

# Commissioner's Report

October 2006

Prepared for the State Board of Regents and the Utah System of Higher Education

As detailed in the Regents' General Consent Calendar, \$18.75 million in research grants have been awarded – \$12.1 million to the University of Utah and \$6.65 million to Utah State University – since the last Board meeting.

## University of Utah:

U of U Biologist Baldomero "Toto" Olivera, who seeks new medications from the toxins of poisonous cone snails, won one of medicine's top honors when he was named as a new member of the Institute of Medicine, making Olivera one of at least 30 U researchers to be elected into one of three prestigious groups under the umbrella known as the National Academies.

## Utah State University:

Ground breaking was held for the new Agricultural Complex south of Logan. A number of northern Utah's senators and representatives influential in securing funding for the \$10 million project attended. The facility includes a central common area and two wings housing classrooms, laboratories and offices. It serves more than 400 students and eight degree programs in the College of Agriculture and houses the university's veterinary and animal care facilities. It is home to the international sheep genome project.

## Weber State University:

Weber State University hosted the Eighth Annual Diversity Conference, "Diversity, Equity and Access to Health Care: Issues, Disparities and Challenges in the 21st Century," in early October. The keynote speaker for the event was former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Richard H. Carmona. The two-day conference examined issues and challenges for minorities and underserved populations in gaining access to health care.

## Southern Utah University:

Southern Utah University's Admissions Web site has just been selected as one of the 10 best in the nation. The National Research Center for College and University Admissions (NRCCUA), the leading organization connecting young people and their families with colleges and universities around the country, released its 8th annual Enrollment Power Index and ranked SUU's site 9th out of 3,015 sites reviewed. The research-based analysis rates how well the functionality and design of college and university Web sites provide information to potential students to take them from prospect to applicant. The NRCCUA is a non-profit education research organization which has for the past 34 years conducted the largest nationwide survey of high school students, which serves as a communications link between college-bound high school students and public and private colleges and universities.

## Snow College:

President Benson will drive a tractor in Snow's homecoming parade this year. What's academic about that? The bio-diesel used to drive the tractor will be produced by Snow College faculty and students. The pilot program is just getting started, and Snow hopes to have enough fuel for the parade route!

### **College of Eastern Utah:**

College of Eastern Utah's Dr. George Uhlig of the Chemistry Department continues to draw national attention for his work on chemical fire suppression solutions. This past week he and his team of student researchers successfully extinguished a lithium fire under controlled conditions. This adds to the significant body of research that soon could find wide-spread commercial and government application.

### **Dixie State College:**

Dixie State College has received its first National Science Foundation grant for \$242,000. These funds are to be used for recruiting and funding need-based scholarships for academically talented first-year students in Computer, Physical, and Biological Sciences, Engineering, and Mathematics with an eye toward broadening participation in STEM careers of underrepresented groups (women, minorities, and disabled individuals) and meeting the demand for an adequately prepared scientific and engineering workforce.

### **Utah Valley State College:**

UVSC was awarded a \$2 million Title III Grant to be paid out over five years. The end goal of this grant is to increase student graduation rates through three strategic retention initiatives: 1) integrated/comprehensive student success retention initiative focused on the First Year Experience; 2) implement a Student Retention Information Tracking System; and 3) implement a comprehensive/progressive training process for faculty, staff, and key administrative leaders. UVSC received 100 percent support from all independent grant evaluators.

### **Salt Lake Community College:**

Salt Lake Community College hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony September 12 for its new Culinary Arts Center at the Miller Campus. The college honored and celebrated Larry H. and Gail Miller with the opening of this eighth building to be added to the rapidly growing campus in Sandy, Utah. The SLCC Culinary Arts program is moving from the Redwood Campus to its new location at the Miller Campus. The 25,000-square-foot facility has more than 10,000 square feet of training space including classrooms, computer lab, demonstration kitchens, gas and electric kitchens, refrigerator and dry storage space and dining room. Courses will be held at the new site beginning Spring Semester.

### **Utah College of Applied Technology:**

The Uintah Basin Campus (UBATC) is deeply involved with the growth of the energy industry. UBATC's Petroleum, Energy, and Transportation (PET) Department has been certified recently by the International Association of Drilling Contractors (IADC) for their Well Control (WellCAP) course of instruction. IADC, an independent association, sets the standards for the drilling industry. Well Control includes sessions on how to handle natural gas wells safely and the weight of the liquids that go into the wells. To drill on Federal or Indian land, it is a requirement to have certification for the Well Control program. UBATC's Well Control program is the only IADC-accredited program in the Intermountain area outside of New Mexico, and serves companies throughout the region.

UHEAA and UESP Continued on Page 3...

**Utah Higher Education Assistance Authority:**

**UHEAA's student loan default rate is fifth lowest in the nation at 2.8 percent, a slight increase from last year's record low default rate of 2.7 percent. UHEAA's default rate compares favorably with the national student loan default rate of 5.1 percent and reflects the successful efforts of UHEAA, colleges and universities, and the student loan community to assist students in meeting their repayment obligations.**

**Utah Educational Savings Plan:**

**UESP celebrated its 10th birthday. Joining the party were the first account owner and his two granddaughters, his beneficiaries who are now 11 and 13 years old; a 25-year-old recent university graduate who was one of the original beneficiaries; former Representative Doug Peterson, who sponsored the UESP enabling legislation; and Christine Kearl, Governor Huntsman's Education Deputy. UESP now holds over 80,000 accounts valued at more than \$1.7 billion.**