From the President

Graduate study at the University: Helping our students find their place

2015 marks an important anniversary for our University. In 1955, the Board of Regents created a separate School of Graduate Study at the University.

We’ve come a long way since then.

From the first few doctoral programs of the 1960s (geology, chemistry and physics were among the first created), the University has invested a great deal in post-graduate education. Today, our University offers graduate degrees in numerous disciplines, in areas ranging from cell and molecular biology to hydrology to speech pathology to English and psychology.

Graduate education is the hallmark of any successful, steadily growing, high-quality research university. The teacher-student relationship at the graduate level becomes more of a partnership, producing a high degree of collaboration.

We’ve made a significant investment in graduate education in recent years. We’ve increased our typical graduate student teaching stipend so that it is funded at a more nationally competitive level. Many additional graduate teaching assistant positions have been added in the last two years. In the fall, on-campus graduate student housing was vastly improved with the grand opening of Ponderosa Village, a 132-unit complex for our graduate student population, including a number of our international students. And, in an investment that will attract more top graduate students and boost our annual research and scholarly productivity, the University is committed to hiring nearly 300 tenure-track professors over the next seven years. Increasing our tenure-track positions and growing our graduate student enrollment are central to our vision of reaching by 2021 the prestigious “Carnegie Research University/Very High” classification.

I know in my own experience, the beauty of graduate education is how it can fine-tune an individual’s expectations and preparations for their career. My graduate studies included a fellowship to a consortium-like program at North Carolina State which focused on science and society. It was a classic interdisciplinary endeavor, where I worked for the director of the program, who was a theologian. We held colloquia and seminars, and, as a young man with long legs and untapped energy in reserve, I was constantly on the move. In the course of my fellowship, I traveled back and forth between the three great universities of the so-called “Research Triangle” – Duke, North Carolina and North Carolina State. It was a fascinating experience, and although I still wasn’t completely certain what my next educational or career step would be, my fellowship exposed me to new points of view and perspectives, and reinforced in me the feeling that collaboration, cooperation and teamwork across the disciplines of natural sciences, social sciences and humanities are essential pieces in solving the important issues of our time.

When I traveled to Michigan State University to work toward my Ph.D. in international development, my graduate experience was profoundly different. I knew it was time to hone in on a more specific approach to knowledge. This led me into the study of many of the world’s agriculturally based economies, which in turn took me into applied research and how to solve many of the inherent challenges such fragile economies face. I came away from that experience with a Ph.D. – and the knowledge that I could be a contributor in an increasingly interdependent world.

In this issue, you will be reading about several of our graduate students. They, too, are in the process of not only finding their place in our world, but in improving it through the incredibly vital knowledge and personal experience they acquire through graduate study at our University.

Sincerely,

Marc C. Johnson
President