are to collaborate, and how excited they are to see us succeed in growing our research enterprise. There is tremendous goodwill for SLU in St. Louis and a strong desire to work with us.

This is, to say the least, an ambitious agenda for the coming year and for the coming five years. No doubt various aspects of these plans will change and evolve as we move forward. But I'm thrilled with the opportunity we have in front of us, and couldn't be more excited to be pursuing this vision with such a committed and passionate group of colleagues.

In gratitude,

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