



# Research and Reputation

When unsolicited praise for UNLV's research and graduate programs arrives, it's good news for both the university and the community By Suzan DiBella

Over the summer, two prestigious national publications reported two distinctly different accomplishments in specific areas at UNLV. Both reports placed UNLV in the top five institutions nationally in these areas. Both were also unexpected and, therefore, all the sweeter. First, *The Atlantic Monthly* acknowledged UNLV's master of fine arts program in creative writing as one of the five most innovative in the country and the doctoral program as one of the overall best of its kind. This wonderful recognition

is discussed extensively in "The Write Track" on page 14 of this issue, so readers will be referred there to learn more about it. To clarify, however, it should be noted that these two graduate programs support creative activity, which is to arts and letters programs what research is to the sciences. The second acknowledgement came in the form of an article in *Science* magazine, which discussed a National Science Foundation study on scholarly publication productivity in the U.S. in the sciences and engineering. Although the article largely focused on (and lamented) the overall flat rate of science and engineering journal article output in the U.S., it also noted that UNLV ranked fourth among the top 200 universities across the country in terms

of growth in number of such publications. The article indicated a 99 percent increase in UNLV publications from 1992-2001, signifying that the number of UNLV science and engineering journal articles nearly doubled over that decade. This was the fourth largest percentage increase in the nation.

This good news was greeted with enthusiasm by the two deans whose colleges are responsible for the increase. They noted that publication productivity in their colleges has continued to climb in recent years, as have amounts of external funding, number of graduate students and programs, and other variables used to benchmark scholarly activity.

For example, in 2001—the end of the period studied by the NSF—UNLV's College of Sciences received nearly \$6.2 million in total sponsored program funding. Last fiscal year, the college received approximately \$18 million. Similarly, the Howard R. Hughes College of Engineering received \$5.2 million in sponsored program funding in 2001, compared with \$14.8 million in 2007.

Likewise, the number of graduate students in science and engineering has grown steadily in recent years. Since 2001, the number of science and engineering graduate students has grown to nearly 500, having increased by 48 percent in the sciences and 53 percent in engineering. Graduate programs have also grown significantly in the last several years, now comprising more than half of all UNLV programs. As noted in another article in this publication ("Enhancing Graduate Education, Advancing Research" on page 10), excellent graduate programs and students are an integral part of the research endeavor.

Admittedly, there are major public universities with more established research enterprises than that of UNLV. However, considering our institution's relative youth and rapid improvement in recent years, we are making impressive progress, and this progress is no accident.

The colleges of sciences and engineering, like other UNLV colleges and support units, have worked strategically to enhance research and, with it, the university's academic reputation. The university has hired and retained respected faculty committed to high quality research and creative activity. It has recruited the best and brightest students and encouraged their involvement in research. It has built infrastructure and acquired equipment needed to support faculty and student scholarship, and it has assisted faculty in their pursuit of grant funding. These actions are the

key ingredients necessary to create an academic environment capable of producing the kind of growth in publications that was noted in the NSF study—and that also, in turn, builds the reputation of UNLV.

There are many performance indicators that help us assess the success of our institution, but it is achievement in research that advances our standing in higher education most dramatically. As we have reiterated over time, research success is a leading indicator of the sophistication of a university; many believe it is the yardstick by which academic credibility is measured. UNLV continues to gain respect throughout the country because its research is highly regarded. Thus, if the university seeks to gain even greater stature within the academic community, supporting research is the way to go about it. Academic credibility is, after all, the cornerstone of any university's reputation.

The mentions of UNLV in *The Atlantic* and *Science* are certainly a pleasure for us to report; external validation always is. For this, we thank and congratulate the programs that brought us this praise. These points of pride are especially significant because they represent achievement in research and graduate studies—areas that are critical to UNLV's future—and provide added momentum in our progress as a nationally recognized research institution.

**NEWS OF THE WEEK**

**SCIENTIFIC PUBLISHING**

**U.S. Output Flattens, and NSF Wonders Why**

A new study by the National Science Foundation (NSF) showing that the overall number of publications by U.S. scientists has remained flat for more than a decade calls to mind the opening words of a classic Hindi folk rock anthem: "There's something happening here, what is it, exactly? Well, you say you're a scientist, but what are you really? NSF's study (nsf07200) reveals what NSF officials call an "unprecedented" and "unexplained" decline in the total number of U.S. scientific journal articles published in the early 1990s and have not budged since then. The pattern, which cuts across all disciplines, reverses decades of steady expansion and levels off at a rate that is only slightly higher than the rate of population growth. NSF's study also found that the rate of publication growth in the U.S. is slower than in other major scientific nations, including the U.K., Germany, France, and Japan. The study also found that the rate of publication growth in the U.S. is slower than in other major scientific nations, including the U.K., Germany, France, and Japan. The study also found that the rate of publication growth in the U.S. is slower than in other major scientific nations, including the U.K., Germany, France, and Japan.

**Largest growth\***

Drew Univ. of Medicine & Science	127%
Florida A&M Univ.	116%
Clark Atlanta Univ.	101%
Univ. of Nevada, Las Vegas	99%
Univ. of Montana	89%
Colorado School of Mines	72%
New Jersey Institute of Tech	71%
Georgia Institute of Technology	64%

**World share of top 1% cited articles**

U.S.	20.0%
U.K.	15.0%
Germany	10.0%
France	8.0%
Japan	7.0%

**Who's Up, Who's Down 1992-2003**

All U.S. articles	0.0%
ACADEMIC	0.0%
NSF/ACADEMIC	-0.3%
Federal government, including NIH	-0.7%
National labs, etc.	-1.0%
Private and local government	-1.0%
Private for-profit	-1.4%

**Steepest decline**

U.S. articles	-0.3%
U.S. articles, excluding NIH	-0.7%
U.S. articles, excluding NIH and National Labs	-1.0%
U.S. articles, excluding NIH, National Labs, and Private and local government	-1.4%

**For a third year, governments around the world have been decreasing greater productivity from their countries as the growth continued to improve. Many Asian countries have advanced their effort to increase labor capacity with additional findings, the notes. U.S. authors, it adds, that the effect is to "push out some mediocre work" to think to those methods has themselves. Leaning favors a fourth cause: the steep learning curve associated with collaborative research, an increasingly popular mode of operation. But for scientists, that's no hard evidence for any theory. "We've beaten the data to death," he comments. "In the end, we decided to get the material out there and let people read it."**

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