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\$451 Million for U Research

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Research and related funding collected by the University of Utah during the recently ended fiscal year 2010 jumped 27 percent to \$450.6 million, with most of the increase provided by economic stimulus money from the federal government.

“It shows that University of Utah faculty members are capable of competing with the best universities in the country to get research money,” says neurobiologist Tom Parks, vice president for research. “That creates valuable research and jobs. Faculty members are hiring staff and spending money on services and supplies, mostly from Utah. Most of the money is spent locally.”

Brent Brown, director of the university’s Office of Sponsored Projects – which administers research funding – says the big increase “is a great win for the university. It further enhances the university’s ability to engage in world-class research.”

Total research grants and external funding for “sponsored projects” received by the University of Utah during July 1, 2009 through June 30, 2010, reached \$450,614,999, compared with \$354,702,864 for the previous year, fiscal year 2009.

Only \$13.7 million of the \$95.9 million increase came from non-stimulus money. Brown says that relatively small increase in regular research funding probably occurred because federal agencies were under deadlines to release stimulus money first.

The other \$82.2 million was allocated by the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) of 2009, the legislation passed by Congress and signed by President Obama in February 2009 with the goal of stimulating the United States’ lagging economy. The money funded 206 University of Utah research projects.

University of Utah Stimulus Projects of More than \$1 Million

One-fourth of that \$82.2 million is for two infrastructure projects: \$8 million toward construction of an \$18 million addition to the university’s chemistry building, and \$13.4 million for the Utah Educational Network to continue to expand the fiber-optic network that connects the “network backbone” to schools and colleges. The stimulus money will allow UEN to contract with Qwest Communications and other telecommunication companies to expand the network to elementary schools, charter schools, Head Start centers and some libraries.

Other research projects receiving \$1 million or more in stimulus funds include:

-- \$6.4 million to study underground storage of carbon dioxide as a way to counteract global warming.

-- \$2 million for a project aimed at better converting biomedical research findings into clinical treatments for patients.

-- \$1.6 million toward a \$2.1 million upgrade to the VERITAS gamma ray telescope in Arizona. The facility is used by University of Utah physicists, who are in charge of the upgrade.

-- \$1.4 million for work on neural interfaces to read brain signals to help disabled people communicate and function.

-- \$1.3 million for development of a database to link demographic records of Utah residents to enhance health research and improve health care delivery.

-- \$1.1 million to continue research into JS-K, a possible leukemia treatment.

Among the other 198 stimulus grants are those that will fund upgrades to earthquake-monitoring networks in Utah and the Yellowstone-Grand Teton region; further development of a sea worm glue for use in mending small bone fragments; commercialization of technology that uses radio waves to see through walls, for example, in hostage situations; development of a national geothermal resource database; testing of eye-tracking technology for use in lie detection; and development of carbon solar cells.

Other stimulus grants are funding studies of causes and potential treatments for many diseases and conditions, including AIDS, chronic lymphocytic leukemia, psoriasis, tractor-related fall injuries, herpes and diabetic nerve damage, to name only a few.

During fiscal year 2009, the stimulus program was new, so such funds contributed only \$4 million to that year's \$354.7 million research grants and contracts. (The amount originally was reported as \$1.5 million at the end of that fiscal year, but the total was raised after late-arriving grants were processed.)

Because many of the stimulus grants are for two years and only the first-year amounts are recorded for fiscal year 2010, "we'll see additional stimulus money in 2011, but probably not to the tune of \$82 million," so the university's total research funding might drop during fiscal year 2011, says Brown.

"We expect the total to go down, but I expect what we consider regular research funding will go up" as stimulus money wanes, Parks says.

Federal Share of U Research Funding Grows

Grant proposals by university researchers were up 7.7 percent, from \$1.52 billion to \$1.64 billion during the 2010 fiscal year. The much larger percent increase in actual funding shows their success rate was greater during fiscal year 2010 than during the previous year, largely because of their success in seeking stimulus funds.

During fiscal year 2010, direct funding from federal agencies was up 40 percent to \$324.2 million – and accounted for 72 percent of the university's research grants. That compares with 65 percent of the university's research funding the previous year.

The University of Utah also received another \$42.5 million in indirect federal research money that "flowed through" to the university from other grant providers, including other universities, industry, the state of Utah, national labs, and associations and foundations. So combined direct and indirect federal research funding for fiscal year 2009 rose 38 percent to \$366.6 million, accounting for 81 percent of the university's research funding, compared with 75 percent in fiscal year 2009.

Research funding from non-federal grant providers included the following, with the totals including federal flow-through received by each provider:

-- \$49.2 million from private industry, a 2.3 percent increase from FY 2009, representing 10.9 percent of the university's research funding.

-- \$22.5 million from associations and foundations, up 12 percent from the previous fiscal year and representing 5 percent of the university's research funding.

-- \$20.7 million from other universities – mostly in the form of federal flow-through dollars – up 13 percent from fiscal year 2009 and representing 4.6 percent of the university's research grants.

-- \$14.8 million from the state of Utah, a 23 percent drop from fiscal year 2009, and representing 3.3 percent of the university's research grants.

The remaining research funding came from other research institutions (\$9.4 million), hospitals (\$4.5 million), national laboratories and other federal “sub-agencies” (\$4.2 million) and non-federal, non-Utah government agencies (\$1.1 million).

University colleges and other major units collecting the most research money were the School of Medicine (\$206 million), College of Engineering (\$62.6 million), Vice President for Health Sciences (\$40.2 million to various centers, primarily the Huntsman Cancer Institute), College of Science (\$38 million), Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs (\$34.5 million to various centers, primarily the Utah Educational Network and the Scientific Computing and Imaging Institute), College of Pharmacy (\$21.5 million), Vice President for Research (\$15.4 million to various centers, mainly the Brain Institute and the National Center for Voice and Speech); and College of Mines and Earth Sciences (\$11.3 million).