

Comments from VP for Research on the One Year Anniversary of Sinquefield Gift

“It’s a pleasure to be with all of you this evening – a pleasure to mark the one year anniversary of Jeanne and Rex’s historic gift to SLU, and to reflect on what it has meant for our beloved university in this first year. It’s been a privilege for me to help guide the use of their gift toward achieving our shared goal of growing SLU into a preeminent Jesuit research university.

Part of what makes the Sinquefield gift so wonderful is how it came to be. Rex and Jeanne’s deep love for SLU led them to want to use their wealth to do something extraordinary for the university. They found compelling SLU’s long-term vision to grow into a preeminent Jesuit research university and invited us to design the best use of the gift to fulfill that vision.

Jeanne and Rex’s requirements in making the gift were threefold:

- That we use the funds to aspire for excellence in science and scholarship
- That we set ambitious goals and hold ourselves accountable to those goals
- That we magnify the impact of their gift by leveraging additional philanthropic, industry, and federal funding, to sustain the higher level of research intensity that their gift enables.

In our first year, we have used the Sinquefields’ investment to accelerate our growth through investing in our outstanding scholars and scientists, recruiting the best and brightest new faculty, and building areas of distinctive research strength.

The gift created the Saint Louis University Research Institute, which I have the privilege of directing. The goal of the RI is to set SLU on a path to becoming a preeminent Jesuit research university. An early task has been designing a series of open and responsive mechanisms to oversee the RI’s funding. We’ve put a lot of energy into getting this right, and many people across the university have contributed their time. The RI is overseen by the Research Growth Committee, a group of faculty leaders and administrators which make funding decisions through competitive processes. A Fellows Committee, made up of eight of SLU’s most distinguished researchers, reviews applications by deans for appointing new research-intensive faculty members as Fellows of the Research Institute. Together with four Research Councils which review grant proposals, over 70 faculty and administrators across the university are engaged in deciding how best to use the Sinquefield gift to grow SLU’s eminence as a research university.

With these mechanisms in place, in our first year the Research Institute managed two rounds of a Research Growth Fund, whereby faculty from across the university could apply for funding to enhance their research productivity. Close to two hundred faculty applied, and 28 grants have been awarded totaling more than \$2.5 million. Even more impressive is that the gift has supported exceptional research across the entire university, from the history of early Christianity to medicinal chemistry to behavioral health.

Further, in a highly competitive environment for the most talented researchers, the gift enabled us to recruit a group of outstanding new faculty through providing financial incentives on top of departmental recruitment packages. Seven up and coming faculty from prestigious institutions such as the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Michigan, and Wesleyan University accepted our invitation to join SLU’s faculty and form our inaugural class of Research Institute Fellows, many of whom are here this evening.

Finally, the Sinquefield gift has allowed SLU to define a set of emerging university research priorities through a competitive “Big Ideas” process. In two rounds more than fifty interdisciplinary faculty teams have competed for planning grants and three areas, Health Informatics, Water, and Geospatial Science, are being launched as initial research priorities. This Big Ideas process has been catalytic for SLU’s researchers. By connecting faculty throughout the university around topics about which they are deeply passionate, we now are seeing the emergence of a university-wide research agenda that reflects SLU’s distinctive Jesuit mission and values.

As you can tell, this has been an intense, vibrant first year in standing up the Research Institute and executing on our shared vision. But I’m grateful for this opportunity to stand back and reflect a bit. I’ll close with three reflections.

First, the financial resources that the gift provides are of course incredibly important. But in addition, the gift has shaped our trajectory as an institution. We are on a 10 year journey to become the preeminent research university envisioned by SLU’s faculty, students, and staff in our strategic plan. Institutional change doesn’t happen quickly, especially in academia, but we will make progress against this vision every year, year after year, and we will see it through. In nine years, we will be a different university.

Second, the Sinquefields’ gift to Saint Louis University is a model for how a university and donors can form a genuine, trusted partnership. In giving their historic gift, they were excited by SLU’s aspiration to accelerate our growth as a research university. SLU developed the mechanisms and talent to carry out the gift; the Sinquefields provided the financial capital. Together, we share a vision. This is philanthropy, radical generosity, in its truest form.

And finally, all of this is ultimately about generating ideas and knowledge that transforms lives. Ultimately it’s about SLU’s outstanding researchers and the outstanding new colleagues that we will bring to St. Louis in the years to come. It’s about literally changing the world through the discoveries and insights of our researchers, and the transformative impact of their science and scholarship, now propelled through the Sinquefields’ generosity.

Together, the Sinquefields and Saint Louis University, share a vision of SLU’s future as a world-class research university, rooted in the city of St. Louis, living out our Catholic, Jesuit mission to pursue truth to the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity. For this we are so very grateful.”

Ken Olliff
Vice President for Research
Director, Research Institute
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