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Innovators of the year named in Ohio State State of Research address

By Logan Hickman: hickman.201@osu.edu November 6, 2013 0

Ohio State



Caroline Whitacre, vice president of research, speaks at the State of Research address Nov. 6 at the Ohio Union.
Credit: Ritika Shah / Asst. sports editor

researchers must make connections within and beyond the university to mitigate the effects of federal funding cuts, vice president for research Caroline Whitacre said during the university's annual State of Research address.

"The solution lies in Ohio State's extraordinary ability to make connections. First, we will need to look beyond federal agencies for alternative funding sources to fuel our research endeavors," she said.

In her Tuesday address to about 200 students, faculty and staff at the Ohio Union, Whitacre said these alternative sources of funding could come from university connections with private foundations, philanthropists and crowdfunders.

"Working with the Ohio State advancement office, we must identify areas of research that foundations and individual philanthropists might be interested in adding their names to," Whitacre said. "Crowdfunding, the collective effort of individuals who network and pull their money via the Internet, is increasingly being used to support scientific research as well."

The pursuit for alternative funding for research comes after the Budget Control Act of 2011, also known as "sequestration," where U.S. lawmakers voted to enact more than \$1 trillion cuts to federal spending over the course of 10 years starting in 2012.

Even though OSU's Office of Research has continued to expand with new faculty and facilities since sequestration began, Whitacre said the cuts will be evident if sequestration continues.

"According to our estimates, the university lost more than \$13 million in federal funding under sequestration just in fiscal year 2013, with potentially greater losses in coming years," she said.

Whitacre said researchers from different disciplines within the OSU community must work together to increase innovation besides searching for new sources of funding, adding that that collaboration is "the impetus" behind the Discovery Themes Initiative.

The Discovery Themes Initiative is a \$400 million OSU investment in the areas of energy and environment, food production and security and health and wellness, including hiring 500 new tenured or tenured-track faculty over the next 10 years.

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At the address, three awards were given to OSU researchers who are succeeding in research innovation.

The 2013 Innovator of the Year award was given to Hesham El Gamal, a information theorist and professor in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering.

El Gamal's career includes 12 issued U.S. patents and four pending patent applications, Whitacre said.

El Gamal was recognized for his contributions to wireless communications and the development of innovations within the mobile video delivery industry.

El Gamal is also the co-founder and CEO of a local start-up company that uses the predictability of human behavior to design resource algorithms for mobile networks to create apps that combat cell phone network congestion, according to a university release.

"It's always good to be recognized – it was a surprise. I feel honored that I was among the group that received it (those who have received award in the past) and I look forward to the future," El Gamal said.

Going forward, El Gamal agreed that researchers have to be more creative when looking for funding.

"It's very hard to imagine that the government will get its act together soon, so we can't rely on that," he told *The Lantern* after the event. "It's a challenge but I think it's doable."

The 2013 Early Career Innovator of the Year Award was given to Monica Giusti, an associate professor in the Department of Food Science and Technology.

Giusti was recognized for finding natural alternatives to synthetic dyes by developing technologies that revealed the benefits of natural pigments, making foods healthier and more appealing, Whitacre said.

"This is definitely a wonderful accomplishment," Giusti told *The Lantern* after the event. "This is a huge motivator to work harder and a sign that we are on the right track."

Giusti said she has been working on making connections to find alternative funding for her research.

"The award is for innovation. Sometimes you have to be more innovative in the pursuit of resources," she said. "The great thing is that the work we are doing is really relevant for the scientific community as well as the food industry, so we don't have to limit ourselves to one source of funding."

The 2013 Student Innovator of the Year was given to Kinshuk Mitra, a fourth-year in biomedical engineering, for finding a cost-effective cancer screening technique that isolates tumor cells in the blood stream from blood samples.

"It means a lot (to win this award) because it means that people value my work and it gives me the confidence and incentive to move forward and to do better things," Mitra told *The Lantern* after the event.

The nominees for the awards were chosen after deans from each college submitted two nominees per award category, Whitacre said. A selection committee then selected the winners, who were given plaques as prizes.

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