

U-M celebrates public engagement, explores how to encourage more

By Terry Kosdrosky
Public Engagement & Impact

An event celebrating public engagement at the University of Michigan showcased the momentum among faculty making an impact outside academia, and explored ways to support and encourage more to participate.

The celebration March 21 at the Tauber Colloquium of the Stephen M. Ross School of Business also honored recipients of this year's President's Awards for Public Engagement: Rosina Bierbaum, who received the President's Award for National and State Leadership, and Joseph Ryan, who received the President's Award for Public Impact.

President Mark Schlissel noted the increased public-facing activity among faculty in the past year — including congressional testimony, writing op-eds and leveraging new media such as podcasts.

"We have enjoyed a number of successes in the last year, including the increased prevalence of faculty engagement and the development of tools to help them reach a greater audience," he said.

Schlissel, Bierbaum, and Ryan were joined by Alec D. Gallimore, the Robert J. Vlasic Dean of Engineering, and Elizabeth Birr Moje, dean of the School of Education, for a panel discussion that explored why faculty step outside the academy and how to support those who want to.

After being "dragged kicking and screaming" out of the lab and into the

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— ROSINA BIERBAUM

policy sphere by a mentor, Bierbaum said she noticed how little of what scientists produced made it to policy makers. She realized that scientists needed to become involved, but also had to make their research useful.

"The information that is developed but not turned into useful information is not used," said Bierbaum, professor in the School for Environment and Sustainability and former dean of its predecessor, the School of Natural Resources and Environment.

Ryan, a professor in the School of Social Work, was a practitioner before becoming an academic and said he is trying to bridge the "huge divide between the knowledge we're generating in the university and the professionals out in the field."

Moje and Gallimore discussed ways to support and credit faculty making the effort to publicly engage.

Moje said the challenge is to develop ways to name and define publicly engaged scholarship, and signal support for it in a school's vision and mission. It can't be a numbers game

because the payoff from public engagement efforts can take years.

"There is this challenge of how you measure impact if it takes a really long time," she said. "So we have to come up with some metrics that can value effort because the impact might not show up for a few years."

Gallimore said he sees the road to public engagement development similar to what it was for entrepreneurship years ago. There were some faculty involved in it, but it wasn't clearly part of their mission and the benefit wasn't always clear.

"Fast forward to the present time and we have a number of entities that help students, faculty and staff start companies. It's now very much a part of our DNA," he said.

Now the university needs to think of the processes and facilities needed to do the same for public engagement, he added.

Schlissel noted that the value of the university's research enterprise is being questioned in some circles and asked how faculty translate what they do so the public can appreciate their investment.

"One of the things we really have to get better at is not just listing all the good stuff we do, but telling our stories," Bierbaum said. She urged more stories that tell how esoteric-sounding research has turned into everyday uses that improve people's lives.

Following the panel discussion, four faculty members gave "lightning talks"

about their research and how they successfully engaged:

- Allison Steiner, professor of climate and space sciences engineering, discussed how she's met with stakeholders such as farmers and business owners as she studies harmful algal blooms in the Great Lakes.

- Minal Patel, John G. Searle Assistant Professor of Health Behavior & Health Education, talked about her work with the Arab and North African immigrant community to address their challenges accessing health care. She founded the Middle Eastern and North African Research Group at U-M to bring together scholars serving this population.

- Steven Broglio, professor of athletic training and adjunct professor of neurology, discussed his concussion research and how faculty members can position themselves to become thought leaders in their areas, and the investment and personal sacrifice that this sometimes entails.

- J. Alex Halderman, professor of computer science and engineering, talked about his extensive work with policy makers and the media to try to improve election security in the United States.

"When I see the momentum our faculty have created, I am extremely optimistic that there will be even greater successes ahead," Schlissel said. "I am especially encouraged by the number of faculty who participate in public engagement earlier in their careers."

RNA Symposium dives into foundational RNA bioscience

By Annie Kadeli
Biosciences Initiative

The U-M Center for RNA Biomedicine's fourth annual symposium March 29 will focus on foundational ribonucleic acid biosciences, from discovery to function.

Recent discoveries in biomedicine have revealed that RNA is critical to most aspects of human health and that its misregulation is responsible for many diseases. As the messenger molecule that carries the DNA blueprint in human cells, it profoundly impacts all cellular processes, from stem cell differentiation to cancer.

The symposium is free and open to the public. It will feature keynote speakers from across the nation,

More information

- **Center for RNA Biomedicine:** umichrna.org

- **Advance online registration:** umichrna.org/2019-symposium

including:

- Rachel Green of Johns Hopkins University will discuss high-resolution ribosome profiling revealing mechanisms of translation elongation regulation.

- Howard Chang of Stanford University will focus on genome regulation by long noncoding RNAs.

- Alice Telesnitsky, professor of

microbiology and immunology at U-M, will address HIV-1 RNA fate determination: the ends as a means.

- Kristen Lynch of the University of Pennsylvania will share her discoveries in CELF control of RNA processing in human T cells.

- David Bartel of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology will host his session on the influence of microRNAs on disease.

The Center for RNA Biomedicine brings U-M faculty together from across campus to pioneer RNA research, translate their discoveries into medical applications, and improve human health. RNA biomedicine revelations provide an unprecedented opportunity to invest in advanced

studies of RNA as a gateway to precision medicine.

As a Presidential Biosciences Initiative Scientific Research Initiative grantee, the center aims to enrich the university's intellectual and training environment around RNA biomedicine, promote and develop cross-disciplinary collaborations, and enrich U-M's intellectual and training environment around RNA biomedicine.

The all-day symposium begins at 8:30 a.m. in the A. Alfred Taubman Biomedical Research Science Building. It is open to U-M faculty, staff, students and anyone interested in the most recent discoveries regarding the many roles of RNA in health and disease.

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