NSF AWARDS $1.3 MILLION TO NWABR FOR BIOINFORMATICS EDUCATION

Innovative Technology Experiences for Students and Teachers (ITEST)
brings the understanding of how biology and information technology interact to teachers and their students
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Seattle, WA – March 26, 2009 – The Northwest Association for Biomedical Research (NWABR) has been awarded a $1.3 million dollar *Innovative Technology Experiences for Students and Teachers* (ITEST) grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF). This three-year grant, entitled Bio-ITEST, provides funding for education outreach programs that help secondary school teachers and their students learn about how information technology is used in biological research.

"Since the first draft of the human genome (DNA sequence) was released in 2001, we have seen an explosion in the amount of data and information being generated by biological research. In order for young people to truly understand what biology today is all about, they need to have an understanding of the *integral role information technology plays in how research is currently conducted,*" said Jeanne Ting Chowning, NWABR Director of Education and Principal Investigator. "Seattle has world leading organizations focused on biomedical research and information technology, as well as a vibrant science education community. We have an ideal region for bioinformatics education outreach programs and NWABR is honored to be at the center of this project."

The grant also supports the implications of these new aspects of biological research for society. Ethical questions are involved in considering how genetic information is acquired, stored, and used. Who will have access to someone's genetic information? How will genetic information be used in making personal and health decisions?

Building upon NWABR's existing successful bioethics education outreach, the Bio-ITEST program will also help students reflect upon the changes that technology is making for individual consumers and for our nation overall. NWABR's bioethics programs are widely recognized, and are featured in the October 11th 2008 issue of *Science*, the journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

"It is great to see the Northwest Association for Biomedical Research receive the recognition and funding that this award represents," said Washington State Governor Chris Gregoire. "This is exactly the type of organization we need in Washington state to lead the global economy. Our life-sciences industry is not only important to our health, but one that I expect will create thousands of jobs across our state. This grant will help make sure that our students are educated and qualified to meet the demands for the economy of the 21st century."

Major collaborators include Geospiza (a Seattle bioinformatics company), the Puget Sound Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology, and Bellevue Community College. The program also draws on NWABR's strong relationships with school districts, community groups, bioethicists and NWABR member research institutions.

"The Bio-ITEST grant supports the mission of NWABR to promote the understanding of biomedical research and its ethical conduct. It empowers NWABR to work directly with ethicists, scientists and educators who are among the most respected authorities in their fields," said Susan Adler, Executive Director of NWABR. The program will provide teacher professional development and curricular resources for secondary school life science educators, as well as authentic inquiry-based bioinformatics research opportunities for students.

About NWABR
NWABR is a non-profit dedicated to promoting public understanding of the implications and applications of the process of biomedical research. Members include industry, academia, health care, and voluntary health organizations. The organization meets a fundamental need for materials that engage students in the scientific and ethical dimensions of topics such as embryonic stem cell research and human clinical trials. NWABR's lesson materials promote discourse and decision-making based on thoughtful analysis and critical reasoning, and stress the importance of understanding the science behind bioethical issues.

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