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News Release

Missouri Western State College • 4525 Downs Drive • St. Joseph, MO 64507 • 816-271-5649

Contact: Kristy Hill

Phone: (816)-271-5649

Title: Public Relations/Marketing Director

Email: hillk@mwsc.edu

FORMER MARS PROJECT MANAGER TO ADVISE WESTERN INSTITUTE

St. Joseph, Mo. —April 14, 2005—Dr. Christopher Shove, executive director of the Western Institute at Missouri Western State College, said Dr. Donna Shirley’s expertise is in “managing innovation.” He plans to tap into that expertise, because Dr. Shirley, former manager of NASA’s Mars exploration program, has agreed to serve as a volunteer advisor for the Western Institute as it begins to develop its research centers.

Dr. Shove noted that the Institute recently appointed research directors for its three new research centers: Business and Economics, Dr. Shiva Nandan, associate professor of business; Health and Wellness, Dr. Evelyn Brooks, associate professor of nursing; and Life Sciences, Dr. Todd Eckdahl, professor of biology. Dr. Shirley will work as an advisor to the new directors and other Western faculty members to begin the process of formulating research strategies, Dr. Shove said.

“We are at day one of formulating an advisory council that will include Western faculty. Dr. Shirley’s role will be to advise on how to evolve the research enterprise.” He said she will communicate with Western personnel through teleconferences, but may visit the campus this fall.

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Dr. Shirley was the manager of the Mars Exploration program and the original leader of the team that built the Sojourner Rover that successfully landed on Mars in 1997. She was also the manager of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory at NASA. She retired from NASA in 1998, and has written an autobiography, “Managing Martians: The Extraordinary Story of a Woman’s Lifelong Quest to Get to Mars,” and currently serves as a trainer and consultant in managing creativity. She has over 35 years’ experience in the aerospace industry, including more than 25 years in management. For several years she taught a course entitled Managing Creativity.

She and Dr. Shove worked together at the University of Oklahoma in the late 1990s, where she served as the assistant dean of engineering for advanced program development.

Dr. Shirley is a native of Oklahoma, and earned her pilot’s license as a teenager. She earned both a bachelor of arts and bachelor of science degree from the University of Oklahoma and a master’s in aerospace engineering from the University of Southern California. She holds three honorary doctorates.

“I’m really excited,” said Dr. Shove about Dr. Shirley’s advisory role with the Institute. “It’s like a rocket blast off to help us get started.”

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Missouri Western State College is a four-year public institution providing a blend of traditional liberal arts and professional degree programs. The college offers student-centered, high quality instruction that focuses on experience-based learning, community service, and state-of-the-art technology. Western is located in St. Joseph, Mo. and is committed to the educational, economic, cultural and social development of the region it serves.

