

INTRODUCTION

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This collection of papers represents discussions arising from the second in a series of regional conferences on the topic of research support sponsored by the Merrill Advanced Studies Center. We hosted “Mobilizing for Research Opportunities in the Next Century” on July 15-17, 1998 in the retreat center at Valley Falls, Kansas. The gathering included thirty-two administrators, senior faculty scientists, and guests from three research institutions: the University of Kansas, the University of Missouri - Columbia and the University of Nebraska - Lincoln. The keynote speaker was Dr. Michael Crow, Vice Provost for Research at Columbia University. Senator Pat Roberts, Kansas, also joined the group for dinner on the concluding day.

In 1997, the Merrill Conference focused on pressures that hinder the research mission of higher education. Although many of these pressures remain, this view yielded in 1998 to a new outlook characterized by a sense of impending renewal due to the predicted budget increases at the national level. With the assumption that new opportunities are on the horizon, participants discussed how best to compete for new resources. Discussion focused on “roadmaps” to guide productivity individually and collectively. The group also worked towards identifying regional initiatives of potential interest to national funding sources.

The purpose of the gathering specifically was to examine upcoming changes, explore existing resources and areas of productivity, and consider ways to formulate research priorities for the region that enhance effectiveness at the national level. Michael Crow, as our keynote speaker and invited commentator, provided comments and suggestions as the group discussed the impact of changes in research policies on public universities.

The gathering provided an opportunity to develop a broadly-based sense of research and scholarship in regional universities. It was also beneficial to examine ways to strengthen the research mission relative to the universities’ current standing, and in comparison with peers outside the region.