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Georgia Southern University expands research infrastructure

JULY 10, 2008



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Georgia Southern University is building its capacity to support the variety of research undertaken by its faculty, from basic scientific research, to community-based research, to service research and more. As its capacity for meaningful research grows, so will the University's value to Georgia and its citizens.

'Georgia Southern University is a typical emerging research institution,' said its president, Bruce Grube. 'When the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching classified us as a doctoral research university in March 2006, we knew we'd need to develop innovative ways of supporting the research that already existed and encouraging new projects. Right now we are developing and nurturing an infrastructure that will support faculty research today and into the future.'

The infrastructure Grube refers to is the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs (ORSSP), which provides support to faculty researchers for proposal development, proposal submission and project management. ORSSP is led by Charles Patterson, associate vice president for research and an experienced research administrator.

'Developing a successful proposal, receiving a grant, and managing the compliance and fiscal reporting of a grant program are labor-intensive tasks,' said Patterson. 'We provide support that facilitates these tasks, which in turn gives faculty members more opportunity to prepare additional proposals. Our goal is to reach a level of consistency in funding, so that the University can depend on income from grants, contracts, and sponsored programs.'

Georgia Southern University's Office of Academic Affairs surveyed faculty in all colleges across the University to gather data on what faculty believed a 'doctoral research university' included. Most agreed that it should include more graduate-level and doctoral programs and more research infrastructure support. Faculty also reported that they continue to search for balance between teaching and research.

'Some of the best teachers are also the best researchers, because they have their hands on their scholarship,' said Patterson. 'I am pleased to see an increasing number of successful research proposals, and we will continue build capacity to serve these faculty efforts.'

Georgia Southern University faculty conducts a variety of research activities

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In years past, the word ‘research’ may have conjured up a white-coated professor, roaming the laboratory in search of a potion to induce just the right chemical reaction. Erase that, and replace it with faculty and students creating and distributing surveys, conducting focus groups, or analyzing socio-economic data as they strive to gather and order information in a way that creates new knowledge.

‘We used to think of research as the ongoing experiments conducted by biologists, chemists, and mathematicians,’ said Charles Patterson, associate vice president for research at Georgia Southern University. ‘Today, in addition to that basic research, we’ve added service research, community-based participatory research, and

data analysis projects.’

Service research is scholarly investigation done for the benefit of a community or organization. For example, at Georgia Southern, the Bureau of Business Research and Economic Development gathers data and analyzes results to benefit the economic development of counties in southeast Georgia. The College of Business Administration gathers and analyzes data that benefits local and regional companies. With faculty who are expert in surveying, gathering, and analyzing information in ways that provide useful knowledge, the University is a valuable asset to the region.

Community-based participatory research (CBPR), used often in public health, is a collaborative approach that equitably involves all partners (both academics and community members) in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths of each. CBPR begins with a research topic of importance to the community, and it has the aim of combining knowledge with action and achieving social change to improve health outcomes and eliminate health disparities. In the Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health at Georgia Southern University, faculty are working with Southwest Georgia Community-based Health Initiative, the Chatham County Health Department’s Safety Net Planning Council, with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, with the Georgia Cancer Coalition and with many county health departments across the state to assess needs, share knowledge, and evaluate programs that will benefit Georgia’s citizens.

CPBR is also used extensively in the College of Education as faculty work in partnership with area teachers to help them meet the performance standards set by the state and the federal standards required by the No Child Left legislation. The College of Education is focused on preparing the next generation of teachers, and the ability to meet the required standards is a vital part of teacher preparation.

Laboratory research is conducted most often in the College of Science and Technology, where faculty research interest groups continue to explore epidemiology; the coastal plain, including terrestrial watersheds, streams, rivers, and reefs offshore; geographic information science (GIS); teaching and learning in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics); and UAIM (unit for advances in mathematics and its applications). Unlike service research, data analysis or CPBR, laboratory research is less likely to have a direct impact on the surrounding community; however, in the long term, the results of laboratory research can be far-reaching.

‘Georgia Southern University’s research activity is increasing as our faculty’s knowledge and expertise becomes more known across the state,’ said Patterson. ‘Faculty members are being invited to participate in research projects, and Georgia is ready for the kind of help we can offer.’