Update from the Vice President for Research - September 2018

Dear Colleagues –

This is a particularly exciting moment in Saint Louis University's history. As you know, Dr. Jeanne and Rex Sinquefield's $50 million gift last week will create the Saint Louis University Research Institute. I am excited to describe some of the initial plans for the Research Institute and update you on other initiatives underway.

SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The vision of the Research Institute is to set SLU on a path to become the world's leading Jesuit research university. While on one level this aspiration might seem implausible, the Sinquefields' singular generosity will enable SLU to make real progress toward this ambitious but achievable long-term goal. We have created an interim Research Institute website that describes the Research Institute along with the metrics by which we will measure our progress. It also outlines three broad categories through which the RI will provide funding to SLU's researchers.

The first of these is a competitive Research Growth Fund. As a complement to the President's Research Fund, the Research Growth Fund will provide highly flexible funding to SLU's faculty to accelerate their research. This might include hiring a post-doc, purchasing a piece of equipment, requesting a course buyout – or it might take an entirely different form. The idea is that SLU's faculty know best what is needed to take their research to the next level. In their applications faculty will be asked to assess the request's financial return on investment (amount and likelihood of external funding that will obtained) as well as its eminence return on investment (extent of scholarly or scientific impact). We anticipate that the Research Growth Fund will be a rolling application process and we will release a Request for Proposals in the next several weeks.

The second category focuses on recruiting and retaining highly talented researchers. While we are still early in designing the program, the intent is to enable chairs and deans to successfully recruit their first choice junior and senior faculty candidates. The fund will help departments attract new faculty through supplemental salary support, research stipends, and assistance with start-up packages. It will also enable SLU to offer additional support to retain highly productive faculty. These funds will be available on a competitive basis for recruitments taking place over the course of this academic year. More detailed information will be forthcoming this fall.

Finally, the Research Institute will provide funding for Big Ideas projects, both launching grants that the current round of Big Ideas planning grantees have been invited to compete for, as well as a new Big Ideas planning grant RFP that will also be released this fall.

SLU RESEARCH

Igniting Discovery, Transforming Lives

The Sinquefields' founding gift to create the Research Institute is structured as a 10 year expendable fund that will set SLU on a path of ongoing growth. The Research Institute will thus leverage this founding gift to significantly increase SLU's capacity to compete for federal, industry, and foundation funded research. Additional philanthropic funding will also play an important role, particularly through pursuing endowed professorships and fundraising for research priority areas.

PROPOSAL GOALS

In order to make progress in achieving our research growth goals, it is essential that SLU increase the number of grant applications that we submit annually. Over the past six years, SLU has hovered around 600 to 650 applications per year. After discussion with deans, chairs, the Provost, and the President over the summer, we are setting a university goal of submitting between 700 and 750 grant applications in FY19. Meeting this goal will require all faculty working in fundable fields to look for and send an application to one more funding source that will enable their work to move forward.

Deans and chairs will have overall targets and will be asking individual faculty to set proposal goals for the year and discuss what is needed to enable them to achieve those goals. We will provide each dean and chair with monthly reports on grant applications and work with them to provide needed support. For faculty who have not pursued external funding for research, grants for student training, summer research experiences, conferences, travel stipends, and outreach to the community are extremely valuable and count toward SLU's overall goal.

While 700+ applications may seem challenging, it is well within our capability as a university. If individuals applied for as many grants this year as they have in their best year, SLU would surpass 850 total applications. Please let us know how OVPR can best support you.

NSF INNOVATION CORPS (I-CORPS) SITE

Another exciting event occurred last week when SLU received approval as a National Science Foundation Innovation-Corps (I-Corps) Site, making us the first university in the St. Louis region to achieve I-Corps Site status. I-Corps funds will be used to build and train teams of faculty, students, and entrepreneurs to build new businesses. The I-Corps award will:

- Contribute significantly to SLU's strategic plan goal of "being an innovator and entrepreneur in all that we do"
- Extend and fund our existing SLUStart program to deliver powerful lean business plan training for both STEM and non-STEM fields
- Raise our profile in Cortex and deepen our engagement with the St. Louis innovation and entrepreneurship community
- Develop innovation and entrepreneurship skills in underrepresented St. Louis communities in collaboration with Harris Stowe State University and other institutions

SLU RESEARCH

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I-Corps programs will commence in October. Please contact Graeme Thomas at graeme.thomas@slu.edu or Malcolm Townes malcolm.townes@slu.edu for further information.

BIG IDEAS

The 12 teams that received planning grants and preliminary planning grants under the 2018 Big Ideas competition are working diligently on refining their ideas, developing collaborations, pursuing external funding opportunities, and developing their research and business plans. If you are interested in connecting with any of the Big Ideas teams, please do not hesitate to contact any of the faculty leaders or Jasmin Patel, jasmin.patel@slu.edu. As noted above, we are preparing another call for Big Ideas that will be announced this fall with proposals due in the spring.

GRANT OPERATIONS (GO) CENTERS

We launched the first GO Center, which supports faculty outside of the School of Medicine, at the end of last year. The GO Center combines pre- and post-award tasks into one cohesive team that allows for the submission of applications with fewer steps and better communication while making it faster and easier to receive and manage awards. At the end of the semester we sent a satisfaction survey to faculty members who had either a current grant award and/or submitted a grant proposal since its inception. The results indicated that 65% of those faculty were either very satisfied or satisfied with the GO Center's pre- and post-award services during its first six months of operation; we are using this feedback to revise and improve our services. This summer the GO Center also hired a Humanities Research Strategist, David Borgmeyer, who will assist multidisciplinary humanities faculty teams and individual researchers in pursuing funding opportunities.

RESEARCH COMPUTING

As you may recall from my April 2018 update, CTO David Hakanson and I engaged Dave Gohara, adjunct faculty in SOM, over the summer to develop a research computing roadmap for SLU. Dave has interviewed over 45 faculty members and shared a summary of his conversations with the faculty who participated in the computation planning workshop in April. Dave is now drafting a report that will be shared when it is ready in mid-September. On September 21, we will hold a follow up computation planning workshop to discuss the roadmap as well as three domain specific conversations around research computing needs. Please RSVP to attend; all faculty are welcome to participate in any session.

INFOED

Starting this semester, we will begin rolling out the new InfoEd system that is replacing SLU's current grants management system, eRS. This fall we will begin with a soft launch of the grant submission module starting with our colleagues at the College for Public Health & Social Justice.

SLU RESEARCH
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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.

Updates about the rollout and trainings will be shared with the SLU Research community in OVPR's weekly updates, website, and targeted emails.

In the past two years, we have made tremendous progress toward our research growth ambitions: we have increased both internal and external funding opportunities, remodeled research support structures to ensure efficiency and accessibility, begun to identify university-wide research priorities, raised our profile as a research institution, and strengthened regional partnerships. The addition of the new SLU Research Institute now builds upon this foundation and will be truly transformative in enabling us to accomplish the ambitions that we have laid out for ourselves over the past several years.

SLU Research is research that matters: we ignite discovery to transform lives. It is a pleasure and a privilege to work with you on this important and powerful undertaking.

In gratitude,
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