

Research that Makes a Difference: MSU part of \$5.2M national center for the impacts of research in society

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October 26, 2018

EAST LANSING, Mich. – What do potatoes, galaxy clusters, and kestrel nesting boxes have in common?

The answer: Each is studied by an MSU researcher who has experienced scientific gains in these areas of expertise. But does the general public know about the benefits of these research outcomes? Why should they care?

Addressing this challenge, Michigan State University has been named a foundational partner in the Advancing Research and its Impact on Society (ARIS) Center, made possible by a \$5.2 million grant from the National Science Foundation.

“Researchers want to make a difference in the world,” said Laurie Van Egeren, Interim Associate Provost for University Outreach and Engagement and ARIS Center co-PI. “The ARIS Center was created so that that scientists have the tools and knowledge to make their research as meaningful for the public as it is for academic colleagues. MSU partners with communities to target critical issues and drive change for our state and beyond.”



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The ARIS Center, housed at the University of Missouri, will work with scientists and engagement practitioners to build capacity, advance scholarship, grow partnerships and provide resources to help them engage with and demonstrate the impact of research in their communities and society.

The work of the center will be beneficial to researchers who are responsible for propelling discovery, to practitioners who collaborate with researchers and community stakeholders, and to the public who benefit from research, education, and workforce advancements. The ARIS Center will emphasize support for serving traditionally underserved populations while providing inclusive public engagement to ensure a diverse science workforce.

Beronda Montgomery, Assistant Provost of Faculty and Academic Staff Development, and MSU Foundation Professor in the departments of Biochemistry & Molecular Biology and Microbiology & Molecular Genetics, is on the Board of Advisors for the ARIS Center.

“Ventures such as ARIS provide excellent opportunities for MSU academics to connect with resources that can help them identify impactful ways to share their exciting discoveries with the public. The consortium of partners across the U.S. also will provide a significant network to facilitate and expand local efforts at MSU,” said Montgomery.

The Board of Advisors for the new Center includes members from the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Association of American Universities, California State University-Monterey Bay, the Center for the Advancement of Informal Science Education, the Council on Undergraduate Research, the Kavli Foundation, NASA, Northern Illinois University, the Rathenau Institute (Netherlands), Spelman College, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Western Washington University, and York University (Canada) among others.

In addition to Michigan State University, national partners and institutions for the ARIS Center include Brown University, Duke University, Iowa State University, Madison Area Technical College, Northeastern University, Northwestern University, Oregon State University, Rutgers University, and University of Wisconsin-Madison.

And in case you wondered:

David Douches runs the MSU Potato Breeding and Genetics Program at MSU. His research has improved potato varieties, reduced pesticide use, and promoted sustainable farming. Some of those improvements mean that potato chips made in a Michigan factory use more Michigan-grown potatoes because they can be stored longer without compromising quality. That, in turn, means more profitability for Michigan potato growers, who produce 1.6 billion pounds of potatoes annually, and see 70 percent of the crop turned into potato chips.

Megan Donahue is a professor in the Department of Physics and Astronomy. She studies galaxies and galaxy clusters and focuses on the ecology of those cluster systems—the gas between the galaxies and how it falls into galaxies and makes stars and feeds black holes. She is the current president of the American Astronomical Society (AAS), an international organization that promotes broad interest in astronomy, enhances science literacy, and leads many to careers in science and engineering. Dr. Donahue, through her work with AAS, assists and encourages members to develop their skills in the fields of education and public outreach at all levels.

Catherine Lindell, associate professor in the Department of Integrative Biology, has worked with Michigan cherry and blueberry growers to improve their orchards' yields by researching bird behavior and the role birds play in the ecology of managed ecosystems. By installing American kestrel nesting boxes in orchards (the kestrel is the most common falcon in North America), the kestrels became a tool to combat pest birds, voles, and insects that feasted on fruit and affected growers' crop yields.

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