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Idaho Biomedical Research Conference Draws Record Turnout to Moscow

Written by Bill Loftus

MOSCOW, Idaho— A record turnout of Idaho's growing community of 270 biomedical researchers will gather at Moscow today through Wednesday for the ninth annual conference of the Idaho IDEa Network of Biomedical Research Excellence.

The University of Idaho will play host to the conference, which features work by 64 undergraduate researchers from six campuses statewide, their faculty mentors and others.

I think it's a direct result of expanding the INBRE network and expanding the number of students, faculty and staff who are involved in biomedical research in our state," said Carolyn Hovde Bohach, a University of Idaho microbiology professor who directs the statewide program.

The network includes 10 Idaho higher education and research institutions founded in 2000. A \$16.5 million, five-year renewal grant was awarded last year to Idaho by the National Institutes of Health National Center for Research Resources' Institutional Development Award Program.

Mason Frederickson, a University of Idaho junior from Coeur d'Alene, is among the undergraduate fellows who will present their research during the conference. Frederickson received a \$5,000 stipend to spend 10 weeks this summer working in University of Idaho DNA chemist Patrick Hrdlicka's lab.

"In the whole research experience, I've met a lot of cool people, really intelligent people," Frederickson said. "It's cool to see them and how motivated they are and it rubbed off on me. You get excited about the research experience."

His summer project focused on developing biosensors to detect DNA sequences, essentially genes, from four bacterial disease agents, E. coli, salmonella, listeria and campylobacter.

This is Frederickson's second summer as an INBRE fellow; last summer he was an INBRE fellow representing North Idaho College before he transferred to UI last fall.

Frederickson also collaborated with Josh Branen, who earned his doctorate from the University of Idaho and now works for BioTracking, a Moscow-based spinoff business founded by retired University of Idaho animal scientist Garth Sasser.

"The technology we developed is capable of specifically and sensitively detecting this DNA," Hrdlicka said.

Hrdlicka, a nucleic acid chemist, said Frederickson and INBRE fellows are outstanding. "To me it's just amazing to have such talented and motivated undergraduate researchers conducting DNA research. It's incredibly rewarding seeing them work at something and succeeding, and to see the excitement."

Hrdlicka earlier worked with another INBRE fellow, Dale Guenther, who is now pursuing her doctorate in his laboratory. Establishing ties with other biomedical researchers on campus and in Idaho is another important part of the program, he said.

The INBRE fellowship is a rare opportunity, Frederickson said. "As an undergrad, you have no idea of what research is. People without that experience can't know how exciting research can be. It might be daunting because you have to do a lot of learning, a lot of reading to get to know your project, but it's really awesome."

Among western states with INBRE programs, Idaho also pioneered an expansion of undergraduate study opportunities to other states this summer. Two Montana undergraduates and a New Mexico student worked on their projects in Moscow with University of Idaho mentors.

This year's conference will also benefit from including faculty and staff from two National Institutes of Health funded Centers of Biomedical Research Excellence that are based on the University of Idaho campus. Each drew nearly \$20 million in NIH funding through the National Center for Research Resources since 2000.

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About Idaho INBRE

INBRE is a \$16.5 million federal grant program established to create an environment for Idahoans with the talent and desire to solve health problems through research, to do so. An unprecedented network of research and educational collaborations among ten institutions in Idaho has been built. INBRE profoundly affects biomedical research at every level by providing support to Idaho faculty, post-doctoral fellows, and graduate students and fostering research opportunities to Idaho undergraduate students.

The Federal Statewide Grant is administrated to the University of Idaho and run by the INBRE Administrative Core who disperse the grant throughout the state. The INBRE award is funded by NIH Grant #P20 RR016454.

About the University of Idaho

Founded in 1889, the University of Idaho is the state's flagship higher-education institution and its principal graduate education and research university, bringing insight and innovation to the state, the nation and the world. University researchers attract nearly \$100 million in research grants and contracts each year; the University of Idaho is the only institution in the state to earn the prestigious Carnegie Foundation ranking for high research activity. The university's student population includes first-generation college students and ethnically diverse scholars. Offering more than 130 degree options in 10 colleges, the university combines the strengths of a large university with the intimacy of small learning communities. The university is home to the Vandals, the 2009 Rody's Humanitarian Bowl champions. For information, visit

www.uidaho.edu