

INTRODUCTION

Mabel L. Rice
University Distinguished Professor
Director, Merrill Advanced Studies Center
University of Kansas

This year marked the fifth annual conference on research policy hosted by the Merrill Center in Valley Falls, Kansas. Our topic, "Evaluating Research Productivity," generated lively discussion, as you will see in this collection. Our group included twenty-two administrators and senior faculty from the four-state region of Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa and Missouri. Keith Yehle from the office of Senator Pat Roberts also joined us. Discussions centered on methods of ranking universities and evaluating faculty in the context of graduate education.

The 2001 topic built on discussions at the four previous regional conferences. The inaugural conference in 1997 focused on pressures that hinder the research mission of higher education, with special consideration of public research universities. In 1998, we turned our attention to competing for new resources, and ways to enhance individual and collective productivity. In particular, our keynote speaker of that year, Michael Crow, encouraged us to identify niche areas for research focus, under the premise that it was most promising to do selective areas of investigation at the highest levels of excellence. In 1999, we examined in more depth cross-university alliances. Keynote speaker Luis Proenza encouraged participants to think in terms of "strategic intent" and he highlighted important precedents in university-industry cooperation as well as links between institutions. In 2000, we focused on making research a part of the public agenda. We heard from George Walker who encouraged us to meet the needs of our state citizens, business leaders and students who are quite able to "carry our water" and champion the cause of research as a valuable state resource. This cutting-edge topic included an exploration of the dynamic interface between research initiatives at public universities and the response of public constituencies in light of actual and potential research outcomes in science.

This year's keynote speaker was Joan Lorden from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Dr. Lorden brought to the conference her experience with the topic of evaluating research productivity. She drew upon the position paper she co-authored in February 2000 for the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges. For our group, she provided a valuable overview of key elements to consider when selecting measures for evaluating performance, with a focus on the very important National Research Council (NRC) study, which appeared in 1995. With this starting point, our conference participants elaborated and expanded on issues of research evaluation from the

perspectives of research administrators, faculty researchers, provosts, and the Executive Director of the Kansas Board of Regents.

The dynamic interactions of the conference are reflected in this collection of papers, which conveys a sense of the multiple perspectives and the complex issues that bear on ways to measure an institution's research productivity. One axiom emerged throughout our discussions: We become what we measure. With this in mind, participants emphasized the role of public universities in the national dialogue and stressed the importance of developing measurement systems that capture the strengths of our public institutions.

It is with pleasure that I encourage you to read each of the following collection of papers. I wish to express my appreciation to Joy Simpson, for her assistance with the organization of the conference, her careful note taking, and her editorial assistance with the collection of papers. Patsy Woods provided help with the budget and fiscal arrangements. We are appreciative of the gracious hospitality provided by the owners and staff of The Barn Bed and Breakfast Inn, and the relaxed and pleasant atmosphere provided for discussion. We are especially grateful for the support and generosity of Virginia and Fred Merrill.