

THE Current

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UCSB Receives Grant for Training Program in Stem Cell Biology and Engineering

UC Santa Barbara has received a \$1.2 million training grant from the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM) to continue an interdisciplinary training program in stem cell biology and engineering. The award was announced today by the Independent Citizens' Oversight Committee (ICOC).

The three-year grant is the second UCSB has received from CIRM to support the training of pre-doctoral and postdoctoral students in stem cell biology and stem cell ethics. The new grant will make it possible for students to participate in groundbreaking research in two broad but interrelated areas: the fundamental molecular biology of stem cell proliferation and differentiation, and bioengineering approaches to develop novel biotechnologies for stem cell research. The first training grant was awarded in 2006.

"It will allow us to recruit the best and the brightest postdoctoral and graduate students," Dennis O. Clegg, professor and chair of the Department of Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology at UCSB, said of the CIRM award. Clegg also co-directs the UCSB Center for Stem Cell Biology and Engineering.

The grant also provides for additional educational activities, such as seminars that will explore novel interdisciplinary biotechnologies, courses in stem cell biology and

stem cell ethics, video conferencing with collaborating institutions, and participation in national and international scientific meetings.

Stem cell research is truly an interdisciplinary field at UCSB with faculty members from many different departments and units engaged in cutting-edge research projects. Among the departments represented at the Center for Stem Cell Biology and Engineering are molecular biology, chemistry and biochemistry, materials, chemical engineering, mechanical engineering, and psychology.

"When we applied for the first grant we had only seven faculty members participating," Clegg said. "Now we have tripled the number of people." He noted that in awarding the grant, CIRM praised the molecular, cellular, and developmental biology department's extraordinary attention to graduate education.

The new training grant brings to five the total number of grants UCSB has received from CIRM since 2005. A \$3.2 million grant was awarded last May to support the development of a state-of-the-art facility in the Center for Stem Cell Biology and Engineering, and a Tools and Technologies grant worth more than half a million dollars was awarded last December to develop new treatments for diseases that can be helped by stem cell research. Additional grants of \$1.34 million and \$2.26 million were awarded in 2005 and 2007, respectively.

The California Institute for Regenerative Medicine was established in 2004 with the passage of Proposition 71, the California Stem Cell Research and Cures Initiative. The statewide ballot measure, which provided \$3 billion in funding for stem cell research at California universities and research institutions, was approved by California voters, and called for the establishment of an entity to make grants and provide loans for stem cell research, research facilities, and other vital research opportunities. The CIRM is the largest source of funding for human embryonic stem cell research in the world.

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