Remarks as prepared for OVPR Campus Conversation
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Teamwork and Research: More Effectively Partnering at the U of M

OPENING
Thank you for coming today to discuss how we at the University of Minnesota and in our research community can more effectively and more strategically partner with one another.

I’m here because I want to make a difference at the university and in Minnesota. If I can better serve our researchers and help you and your work have an impact on our community and our world, then we have all succeeded.

My agenda today is to remind our research community of the many offerings that OVPR has and discuss the ways you can take advantage of these resources here at the university.

Specifically, I’d like to talk about:

- Internal research funding support
- Risk recalibration
- An update on the research strategic plan and our work to build transdisciplinary partnerships

I hope you have an agenda, too. I sent out advance questions in hopes of spurring the conversation on how the OVPR can further make an impact on your research, your collaborations and on research as a whole at the university. I hope to take away innovative ideas that we can make into a reality.

As an illustration, let me take a couple of moments to tell you about a revelation one of the great innovators of our time—Steve Jobs—had about teamwork, partnership and the environment he was striving to create at Apple:

“When I was a young kid there was a widowed man who lived up the street. He was in his eighties. He’s a little scary looking. And I got to know him a little bit. I think he may have paid me to mow his lawn.

“One day he said to me, ‘Come on into my garage, I want to show you something.’ And he pulled out this dusty old rock tumbler. It was a motor and a coffee can and a little band between them. And he said, ‘Come on with me.’ We went out into the back and we got some rocks. Some regular old, ugly rocks. And we put them in the can with a little bit of liquid and little bit of grit powder, and we closed the can up and he turned this motor on and he said, ‘come back tomorrow.’

“And this can was making a racket as the stones went around.

“I came back the next day and we opened the can. And we took out these amazingly beautiful polished rocks. The same common stones that had gone in through rubbing against each
other like this, creating a little bit of friction, creating a little bit of noise, had come out these beautiful polished rocks.”

This metaphor—of working through the team, through that group of incredibly talented people bumping up against each other, making some noise and working together as they polish each other and they polish the ideas—is accurate. If you relate it to our research, our ideas and innovation—what comes from the research model is beautiful stones.

At a university, where the economic and regulatory environment might be a little tough at times, my goal is to help our research community overcome some of these challenges. To me, OVPR can serve as the rock tumbler and bring together partners to foster discoveries and make our community stronger.

OVPR RESOURCES FOR RESEARCHERS

Many of you know the OVPR provides services for the research engine through SPA, the IRB, IACUC, OTC and others. You may know some of these programs and/or have worked with these partners. But I want to introduce you to some resources you might not have used or known about.

Over the past five years, OVPR has provided researchers more than $20 million a year to help facilitate the continuation of important research in our community. If you haven’t heard of these programs, then I highly encourage you to look them up on my website (research.umn.edu) or contact my office for more information on how to be considered.

Grant in Aid

- Grant-in-Aid Program funds are awarded in the belief that the quality of faculty research or artistic endeavors is a major determinant of the overall vitality of the institution.
- The program promotes the research, scholarly and artistic activities of faculty and supports academic excellence throughout the university.
- Support from the OVPR during the past five years includes approximately $15 million for 560 projects. This helps a lot of research to continue, and these awards run the gamut of disciplines — humanities, history, art, engineering.

Research Infrastructure

- The Research Infrastructure Investment Program awards are investments in university research infrastructure designed to form strong partnerships and interdisciplinary alliances at the University of Minnesota between the health sciences and other disciplines.
- While the OVPR helps to fund these awards, it requires matching funds by the colleges and departments as well, which demonstrates our joint commitment to supporting critical research.
- While we face an uncertain economic future with decreasing federal funding for research, society’s greatest challenges in healthcare, the environment, food security and other areas continue to rise.
- It’s more important than ever for the university to leverage its resources and link arms with partners across disciplines and administrative units to ensure that our research infrastructure remains robust, state-of-the-art and poised to support critical discoveries.
Support from the OVPR during the past five years includes more than $30 million for 22 projects, including:

- The Driven to Discover Building project at this year’s state fair, with matching funds from the School of Public Health, School of Medicine and College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences, to create a dedicated University of Minnesota research resource at the Minnesota State Fair.
- 30 research projects from the Twin Cities and Duluth campuses were conducted at the fair, which recruited more than 9,000 research subjects to participate.
- The new facility provides a unique opportunity to reach outstate, agriculturally-focused residents, to engage student volunteers and to provide faculty with opportunities for a wide range of research activities.

