

# KU dean seeks to ignite

SCIENCE

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 1, 1996 5B

## passion for knowledge

● **KU's rookie dean** of liberal arts takes a look at how students can be instilled with a passion for knowledge.

BY TIM CARPENTER  
JOURNAL-WORLD WRITER

Sally Frost-Mason wants to take a page from proponents of "family values."

From her bully pulpit as dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Kansas University, Frost-Mason would like to build support among taxpayers and legislators for a movement focusing on "educational values."

"Building more prisons instead of more schools makes little sense to me," she said in an interview.

Frost-Mason said a sensible approach would be to invest more in higher education institutions, such as KU, that give students a foundation for a lifetime



**Frost-Mason**

of learning. The goal is to foster communication skills, analytical reasoning, technological savvy and critical-thinking ability.

"We hope they have a passion, enthusiasm for knowledge," the dean said.

Frost-Mason, the first woman to be named liberal arts dean, has held the post for six months. She's been at KU since 1980, starting on the biology faculty and advancing through the ranks.

She said the college was grappling with issues faced in other areas of higher education.

At the top of the list is erosion of public confidence, she said. There is lack of trust that colleges and universities monitor themselves properly. Some taxpayers are suspicious that tenure allows faculty to be lazy. Underlying this is the rising cost of a college education, she said.

"We need to do a considerably better job conveying who we are and what we do," Frost-Mason said. "Faculty work hard. Research and scholarship is an important part of what we do. It's what makes KU unique."

She said it was reasonable for the public to expect the liberal

### COLLEGE PROFILE

**Sally Frost-Mason** has been dean of KU's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences since May. She's a biologist and the first woman to lead the college.

**The college** is the largest of KU's 14 schools. It contains 50 departments or programs, has a budget of \$45 million and includes 15,000 students, 1,200 staff and 600 faculty.

arts college to maintain a high-quality educational environment through teaching, research and public service.

However, she said, it was unreasonable for the public to view a liberal arts diploma as a job guarantee after graduation.

"We're not a professional

school or a trade school," she said.

Frost-Mason said one of the key issues in the future would be uncompetitive salaries paid to KU's 600 liberal arts faculty. Salaries are consistently 10 percent below wages paid to faculty at comparable universities in other states.

"We pay a price when we choose to come to Kansas," she said.

The salary issue hurts the college when recruiting new faculty and when attempting to retain professors sought by other institutions.

"We've got an awful lot of faculty out there who are vulnerable to raids," Frost-Mason said.

Meanwhile, the college relies on graduate teaching assistants to teach courses for 15,000 students enrolled in 50 academic departments. Frost-Mason said GTA compensation — salary and benefits — was insufficient.

"Our stipend is dreadful," the

dean said. "I agree with students who want health care benefits. I sympathize with graduate students who felt they had to unionize. They're paid poverty wages."

GTA's formed a collective bargaining unit but haven't reached a labor contract with KU.

Frost-Mason said the future of liberal arts education at KU would be greatly influenced by technology. The college lags other liberal arts schools in the acquisition of computers, audio-visual equipment and laboratory gear.

She's pushing for a \$3 per-credit hour fee for all liberal arts students. It would generate approximately \$1 million annually for technology purchases.

"It would benefit the students enormously," she said.

Even if a new fee were passed, Frost-Mason believes whiz-bang gadgets won't replace teachers with a capacity to motivate, ignite and guide.

"It should not replace human interaction. Technology can be dehumanizing and distancing."