



LA Higher Education Responds with Unified Voice

(The following is the first in a series focusing on the impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on Louisiana higher education research activities.)

On Monday, August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit Louisiana.

On Tuesday, August 30, Louisiana's top higher education administrators met in the Board of Regents' office in Baton Rouge.

It was the first of a series of still ongoing meetings to assess the damage inflicted on Louisiana institutions, its impact on students and faculty, and the means by which education can assist in the relief efforts. Those unable to attend in person do so via conference calls.

"The Louisiana Higher Education Response Team (LaHERT), as it is now known, has been united in its effort to address higher education issues with a single statewide voice," says Commissioner of Higher Education E. Joseph Savoie.

"From that first day, we have had the personal participation and support of all of our public and private university System presidents, higher education board members, and board staff members.

"The world is aware of the devastation that Hurricanes Katrina and Rita inflicted on Louisiana. What many don't know is the uniquely destructive impact they have had on Louisiana higher education as a result of the concentration of institutions in the Greater New Orleans Area," says Dr. Savoie.

Even fewer know according to a March 2005 survey, there are approximately 5,350 faculty members in Louisiana, primarily in science and engineering disciplines, who are eligible to submit proposals to NSF. Of that number, 54 per cent—roughly 2,900 faculty members—are located in New Orleans and have thus been directly affected by Katrina.

Additionally, most of McNeese State University's building and athletics facilities were heavily damaged by Rita's passage. Campuses not in the directly affected areas have had to make unforeseen and unprecedented adjustments for displaced faculty, students, laboratories, and programs.

The aftermath of the hurricanes is the subject of a white paper developed to provide federal agencies with a broad understanding of their impacts as well as cost projections for immediate needs, recovery and revitalization, and advancement of Louisiana's research and education enterprises.

Titled *The Impact of Katrina and Rita on Federally Sponsored Science and Engineering Research and Education Programs*, was written with the support of a Research Task Force of statewide university representatives. Working in concert with LaHERT, the task force focuses on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) research and related infrastructure.

"Even institutions in areas not directly affected by Katrina have been severely strained," says Dr. Kerry Davidson, Board of Regents' Deputy Commissioner for Sponsored Programs. "Louisiana State University and A&M College, for example has taken in roughly 3,500 displaced students - over 10% of its normal enrollment - and continues to serve as a major center for New Orleans relief efforts, hosting FEMA and others at its facilities.

"Southern University and A&M College has absorbed 600 extra students, and 630 students have relocated to the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. And the LSU Pennington Biomedical Research Center in Baton Rouge, a facility not designed for teaching, is hosting 617 students and 163 administrators from the LSU Health Sciences Center in New Orleans."

Institutions that accommodated evacuees displaced by the hurricanes include Grambling State University, which housed some 350 people; Louisiana Tech, 600; McNeese, over 1,300, including 100 special needs patients; Nicholls State University, 1,200; Northwestern State University, 800; University of Louisiana at Lafayette, over 6,000; University of Louisiana at Monroe, 200; and Southeastern Louisiana University, which housed 1,000 Entergy personnel.

"For Louisiana's research competitiveness, these storms could not have come at a worse time," says Dr. Michael Khonsari, Louisiana EPSCoR Project Director. "For the past several years, the State has experienced increasing success in receiving federal S&E funding. This upward trajectory is in jeopardy.

"Research collaborations between faculty members at institutions throughout the State have been interrupted indefinitely, while others are completely dependent upon

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On a normal day this parking lot would be full of Xavier student vehicles. Following Katrina, however, it is instead a home to a trailer park housing campus police officers and staff busy working on reconstruction of the campus.

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shared resources that are now being heavily taxed to accommodate displaced scientists.”

The Economic Impact

Federal research and development obligations to Louisiana in 2002 totaled approximately \$432 million, according to the National Science Foundation.

“The economic impact of sponsored research, as measured annually by the Department of Commerce, is formidable,” says Dr. Savoie. “The ‘multiplier effect’ is well documented: every dollar of sponsored research creates additional spending in the community in the form of employment, services, vendors, education, culture, and entertainment. These dollars remain in the community and amplify related businesses.

“Universities also contribute directly to business growth in their communities. Home to several research universities, the Greater New Orleans Area accounts for over 30 per cent of Louisiana’s gross state product. It is also the State’s entrepreneurial center, where most of new development, as measured by venture capital investment, has been focused,” says Dr. Savoie, adding that spin-off companies established by faculty have contributed significantly to this development.

Referring to the campuses as “powerful engines of economic activity that make substantial contributions to the economic well-being of the State and nation,” he cites the following.

Tulane University, including its Health Sciences Center, is reportedly the largest private employer in Orleans Parish. The most recent economic impact study (2004) indicates that more than 25,000 workers are associated, directly or indirectly, with Tulane, earning approximately \$689 million, and responsible for \$81.5 million of State and local tax revenue. Tulane’s activities provide more than \$2 billion annually in revenue to Louisiana business enterprises.

The Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center (LSUHSC) educates 70 per cent of the State’s health care professionals and produces an economic impact estimated at over \$1.5 billion annually. The University of New Orleans normally enrolls nearly 17,000 students, with an economic impact of over a quarter of a billion dollars.

EPSCoR Opportunity for Displaced Researchers

A National Science Foundation EPSCoR program that awards grants to researchers displaced by the hurricanes to visit and train at a research facility has emerged as a valuable resource.

The LINK (Links with Industry, Research Centers, and National Labs) program provides faculty with \$1,000 for round trip travel to and from the facility and up to \$500 per week for meals and lodging. The grants range from two to 12 weeks; faculty may also sponsor postdoctoral researchers and graduate students.

Louisiana EPSCoR requested and received supplemental funding for this program from the NSF in the wake of Katrina and Rita.

For details, please go to the Louisiana Board of Regents Office of Sponsored Programs’ website at www.laregents.org.

Xavier University is responsible for generating 10,000 jobs each year for the nation and 6,000 jobs a year for the State; its economic impact is estimated at approximately \$600 million annually for the nation and \$380 million for Louisiana.

“The return of Louisiana’s higher education research community, including students, is critical to Louisiana’s recovery, revitalization, and advancement. In the long term, they must remain confident that the State’s research and education infrastructure and environment will be conducive to their research and careers,” says Dr. Khonsari, who is also the Board of Regents Associate Commissioner for Sponsored Programs and Research.

The Board of Regents and its EPSCoR program joined with campuses statewide to form the Research Task Force, which concentrates on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) research and related infrastructure. Its charge is to organize, develop, and communicate hurricane-related research impacts and opportunities to diverse audiences.

Task Force goals are twofold: 1) to assess impacts on respective scientific areas and develop reports for distribution to Federal funding agencies, as well as State and national policymakers; and 2) under the auspices of the Board of Regents, to explore hurricane-related STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) directions in partnership with faculty, students and policymakers.



Louisiana EPSCoR
P.O. Box 3677
Baton Rouge, LA 70821-3677