

INTRODUCTION

Mabel L. Rice

University Distinguished Professor
Director, Merrill Advanced Studies Center
University of Kansas

The papers in this collection represent discussions that took place at the third in a series of regional conferences on the topic of research in public universities, sponsored by the Merrill Advanced Studies Center. We hosted “Building Cross-University Alliances That Enhance Research” on July 26-28, 1999 in the retreat center at Valley Falls, Kansas. The gathering included thirty-two administrators, senior faculty scientists, and guests from five research institutions: the universities of Kansas (including the Medical Center), Kansas State, Nebraska, Missouri, and Iowa State University. The keynote speaker was Dr. Luis Proenza, President, University of Akron. Senator Pat Roberts was represented by his legislative assistant, Keith Yehle.

This year’s topic followed naturally from the two previous topics. In 1997, the conference focused on pressures that hinder the research mission of higher education, with special consideration of the complexities encountered by public research universities. In 1998, our attention turned to how best to compete for new resources. Discussions focused on ways to enhance individual and collective productivity. In particular, our keynote speaker of that year, Dr. Michael Crow, encouraged the represented universities 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. A corollary recommendation was to cover research areas cooperatively with other institutions.

In 1999, we turned our attention to an explicit examination of cross-university alliances for the enhancement of research endeavors. In order to broaden the perspectives, we expanded the number to five major regional universities, representing the four-corner states of Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, and Missouri. The research areas represented were also chosen for diversity, including biomedical science, grain science, chemistry, biology, physics, engineering, art history, and literature. The participants included persons who participate in direct research endeavors, those who direct multi-investigator and multi-university collaborative efforts, academic deans, research administrators, provosts, and chancellors.

The following collection of papers captures the energetic, enthusiastic, and lively nature of the dialogues that took place at the conference, beginning with the keynote address of Dr. Luis Proenza, who encouraged the participants to think in terms of “strategic intent” and described important precedents in university-industry cooperation and cross-university alliances. Subsequent contributions addressed the correlated issue of the measurement of academic performance, and a variety of observations bearing directly on research productivity, research training, dissemination of research findings, and the forging of new alliances and competitive coalitions. It is with pleasure that I encourage you to read each of the following contributions for a sense of the diversity of issues involved in research endeavors and the basis for collaborative institutional arrangements.

I would like to end this section with appreciation to Robert Barnhill, who is on the Board of Directors of the Merrill Advanced Studies Center, for his thoughtful recommendations, and to Joy Simpson, who assisted with the arrangements for the conference, and the compilation, editing, and production of this document.