

Duncan Moves from Missouri to Texas, Will Remain Involved in LENR Field

Marianne Macy

University of Missouri (Columbia) Provost Brian Foster announced on October 11 that Dr. Rob Duncan, Vice Chancellor for Research at the University of Missouri, would be moving on to a position as Vice President for Research at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas. Duncan has been in the position since 2008 and during his tenure there have been 365 patents filed for and over 200 options and licenses for new technologies developed. Last year, researchers at the university utilized over \$250 million in federal grant and contract funding.

In addition to his other responsibilities at the University of Missouri, Duncan in early 2012 worked with Sidney Kimmel to create the Sidney Kimmel Institute for Nuclear Renaissance (SKINR) to study effects related to low-energy nuclear reactions (LENR/cold fusion). This is the largest research center for the field at an accredited university, directed by Dr. Graham Hubler. In August, Duncan and the University of Missouri hosted the 18th International Conference on Condensed Matter Nuclear Science (ICCF18).

MACY: Questions were raised among researchers in the field about what your move signified. There was some speculation that this was a step down career wise, and that the University of Missouri wanted you to leave because of your work in LENR. Can you address that? Did they want you out? Is the position at Texas Tech a “demotion”?

DUNCAN: No, my move is certainly not a demotion, although it is true that the University of Missouri (MU) currently conducts more sponsored research than does Texas Tech University (TTU). Please also notice that TTU is expanding its research program at a remarkably rapid rate today.

It was a very hard decision to leave MU, since it is an outstanding university with an excellent faculty. The administration at MU has been supportive of SKINR, and that is unlikely to change. Texas Tech is under the new leadership of President Duane Nellis, and he made both my wife and me an excellent offer to join TTU. I will serve as the Vice President for Research and as a professor of physics. MU didn't want me to go, but the position was much better at TTU and the opportunities for promotion for my wife and me are much better there. Furthermore, the State of Texas is investing heavily in Texas Tech as an emerging research university so that it may become a “Tier 1” research university very soon. My administrative style is more entrepreneurial than managerial, although both aspects are important, of course. I am very excited about the prospects of building excellent new research programs following the enthusiastic leadership



of President Nellis, with substantial support from the State of Texas.

MACY: What about your involvement with MU's SKINR center? You begin your position at Texas Tech in January. In the meantime, what remaining goals do you hope to accomplish at MU, specifically related to SKINR and LENR work?

DUNCAN: I have one publication and one patent disclosure, both of which I am co-authoring with MU SKINR staff and faculty members, and they are in the final stages of preparation. I hope to finalize both before I leave in January. The MU Physics Department has appointed me as an adjunct professor at MU following my departure so that I can continue to collaborate with SKINR easily.

MACY: As an active fundraiser, development head and the respected face of research at the University and CBS “60 Minutes” expert examining LENR, your support was invaluable. Will you have any continued involvement with the SKINR Center? What will that be?

DUNCAN: Yes, as an adjunct professor at MU I plan to continue to collaborate with four different faculty-led research groups within SKINR. I am also continuing to help encourage more public investment in LENR, and this has the potential to benefit SKINR, of course. I will assist SKINR Director Graham Hubler in this regard once I leave MU for TTU.

MACY: Is there interest in LENR at TTU and will you be involved in any LENR research initiatives there?

DUNCAN: Once I get to TTU I will see if there is interest in LENR on their faculty. If so, then I will be pleased to collaborate with them. The reason why LENR is going well at MU is that seven established professors in science and engineering departments are genuinely interested in this fascinating field of research. It is impossible to sustain a center or institute within any major research university without the genuine intellectual engagement of the faculty.

MACY: Did you speak with Texas Tech already about pioneering LENR efforts at their university and, if so, how was that received?

DUNCAN: I mentioned in one discussion at TTU that I am interested in applying the scientific method in an effort to understand anomalies that we don't fully understand yet. But that is the extent so far of that discussion.

As an aside, and to this point, few people would have ever predicted that big thunderstorms would emit a substantial flux of antimatter before this was discovered by NASA scientists using the Enrico Fermi Satellite in December of 2009. Many national laboratories around the world, and other fine laboratories, have confirmed the existence of the large anomalous heat in certain metals loaded with hydrogen isotopes, but (at least to me, and others who I know) it remains unclear what the physical origin of this effect actually is. I certainly think it is worth exploring systematically, using the scientific method strictly. Simply put, there are many things that we do not yet understand, and that is why discovery at major universities is so important to advancing the human condition.

MACY: Texas Tech administrators must have been aware of your CBS interview and work in creating SKINR and promoting LENR, so did they have any particular comments about the field and your work in it?

DUNCAN: We did not discuss it specifically, and that really was no surprise to me. The duties of the Vice President for Research extend over every discipline and department in the university. Naturally we were much more focused on how to build research programs comprehensively across the board at TTU. My main job is to team with the faculty to build the research enterprise and expand creative works in every discipline at Texas Tech.

MACY: What about collaboration between these institutions and work outside?

DUNCAN: As a professor at TTU (come January 1) I will continue to collaborate with SKINR at MU. Many faculty members collaborate with other faculty members at other institutions, as I have done throughout my career as a physicist.

MACY: What about your spouse, Annie Sobel? What will she be doing?

DUNCAN: Annie will be a tenured professor of medicine and she will run a center that develops interdisciplinary programs between medicine and engineering. This is also a nice opportunity for her.

MACY: What can you tell us about the future of your work in LENR?

DUNCAN: I will continue to follow my scientific curiosity. I am not trying to "prove" anything, since that is not how the scientific method works. I am interested in continuing to search for a detailed understanding of these anomalous heat effects.

MACY: Do you want to be the head of an academic institution, serving a role such as University President?

DUNCAN: Quite possibly someday, but I am not ready to

accept such responsibility at this time. I am good at building major research programs at excellent universities, and I enjoy doing that very much. In short, I like to create genuine value through innovation, and that requires an environment where the faculty are encouraged and empowered to follow their curiosity in a very disciplined way.

MACY: Could you say a few words about what direction this field is going in and the importance of it? Why do you care? Why are you involved? What part do you want to play?

DUNCAN: Like many researchers around the world, including many in major national laboratories, I am convinced that the anomalous "excess heat" is real. At first I was not convinced of that, but the repeated results of hundreds of careful researchers and my own inquiry have convinced me now that the anomalous excess heat is real. I do not yet understand its origin, but I can think of many hypothetical effects that may be causing it to occur. I want to apply the scientific method as I conduct definitive experimental tests using well controlled materials in an effort to understand what is actually going on. To do that, I have to be able to design experiments that rule out various hypothetical possibilities, and along the way I will refine the most likely hypotheses based upon clear experimental results. Eventually, if enough of us do this, then as a scientific community we will have convincing evidence and we will then understand what is going on. I don't yet know if this will ever become a new abundant source of energy conversion, but I do know that the only way to figure out the answer to this question is to follow our scientific curiosity in a very disciplined way, using only the scientific method. If we inhibit each other from exploring this effect, then we will never be able to know if it will someday be useful. In my opinion, we will just have to wait and see where good science leads us. I don't think that anyone is clairvoyant, so it is very unlikely that anyone will make a huge discovery in the future without carefully following the scientific method.

MACY: Any other comments you would care to make?

DUNCAN: No, I think your questions did a great job in covering the topic. Feel free to contact me if other concerns or questions emerge.

MACY: Thank you very much.