UCI RECEIVES $4.3 MILLION GRANT TO DEVELOP COMPREHENSIVE BIOMEDICAL INFORMATICS TRAINING PROGRAM

Irvine, Calif., May 23, 2002 — The UC Irvine Institute for Genomics and Bioinformatics has been awarded a $4.3 million, multiyear training grant from the National Institutes of Health to consolidate current UCI bioinformatics training programs into a comprehensive, campus-wide initiative.

Called the Biomedical Informatics Training Program, the initiative will fuse current efforts in the Department of Information & Computer Science (ICS), the College of Medicine, the School of Physical Sciences, the School of Biological Sciences and the Institute for Genomics and Bioinformatics. Educational training grants allow faculty to design concentrated curricula – unique groups of classes and research initiatives – to train students in specialized areas of any field. The NIH grant, the largest training grant of its kind awarded to UCI, lays the foundation to further develop graduate-level programs designed to train students in biomedical informatics. In 1999, ICS pioneered an Informatics in Biology and Medicine graduate degree program at UCI. This grant allows UCI to mirror this Ph.D. degree program in the College of Medicine and the School of Biological Sciences.

"Advancements taking place in the bioinformatics field are impacting today’s medical technologies with greater frequency," said Pierre Baldi, institute director. "However, interdisciplinary graduate programs in bioinformatics remain scarce and the pool of individuals with training in both computational and biological sciences is exceedingly small. The Biomedical Informatics Training Program will allow UCI to impact bioinformatics significantly by offering our students access to dual advisors (one in computational sciences and another in life sciences) and dual mentoring, thus giving them a truly comprehensive education in biomedical informatics."

Bioinformatics melds life sciences and computer science with emphasis in mining the large sets of data associated with the study of DNA and protein sequences. As biological research methods and high-throughput technologies continue to mature and capabilities increase, the need to utilize computer science applications in the analysis, processing and visualization of these data also increases.

Baldi, an ICS professor with joint appointment in biological chemistry, also directs the digitally enabled genomic medicine component of the California Institute for Telecommunications and Information Technology at UCI. He and G. Wesley Hatfield, professor of microbiology and molecular genetics in the College of Medicine, and chemical engineering and material sciences in The Henry Samueli School of Engineering, will serve as co-directors of the program.

"The genomics era has caught us all by surprise. Biologists have been deluged by masses of data from DNA and protein sequences and new high-throughput genomic technologies," Hatfield said. "Computer scientists working together with biologists are only now developing the computational methods required to process, analyze and interpret this information. This NIH-funded program will facilitate necessary cross-training and interdisciplinary research activities among the faculty and provide a forum for producing a new breed of interdisciplinary scientists of the future."

Supported by more than 20 UCI faculty, the award is the fourth in six months designated for bioinformatic training purposes. In addition, the Institute for Genomics and Bioinformatics was
awarded a $340,000 grant from the UCI Systemwide Biotechnology Research and Education Program (BREP), and Richard Lathrop, professor of Information & Computer Science, and Hatfield have been awarded $100,000 in BREP funds. Also, The Newkirk Center for Science and Society is underwriting costs for an institute-organized research symposium and lecture series detailing The Impacts of Biotechnology on Society.

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