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Dunn Foundation awards first grants under \$3M collaborative research program

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As part of a 10-year commitment to Rice University's BioScience Research Collaborative (BRC), the John S. Dunn Research Foundation has awarded the first four competitive grants under the \$3 million collaborative research program the foundation established last year to foster interdisciplinary and interinstitutional research at the BRC.

The collaborative research award program is administered by the Gulf Coast Consortia. It fosters interdisciplinary and inter-institutional engagement by providing two types of seed grants: one for preliminary research that's often essential to be competitive for federal and other funding and a second for events that bring together new interdisciplinary communities.

In the first competitive grant cycle, three grants of approximately \$100,000 each were awarded for collaborative research at the BRC. A fourth award was given for a collaborative research event in an emerging area.



Bioscience Research Collaborative

To qualify for a seed grant, a BRC researcher must initiate a new research collaboration with scientists or physicians from other institutions in the Texas Medical Center. The studies and event funded by the first round of grants are:

- Rebekah Drezek, professor in bioengineering and in electrical and computer engineering, will be joined by Aaron Foster, Baylor College of Medicine (BCM), to pursue a project titled "T-cell Mediated Delivery of Gold Nanoparticles for Externally Triggered Photothermal Cancer Therapy."
- Oleg Igoshin, assistant professor of bioengineering, will work with Michael Mancini, BCM, and Gábor Balázi, the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, on "Synthetic Tuning of a Breast Cancer-controlling Network."
- Tomasz Tkaczyk, assistant professor of bioengineering, and John Oghalai, BCM, will study "Development of High Resolution Endoscopes for In Vivo Imaging of the Inner Ear."

- John McDevitt, the Brown-Wiess Professor in Bioengineering and Chemistry, will collaborate with Christie Ballantyne, BCM, and David Gorenstein, the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, on the event "Early Disease Detection: Biomarker Discovery to Clinical Application."

"Each of these awards will foster the intention of the Dunn Foundation to fund excellent state-of-the-art interdisciplinary work that will catalyze research in a new area that might not have been possible if funding first had to be sought at the federal level," said Cindy Farach-Carson, associate vice provost for research.

"Federal review panels can be notoriously slow to recognize the value of research that crosses disciplines, especially without preliminary data," she said. "These three awards address a critical need to bring Rice excellence in scientific research to the tackling of big problems that affect society today."

The late John S. Dunn established the Dunn Research Foundation in 1977 to support organizations and programs engaged in biomedical, educational and research programs, primarily in the Greater Houston area.

Each year of the 10-year program, recipients of the John S. Dunn Foundation Collaborative Research Awards will be selected by reviewers, who will be appointed and approved by the Oversight Committee for the Gulf Coast Consortia (GCC). GCC members include BCM, Rice, the University of Houston, the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston and the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center. Its mission is to build interdisciplinary collaborative research teams and training programs in the biological sciences that involve the computational, chemical, mathematical and physical sciences.

The John S. Dunn Research Foundation is a longtime supporter of collaborative research through the Gulf Coast Consortia. Two of the GCC's research consortia are named for the foundation: the John S. Dunn Gulf Coast Consortium for Chemical Genomics and the John S. Dunn Gulf Coast Consortium for Magnetic Resonance.

The BRC will house the new GCC offices, which will be named in honor of the John S. Dunn Research Foundation in recognition of the foundation's support of the GCC and its collaborative research efforts.

The 10-story BRC was designed to facilitate joint research between Rice's experts in biological sciences, engineering, computation, and the physical and mathematical sciences and Texas Medical Center physicians and scientists.