



News Release

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WESTERN RECEIVES \$100,000 NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF HEALTH GRANT

St. Joseph, Mo. —July 2, 2003— The National Institute of Health’s National Cancer Institute announced today that Missouri Western State College has received the Academic Research Enhancement Award of more than \$100,000.

This grant is entitled “Antitumor Drugs that bind the DNA Minor Groove” and will fund three years of summer research to better understand how certain drugs turns genes on or off in cancer cells.

“This is a cutting edge research question. Training undergraduate students to do the research – to learn how to attack the problem -- is the primary goal. Solving the problem is an important but secondary goal,” said Dr. Todd Eckdahl, professor of biology and principal investigator for the project.

The award will support three faculty, five college students and four high school students’ work on the project beginning this summer, encompassing both the biology and chemistry departments. Faculty members are Dr. Eckdahl, Dr. Jason Baker, assistant professor of biology, and Dr. Benjamin Caldwell, associate professor of chemistry.

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Students who have chosen the interdisciplinary majors biochemistry or molecular biology will be targeted to assist in the research. Western students selected to assist in the research project this year are Sara Freel, Plattsmouth, Neb.; Jennifer Lamp, Tina, Mo.; Brianna Peterson, Cameron, Mo.; Bart Phillips, Shiloh, Ill.; and Christy Saverino, St. Joseph.

“This is an awesome opportunity for our students. It is a chance for Western students to be involved in cutting-edge research. This will be valuable experience for students preparing for careers as bench scientists or for advanced education,” explained Dr. Eckdahl.

“This is a learning experience on many levels. I am learning how to work in a lab and the process of research which will be beneficial in a graduate setting,” said junior Bart Phillips.

According to the review committee, Western and Dr. Eckdahl’s commitment to undergraduate research was an important determinant in receiving the grant. The committee cited the fact Dr. Eckdahl had sponsored over 50 undergraduate student presentations in the past six years and has published seven peer-reviewed articles, several with undergraduate co-authors, as indicators of his success in this area.

Western has a long-standing commitment to summer research programs, according to Dr. Eckdahl. The Undergraduate Research Summer Institute, which began 15 years ago, provides support for a faculty and student to work on joint research projects. The Summer Research Institute, now in its second year, allows faculty, college students and high school students to work together on a research question.

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The quality lab equipment Western has available was another important factor in receiving the grant. Through private donations and grants, the departments have acquired state-of-the-art lab equipment, including the DNA sequencer that will be used in the research. Dr. Eckdahl noted that Western undergraduates have the opportunity to use equipment that is normally available only at the graduate level.

The National Cancer Institute (NCI) is a component of the National Institutes of Health, one of eight agencies that compose the Public Health Service (PHS) in the Department of Health and Human Services. The NCI, established under the National Cancer Act of 1937, is the Federal Government's principal agency for cancer research and training.

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Missouri Western State College is a four-year public institution providing a blend of traditional liberal arts and professional degree programs. The college offers student-centered, high quality instruction that focuses on experience-based learning, community service, and state-of-the-art technology. Western is located in St. Joseph, Mo. and is committed to the educational, economic, cultural and social development of the region it serves.