

New \$1.3 million grant will fund undergraduate biology and chemistry research opportunities for Carolina Covenant Scholars

Among the most vexing challenges facing scientists today is diversifying the ranks of the research community.

Now, thanks to a \$1.3 million grant from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, the University will encourage some students in its Carolina Covenant Scholars Program to pursue biomedical research.

The grant will extend the Carolina Covenant Scholars Program, which attracts high-achieving students from low-income backgrounds to the University with the guarantee of being able to graduate debt free.

The HHMI Undergraduate Research for Future Scientists and Clinicians Program will help 12 Covenant Scholars undertake original research in biology or chemistry each year as part of a broader science educational initiative.

Most summer undergraduate research opportunities last for a single season, but participants in the new Carolina program will continue their work the following summer.

Patricia Pukkila, project director and director of the Office for Undergraduate Research in the College of Arts and Sciences, said extending research beyond a single summer heightens students' dedication and performance.

The result, she is convinced, will be improved confidence that will lead, in some cases, to a commitment to a career in science.

"What students produce in that second summer is mind-boggling," said Pukkila, who is a professor of biology. "They're presenting at prestigious meetings, they're winning scholarships, and they're co-authoring publications in top journals."

Students will work alongside faculty and graduate student mentors, who will provide research support and career guidance. In their second year of the program, students will be expected to assist and advise first-year students.

The goal is to build a support system to ensure that students have every opportunity to succeed.

"When we can provide empowerment, information and the means to pursue science, students can begin to imagine themselves in science careers," Pukkila said. "They realize the benefits. And that is incredibly invigorating."

HHMI awarded 50 research universities in 30 states and the District of Columbia \$70 million to develop creative, research-based courses and curricula, to give more students vital experience working in labs and to improve science teaching from elementary school through college.

An additional \$9 million from HHMI was awarded to 13 professors in schools across the country that want to put their innovative ideas for science education into practice.

"[We are] committed to funding education programs that excite students' interest in science," said HHMI President Robert Tjian. "We hope that these programs will shape the way students look at the world — whether those students ultimately choose to pursue a career in science or not." □



Patricia Pukkila, director of the Office for Undergraduate Research, pictured at right, said the HHMI grant encouraging biomedical research could lead students to commit to a career in science.



Tony Waldrop is named UCF provost and vice president for academic affairs

Tony Waldrop, vice chancellor for research and economic development, will leave the University this summer to become provost and vice president for academic affairs at the University of Central Florida.

Waldrop, a Morehead Scholar and track star at Carolina in the 1970s, has led graduate studies and the University's research enterprise since August 2001.

In a letter to colleagues, Waldrop said his new position would become effective Aug. 1 and that his wife, Julee, a clinical associate professor of nursing at Carolina, would join the UCF faculty in the College of Nursing.

"Both of us are very excited by these new opportunities at what is a growing and vibrant university," Waldrop said. "It has been very rewarding to have worked with such a great group of people. Thanks for all your support during my time at Carolina."

Chancellor Holden Thorp said Waldrop has led the growth of the University's research enterprise from \$438.7 million when he arrived nine years ago to \$716 million last year.

"While this is a huge loss for us, it is a great move for Tony and for higher education," Thorp said. "UCF is an exciting university and undoubtedly will benefit from Tony's extensive skills and experience."

As head of the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Economic Development, Waldrop led efforts to support and promote the research needs of faculty, staff and students and to promote Carolina's economic development activities. He has been responsible for 12 University-wide research support offices and 15 research centers.

Toward that end, Waldrop also encouraged interdisciplinary activities across campus and promoted excellence within all graduate programs.



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