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Application open for under-resourced entrepreneurs program at The Hub Powered by PNC

University of Dayton

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University vice president for research retiring; new roles for leaders at Research Institute, new vice president position to focus on academic research



udayton.edu/news/articles/2023/05/vp_research_john_leland_to_retire_others_take_on_new_research_leadership_roles.php



John Leland will retire as vice president for research at the University of Dayton June 30, leaving a legacy of strong research growth and the University of Dayton Research Institute well poised for continued success. With his departure will come a restructuring in the University's research leadership roles to support UDRI and academic researchers in the schools and college.

"UDRI is now such a large part of the University and its research so critical, that it makes sense with John's retirement to restructure in a way that will further support UDRI, address the different needs of academic researchers, and enable even greater partnerships," President Eric F. Spina said.

Leland joined UDRI in 2000 as director of technology partnerships, after a 16-year career leading a research team at the Air Force Research Laboratory. He was promoted to division head of materials engineering in 2003, to associate director for research operations in 2004, and to director of UDRI in 2005.

With a strong record of research growth under his direction at UDRI, Leland was promoted in 2013 to associate vice president for research at UD, simultaneously serving as executive director of the Research Institute, and in 2015 to vice president for research, where he also supported the elevation of academic research.

"In his role as vice president, John worked hard to foster opportunities for increased collaboration among faculty researchers across academic units, as well as between faculty and research staff at UDRI," said Paul Benson, University provost. "This increase in collaboration further enhanced the quality and impact of research at UD and allowed us to compete for a wider range of funding."

During Leland's tenure, sponsored research revenue grew more than 200%, from \$70.2 million in fiscal year 2005 to more than \$220 million in fiscal year 2022; UD rose to first place in the nation for materials research — a ranking it has held for five years. Leland played a key role in bringing GE Aviation's Electrical Power Integrated Systems research and development center (EPISCenter) to Dayton and helped drive the effort to establish the region's Ohio Aerospace Hub.

Leland said he's looking forward to spending more time with family and friends and traveling; he also intends to remain active professionally. But stepping away won't be easy, he said. "I'm going to miss the people here; they have always been the most important part of our organization. We've developed outstanding business teams, and our researchers are among the most talented in the country. I look forward to hearing about the next great research innovations that are sure to come from UD."

"While John will be missed as a leader and as a person, his legacy is secure as a historic builder for UDRI," added Spina. "He has done a great job of identifying and preparing senior leaders within UDRI who are well-positioned to move into executive leadership roles and steer the institute toward continued success."

Sukh Sidhu, current executive director for UDRI, will become vice president for UDRI, handling the Institute's internal and external operations, including leading more than 800 full-time employees. Sidhu started at UDRI as a post-doctoral researcher and worked his way up the ranks as a successful researcher and an innovative administrator. He possesses strong technical capabilities and understands the complexity and demands of the business, while balancing that with his ability to inspire and motivate UDRI staff and connect with and deliver for key customers.

"I am honored and humbled to be able to lead a great team at UDRI. With nearly seven decades of history of innovation and high-level performance, we take pride in serving clients that range from the U.S. Air Force and sister services to industrial power-houses like GE, Boeing and leading defense contractors to small businesses and startups," Sidhu said. "Over the last five years, UDRI has doubled its revenue, and our programs have grown in

complexity and size, now ranging from a few thousand to hundreds of millions of dollars. We have acquired new capabilities and expanded into new areas of R&D and geographical locations. These are exciting times. I am confident that UDRI is well positioned for success in the coming years."

Taylor Renner, currently the UDRI director of business operations, will become associate vice president for UDRI. Renner brings great depth of business knowledge, process and organization of complex systems to her work. She has helped position the institute at the highest level in supporting UDRI's clients and executing contracts.

"I am excited and honored to lead UDRI as the associate vice president," Renner said. "I look forward to continuing to collaborate with our talented team and partners to deliver innovative solutions to our government, industry and nonprofit customers."

While Sidhu and Renner will focus on supporting UDRI, its staff and its customers, the University is creating the new position of acting vice president for academic research to address the needs of faculty researchers in the schools and College of Arts and Sciences.

"UD has positioned itself among the top Catholic research universities in the country in both scope and impact of research," Benson said. "Our research spans the spectrum of heavily applied technological innovation in UDRI to the more fundamental research and scholarship led by faculty in the academic units. We believe this new structure will expand opportunities for valuable, high-impact scholarship that serves the common good."

David Ashley will serve as the acting vice president for academic research, providing attention to and advocacy for faculty from all disciplines. Ashley's years of higher education leadership experience – as dean of engineering at Ohio State, founding provost and executive vice chancellor at University of California at Merced, and president at University of Nevada, Las Vegas – will be key in his efforts to use this transitional role to define processes, practices, and approaches that will best serve academic research at UD. Ashley has served at UD since 2018 as director of industry relations in the School of Engineering.

"I look forward to supporting and enhancing academic research at UD which in turn will help to advance student learning and the University's academic excellence," Ashley said. "This new administrative structure will allow us to better support our faculty and students throughout the university as they pursue their scholarship and research experiences."

Sidhu, Renner and Ashley will assume their new roles on July 1.

For interviews please contact Cara Zinski-Neace, executive director of news and communications, at czinskineace1@udayton.edu or Pamela Gregg, senior communication manager for UDRI, at pamela.gregg@udri.udayton.edu. [Read a more in-depth story on John Leland's career and accomplishments.](#)