RISK RECALIBRATION

Part of what we want to help with is not only providing seed funding that enables research to continue, but finding ways to streamline our administrative functions, increase operational efficiency and cut unnecessary administrative costs system-wide.

- As you know, 42 percent of faculty time is spent on non-research related administration, and there is increased public scrutiny over administration costs. We know you need to resume work on mission critical research.
- Let me say first: The work is ongoing, but I think we’ve helped make a big dent on areas of burden. The total financial impact of these initiatives is nearly $9 million. Specific initiative progress includes:
  - Implemented multiple initiatives related to regulatory inspections for animal research, reducing duplication of efforts across units and resulting a time savings of 686 hours.
  - Streamlined new research faculty training requirements by transitioning Responsible Conduct of Research I and II to a single online format.
  - Eliminated RCR continuing education course requirement for faculty, resulting in 3,900 hours in total annual time savings.
  - Reduced administrative review and researcher certification for effort reporting by approximately 10,000 statements per year.
- My office can do more—and I hope to find out by the end of our conversation today what other areas we can help make an impact in as it relates to your research.

STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

For those in attendance today, I’ve brought along a laminated card that serves as a blueprint for the research strategic plan, Five Years Forward. For those of you following along online, you can find the link to this plan online at research.umn.edu.

- At this point in implementation, we have just begun to identify how goals for the research enterprise intersect with those of the Twin Cities campus and other campuses whose strategic plans also include research goals.
• Our plans fully embrace the commitment to excellence, innovation and community engagement that is critical to advancing the university’s research mission.

• As we develop new initiatives with partners across the university system, we will seek opportunities to further align our efforts so we can build upon our many strengths and create opportunities to bring people together in new ways, fostering discoveries and making our world a better place.

Transdisciplinary Partnerships

One area we see as an area of early success is around the earlier formation of transdisciplinary partnerships, especially through MnDRIVE.

• MnDRIVE is a landmark partnership between the University of Minnesota and the state that aligns areas of university strength with the state’s key and emerging industries to produce breakthrough research that addresses our state and society’s greatest challenges.

• In the first year, $34.5 million has been authorized for more than 120 MnDRIVE projects across the four research areas. These involve approximately 354 researchers in 70 departments, 20 colleges and three campuses (Twin Cities, Duluth and Morris).

• One early accomplishment I’m particularly excited about is the 12 Transdisciplinary projects we awarded to help our talented community of researchers explore ways to break boundaries and develop new insights and solutions.

  o Building Community-based Bioeconomies project—proposed by Nick Jordan in Agronomy and Plant Genetics.

    ▪ This project was designed to develop sustainable agricultural biomass supply chains for Minnesota agriculture, the natural environment and the state’s rural communities.

    ▪ The project will develop advanced robotics-based technologies and engage multiple stakeholders to strengthen food security through the work of many disciplines including: soil science, hydrology, landscape architecture, environmental planning, spatial science and computer science/robotics, just to name a few.

  o This project is an example of how we can address global challenges by thinking outside of the box and outside of individual departments.

  o And there are more projects like this being developed every day. Our goal is to find ways to make research like this sustainable at the University of Minnesota.

Additional resources from the strategic plan

I can speak to some of the other programs we have available for help in developing research or translating research into real-world solutions, such as...

  o Discovery Capital Investment Program: provides seed funds of $350,000 for the most promising U of M technologies

  o UED: the University Economic Development office was launched to better facilitate and streamline university-external partner relations and connect research to resources—both within the university and in our extended communities
o UMII: The University of Minnesota Informatics Institute was formed to foster data-intensive research in agriculture, engineering, environment, health, humanities and social sciences and is supported in part by MnDRIVE.

...but I would rather hear from you and engage in a conversation. I’d like to get your input, hear your questions and find more ways the OVPR can strengthen our partnership to advance our shared research mission and vision.

Thank you.