

Daily Chronicle ONLINE

Your Towns | Your Neighbors | Your Newspaper

Updated: Oct 08, 2004 - 11:04:27 am CDT

NIU's Peters touts \$50M in research funds

By Aracely Hernandez - Staff Writer



Northern Illinois University President John Peters

DeKALB - In the first event held in the restored Altgeld Hall, Northern Illinois University President John Peters used his State of the University address to highlight several research grants.

History was a theme throughout his speech on Thursday. He used Altgeld Hall, the most historic building on the university's campus, as a metaphor for the challenge that lies ahead.

"Just as we rededicate this building to a new century of service, so must we rededicate ourselves - as a community of scholars and learners - to the purpose for which NIU was founded: that is, elevating the educational attainment and body of knowledge of all citizens in the region we serve."

Peters talked about the university's preschool-through-graduate, or P-20, program, which is helping run a partnership school, Wright Elementary School in Malta, where fine arts and technology are integrated into every subject. Peters cited the program as an example of the university working with the community. He said the program has become a national standard for school-university partnerships.

But he also was proud of the \$50 million in external research funding the university received this year, \$15 million more since his arrival in June 2000.

"Our society's most pressing problems call for expertise from many fields. Few solutions can be found in research silos," he said. "Few breakthroughs will come from individual scientists working in isolation. At NIU, we embrace the multidisciplinary imperative, and in so doing, we have attracted unprecedented new funding."

NIU's geology department recently received \$2.3 million in federal money through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to establish the Analytical Center for Climate and Environmental Change. NIU geology professors will study global warming by looking at changes in the polar ice cap. The grant will help geologists purchase equipment, including a hot-water drilling system and a remotely operated submarine for exploration under the Antarctic ice sheet.

Other unprecedented new funding includes \$5 million over the next five years received by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the College of Engineering & Engineering Technology to create emission-free, clean energy fuel cells in a project at Argonne National Laboratory.

Other highlights included about \$1 million in grants that NIU physics professor Courtlandt Bohn recently received from the U.S. Department of Defense and the Department of Energy. Bohn also holds a joint position at Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory. He is working on creating simulation tools to develop high-powered lasers that could help U.S. Navy fleets defend themselves against cruise missiles.

And in a partnership with politicians, scientists and city officials, the military and the College of Business are working with Rockford's manufacturing industry through a \$5.75 million program called Rapid Optimization of Commercial Knowledge, or ROCK.

The program will help the city in creating faster, lighter and stronger fighting vehicles for the U.S. Armed Forces.

Peters also mentioned upcoming announcements about initiatives dealing with university programs in health and family wellness. He said he couldn't say more, but called NIU a "sleeping giant" in fields that complement and strengthen services in this community and throughout the northern Illinois region."

The speech coincided with an open house held at the restored Altgeld Hall, which recently reopened after being closed for five years. The restoration cost \$25 million.

Aracely Hernandez can be reached at ahernandez@pulitzer.net.

Copyright © 2007, Daily Chronicle. All rights reserved.