



The Athens Messenger

Sunday, March 09, 2008

Bioinformatics plan earns state funding

Sunday, March 09, 2008

An Ohio University-led proposal aimed at positioning the state as a national leader in the emerging field of bioinformatics is among seven to earn funding in the first round of the new Choose Ohio First Scholarship Program, the university announced Friday.

Bioinformatics is the field of science in which biology, computer science and information technology merge to form a single discipline that relies on high-performance computing to analyze large amounts of data. It can assist in efforts as diverse as finding cures for diseases, making advances in agriculture and enhancing industrial opportunities, according to an OU news release.

The Ohio Board of Regents on Friday announced that the Ohio Consortium for Bioinformatics will receive \$4.475 million for student scholarships under the program.

The seven successful proposals announced Friday - of 28 submitted - will receive more than \$22.7 million for student scholarships in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medical (STEM) fields.

Ohio University will partner with 11 other colleges and universities and the Ohio Supercomputer Center, the Ralph Regula School of Computational Science and industry leaders to attract and graduate an estimated 345 students in STEM fields over a five-year period. Partners in the consortium will contribute more than \$4.6 million to develop programs, expand offerings and cover other related costs.

"I believe that after this five-year program that we're just beginning, we will be among the top five states in the nation in this field," said Lonnie Welch, an OU professor of electrical engineering and computer science.

Welch and Ohio University alumnus Terry Lewis of the Ohio Supercomputer Center organized the first Ohio Collaborative Bioinformatics Conference, held at OU in 2006.

Associate professor of environmental and plant biology Sarah Wyatt co-leads Ohio University's bioinformatics efforts with Welch and serves on the Ohio Consortium for Bioinformatics steering committee.

She said about a dozen OU faculty members in such disciplines as computer science, biomedical engineering, plant biology, biological sciences, biochemistry and medicine are working on bioinformatics-related research. Wyatt expects that number to grow dramatically with approval of the Choose Ohio First proposal - as will opportunities for students.

"This will give students an opportunity to interact not just on their own campus, but with their colleagues across the state," Wyatt said. "We will work with industries throughout the state to make sure students are trained in the way industry wants them to be trained to join the workforce."

In recent years, Welch and Wyatt have collaborated in the creation of three new Ohio University courses in bioinformatics, one of which they co-teach. They are seeking approval of a certificate program in the field that they hope will launch in the fall. Currently, students seeking a bachelor's degree in computer science can

specialize in bioinformatics, according to the OU news release.

The \$50 million Choose Ohio First Scholarship program is a component of the Ohio Innovation Partnership created by the General Assembly. The funding is aimed at attracting and graduating more than 2,000 students in STEM fields over the next five years.

Related Links

Content © 2008

Software © 1998-2008 **1up! Software**, All Rights Reserved