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Grant money to help scholars

To benefit biomedical students

By [KATIA MARTINEZ](#) | The Daily Tar Heel

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The undergraduate field of biomedical research has grown by 215 percent in the past decade.

And the Howard Hughes Medical Institute — in collaboration with UNC — has plans to make it more diverse, as well.

A portion of the \$1.3 million awarded to UNC will be used to start an undergraduate research program to attract Carolina Covenant Scholars into the biomedical research department as part of the Undergraduate Research for Future Scientists and Clinicians program.

The program is intended to help low-income students, specifically those in the Carolina Covenant, “overcome financial, social and cultural barriers,” according to the grant distribution summary.

“Lower-income students could do just as much research as anyone else and could learn even more,” said freshman Covenant Scholar Candace Gentry, who plans to join the program.

Biology professor Patricia Pukkila said the grant would significantly affect future students.

“By providing research opportunities to Covenant scholars, future high school teachers and students in the new first-year seminar courses, we expect that more students from diverse backgrounds will begin to imagine themselves in science careers, and realize the benefits to themselves and to society,” Pukkila said.

The undergraduate major requires multiple courses in biology, physics and chemistry, as well as high-level math and applied sciences courses.

The grant money will also be used to start and promote the institute’s Undergraduate Internships for Future Teachers program, as well as First Year Seminars in science for non-scientists.

Ted Bateman, a biomedical research associate professor, said that although the grant’s research plans focus on Carolina Covenant Scholars, the programs will serve a broad spectrum of students.

UNC students and faculty already perform several research studies each year — bringing in \$716 million in total funding last year — and the grant would allow for more studies.

“This would give more students the opportunity to not only perform research, but participate in research,” said Richard Goldberg, a UNC biomedical engineering associate professor.

The teaching internship program would focus on training students to become high school science teachers, and the first year seminar program will focus on educating students who do not choose science as their major field of study.

“Getting to do research at the undergraduate level will be able to make it real for the students,” Bateman said.

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