From the Dean

I’m writing this month’s introduction while attending the annual meeting of the Association of American Universities deans of arts and sciences in Minneapolis. Our meeting’s theme is “The U.S. Science/Engineering Deficit: Facing the ‘Gathering Storm’.” We’re discussing ways to increase the pipeline of students who choose to major in science, engineering, and technology—so as to fuel today’s growing economy as well as to foster the innovations that will drive tomorrow’s. I’m excited by the ideas coming from this group, and I’d like to share some of them with you:

- Institute science and engineering fraternities and sororities to provide students a place to socialize—just in case they ever get out of the lab.
- Offer computer science students free karate classes as a way to vent their frustrations when their code won’t behave.
- Encourage an appreciation of the great literary works—and how they may influence science and innovation—by requiring professors to lecture in iambic pentameter.
- Provide students with one-semester internships at the drive-in counters of local fast-food restaurants in order to give them an appreciation of what their career possibilities might be like without a science degree.

I think you’ll agree that with ideas like these, as well as from the exciting news you’ll read about below, there’s no telling where we’ll go!

Best regards,

Jeff Vitter

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Science alumni: We want to hear from you! Share your professional news and your personal and family milestones by clicking here.
In the strategic interest of encouraging multidisciplinary research collaborations, the commons area of the new Richard and Patricia Lawson Computer Science Building will be reserved one afternoon per week for “multidisciplinary speed dating.” Each faculty member will have four minutes to talk to his or her tablemate about research; Powerpoint is optional. When the four minutes expire, each player will have 30 seconds to mark either a “yes” or a “no” on the scorecard. Assistant and associate professors will then move to the next table for their next dates, while the full professors remain seated. Faculty who turn in their scorecards at the end of the event will be sent the web sites and email addresses of those faculty who want to collaborate with them. Laboratory gloves will be issued as a precaution. Click here to sign up.

**Hold those clocks!**

Just when you thought that folks in Indiana would need to change their clocks this weekend… A startling discovery was made last week by mathematics and earth and atmospheric sciences professor Maarten de Hoop and his colleagues in the Geo-Mathematical Imaging Group. Their discovery suggests that Indiana will actually detach and cease rotating with the rest of the earth for one full hour, beginning at the exact moment when clocks are set to spring forward on April 2. When Indiana resumes rotation, it will be located somewhere near the Rocky Mountains. Purdue brochures and web sites are being updated to take advantage of this recruiting opportunity. Full story.

**Movin’ on up to the 9th floor**

Inspired by last month’s passage of the Major Moves legislation that will lease the Indiana Toll Road to a Spanish-Australian management consortium, the College of Science is in negotiations with an international company on a major new initiative, called Upward Bound, to lease the elevators in the Math Sciences Building. The company will pay an estimated $5 million to manage the operation of the elevators. A company spokesman predicts that they will turn a profit by converting one elevator into an express that will stop only on the 9th floor and charging a toll to department heads coming up to attend the frequent meetings in the dean’s office.
“The Gathering Storm,” and argue that America needs instead to increase domestic investment in science elevators. Full story.

Physics couch picks up speed

With the recent notoriety of the Physics MoJo couch, student groups are motorizing more and more old furniture from lobbies and lounges all across campus. The resulting increase in furniture traffic was blamed for a pileup on Northwestern Avenue late last week in which the Purdue Engineering Student Council was ticketed for operating a Barcalounger without a license. Fortunately, the MoJo couch was not seriously damaged and is expected to be ready to compete in the Grand Prix later this month. Full story.

Biologists plan for flu pandemic

On the heels of a national summit at Purdue to plan for a potential flu pandemic, the biological sciences department last week outlined its own planning process. Department head Richard Kuhn reports that in the event of a quarantine, they plan to gather as many people as possible into the basement of Lilly Hall, currently the home of the world-renowned Purdue structural biology group. Kuhn says that using the basement area will accomplish two goals: The structural biologists will be able to continue their work to map the flu virus, and the experience of spending a few days in the basement will spur a flood of donations to complete the fundraising for the new Wayne T. and Mary T. Hockmeyer Hall of Structural Biology building. Full story.

Science Kids Club reaches out to young at heart

The recently-launched Science Kids Club has quickly become a rousing success with the younger generation, showing that science can really be cool. For those of you alumni who are older but still want to keep up with science fun, we haven’t forgotten you at all! Later this spring, we’ll launch the Science Seniors Club, where web links will be in extra-large type and all activities can be performed sitting down. Members will receive a membership card, a button-up cardigan with the SSC logo, and a one-year trial enrollment in AARP. Click here to sign up.

More students like the odds in actuarial science
Enrollment in Purdue’s highly regarded actuarial science program, which is run jointly by the mathematics and statistics departments, jumped significantly in the 2005–2006 academic year. According to program director Richard Penney, the increase comes from large numbers of accounting majors switching to actuarial science. “They’re attracted by the strength of the program, of course,” says Penney. “Also, everyone knows how actuarial scientists like to party.” Click here for the latest actuarial antics.

New Discovery Park building to make big use of small science

Purdue announced plans earlier this month to begin construction on the Discovery Park’s newest building, the Lemuel Gulliver Research Center, to be located next to the Bindley Bioscience Center. The building will be used exclusively to develop products from the analytical chemistry research and entrepreneurial talents of two distinguished chemistry professors, Graham Cooks and Fred Regnier, who between them have more than 50 patents and two outstanding commercialization awards. Because the building will be equipped with mini-mass spectrometers and labs-on-a-chip, the floor plan will consist of only a few circuit boards, allowing an outer construction of (red brick) Lego. The fundraising campaign will begin later this month and is expected to reach its goal the following day. Full story.

Student innovators team up on new product

The College of Science’s newest student organization, the Science Young Entrepreneurs, has brought its first invention from drawing board to prototype. The product is a podium that folds into its briefcase-sized carrying case for easy transport. Science Administration staff have formed a venture capital group to bring the product—dubbed the “Port-a-Podi”—to market so that dean Jeff Vitter will have a podium at the ready for his many speaking engagements. He is currently demo-ing the Port-a-Podi in Minneapolis at a meeting of the Association of American Universities; several of his fellow deans have already placed orders. Full story.

Ernie Agee carved in stone?

Last fall, earth and atmospheric sciences professor Ernie Agee received the Science
Corporation for Atmospheric Research (UCAR). This year was the second straight in which UCAR honored Ernie for his exceptional effort in obtaining congressional support for scientific research. In recognition, UCAR has proposed adding Ernie’s visage to the group of great Americans on Mt. Rushmore. After consulting with the Purdue Climate Change Research Center, Ernie declined the offer, citing concerns about the environmental impact of the dust that the chiseling would create in the atmosphere. Full story.