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UNC reaches new NIH funding high

From UNC News Services

CHAPEL HILL -- The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill received nearly \$300 million in funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in fiscal 2005, placing Carolina 15th overall and first among public universities in the South.

The \$296.6 million total, an all-time high, was a 2.3 percent increase over funding of \$289.7 million in fiscal 2004, and it represented more than \$150 million in growth in biomedical research at UNC since 1998. It was also slightly more than half of UNC's total research funding for fiscal 2005.

"The growth of investment by the federal government is a tribute to the diligent and creative work performed by Carolina faculty," said Tony Waldrop, vice chancellor for research and economic development. "The continued success reflects a determination to improve the health of everyone in North Carolina, while making a mark among the best research institutions in the world. Everyone in the state can be proud of this success."

The NIH is the federal government's main source of basic research into such diseases as cancer, AIDS, diabetes, heart disease and mental

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illnesses. The bulk of the funding went to academic research centers.

NIH funding to UNC put all five health affairs schools in the top 20 of all public and private universities. Following are the schools' rankings and funding totals:

- The School of Medicine, 17th, \$217.4 million
- The School of Public health, sixth, \$36.6 million
- The School of Dentistry, fifth, \$10.1 million
- The School of Nursing, fourth, \$7.3 million
- The School of Pharmacy, 14th, \$5.8 million.

Within the medical school, the department of pharmacology ranked first in the nation, with more than \$21 million in funding. That department has particular strengths in developing drugs to fight cancer and alcohol addiction as well as studying cellular proteins and their roles in causing disease.

Other top-10 medical departments were: biomedical engineering, fifth; biochemistry, seventh; anatomy and cell biology, ninth; and genetics, 10th.

"The increase in NIH funding reflects our commitment to becoming the nation's leading public medical school," said Dr. William L. Roper, dean of the School of Medicine, vice chancellor for health affairs and chief executive officer of the UNC Health Care System. "The NIH is a very important source of funding for UNC. It makes possible much of the work we do in our laboratories and the clinical trials our patients participate in."

The growth comes when total NIH awards had its smallest one-year increase since 1996. The NIH budget doubled from \$11.2 billion in 1998 to more than \$22.9 billion in 2004. In 2005, awards totaled \$23.4 billion. The NIH budget is expected to decrease in 2007.

Roper attributed Carolina's steady climb to the success of interdisciplinary teams, which compete more effectively for NIH grants.

Also, UNC has received more NIH Roadmap awards than any other school.

These grants encourage researchers to attack some of the most difficult problems using interdisciplinary collaboration. They are intended to break through traditional barriers to discoveries and deliver results more quickly, according to the NIH. Carolina's total funding through this program, in its second year, totals \$15.5 million.

UNC's strategy to create centers where multidisciplinary teams can work together will help Carolina continue to compete successfully for shrinking research funding, Waldrop said.

"We're in a good position now, but we need to continually assess our strategies and decrease our dependence on federal funding. Carolina has lagged in the arena of corporate support. That's one target we are taking careful aim toward now so we're more strongly positioned in the future," Waldrop said.

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