

Update from the Vice President for Research - April 2018

Dear Colleagues –

I write with my quarterly update on the progress of our research growth ambitions. As you know, last year we embarked on an ambitious plan to grow the scale and eminence of SLU's research enterprise. As we draw toward the end of the academic year, I want to offer a few reflections on what we've accomplished over the past few months and where we're going next.

It might first be worth reflecting a bit about why research is critical to SLU's future. As conversations were taking place about SLU's strategic plan in 2014 and 2015, President Pestello heard loud and clear that our community wanted to see more research and scholarship and greater investment in research and scholarship. As the bicentennial book, "Always at the Frontier" and accompanying exhibit at SLUMA demonstrate, for over 200 years SLU has been shaped by a spirit of inquiry and discovery. We are one of about 200 research universities among more than 4,000 post-secondary institutions in the United States. Our status as a university that celebrates both research and teaching differentiates us in an increasingly challenging market for great students, faculty, and funding. We are able to attract a type of student that seeks to learn from faculty who are creating new knowledge – and in many cases, we are attracting students who want to engage in discovery during their time at SLU. Our position as a growing research university enables us to attract new faculty colleagues who bring research programs that broaden opportunities for our students and society. And the work we are doing together to grow SLU into a position of research eminence also enhances our Jesuit mission.

A few highlights from the past several months:

- Faculty teams from across SLU developed and submitted 38 Big Ideas proposals as candidates for future university-wide research priorities. SLU's new Research Growth Committee (RGC) debated the merits of these proposals and has awarded three full planning grants for projects that demonstrate high potential; and nine preliminary planning grants for projects that have potential but which might benefit from additional consultation. The RGC also provided numerous small seed grants to encourage groups with promising collaborations to develop them more fully. Planning grant recipients now have 6-9 months to move ideas to the next stage, a process that will include engaging a broader group of faculty and students into the conversation. The full list of awardees is available [here](#).
- [Three Research Councils](#) made up of department chairs, center directors, and research leaders launched earlier this year and are formulating their agendas and beginning to work together. The Councils together with SOM's Research Planning Committee held a joint meeting on April 5 with an open discussion on research with Provost Nancy Brickhouse. Additionally, each Council and the RPC is now responsible for managing a portion of the President's Research Fund.



- The Research Advisory Board made up of members of SLU's board of trustees met for the third time in February and meets again next week. This group of trustees is committed to advocating for our researchers and helping SLU raise its research profile. Earlier this month RAB member and SLU trustee Peter Benoist hosted a gathering of St. Louis civic, innovation, industry, and philanthropic leaders to take part in a salon-style conversation about our outstanding contributions to vaccine development.
- Our DC federal agency consulting firm, Lewis-Burke and Associates, supported a group of our humanities faculty on a trip to meet program officers at the NEH and NEA. Lewis-Burke staff also spent several days on campus meeting with faculty and helping to plan new research programs.
- President Pestello announced significant changes to the [F&A distribution model](#) in March, ensuring that faculty engaged in funded research increasingly benefit from SLU's growth and are able to reinvest in their own research programs.
- OVPR celebrated with faculty winners of this year's Scholarly Works awards, our second annual celebration of books, articles, and performances that reflect the eminence of our faculty and make SLU a destination for students and colleagues seeking the rich conversations that happen in our hallways.
- We launched a First Tuesdays Happy Hour at Cortex (4240 Duncan Ave). These events, starting at 5:15pm on the first Tuesday of each month, give faculty a chance to meet colleagues and potential collaborators from other departments and colleges. The first included Economics, Psychology, and Education. On Tuesday, May 1, we will host Biochemistry, Chemistry, and Biomedical Engineering. All SLU faculty are welcome to attend any First Tuesday gathering, whether or not your department is featured.

We have several things on the horizon:

- **Increasing Grant Submissions:** To meet our ambitious growth goals, we have to be intentional about submitting more grant applications starting in FY19. We have many resources to support faculty including Lewis-Burke, the new GO Center in Fusz Hall, grantsmanship workshops, writing and statistical support, and seed funding. The revised F&A policy gives researchers a larger share of that success. In the months ahead, we will be meeting with department chairs to discuss faculty research aspirations, funding goals, and any barriers that we can help remove. If we grow the number of applications by 30% in FY19, we can reasonably expect that faculty's share of F&A return will increase to 20% in FY20.

- **Research Computing Support:** On April 6, 40 SLU faculty and administrators participated in a Computation Planning workshop to brainstorm around how SLU can best support the computational needs of our researchers. Following on that meeting, CTO David Hakanson and I have engaged Dave Gohara, adjunct faculty in SOM, to develop a research computing roadmap for SLU over the next several months, including interviewing faculty to fully understand your hardware, software, and technical support staff needs so that we can begin to implement these in FY19.
- **Enhancing Undergraduate Research:** I have asked Associate Vice President Matthew Christian to begin to convene the numerous faculty and departments that actively support undergraduate research. In many areas SLU does this well and we are looking for ways to better support undergraduate research and make it an area of distinction at SLU. If you have interest in being a part of this conversation, please contact matthew.christian@slu.edu.

Finally, as the academic year comes to a close we will gather as a community to celebrate the incredible accomplishments of our scholars and scientists this year. I would like to invite you to gather on Monday, April 30 at 4:00pm at Saint Louis University Museum of Art. The event will feature brief talks about the emerging Big Ideas and we will raise a glass to acknowledge the work we have done together toward our goal of becoming one of the world's leading Jesuit research universities.

As always, I would be grateful for your input on whether my colleagues and I in the Office of the Vice President for Research are genuinely enabling you to accomplish your research ambitions, what we might be missing, and where we can improve.

In gratitude,
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