

# Funding Woes Hurt Genome Researchers

By KRISTINA CASTO  
Staff Writer

Genetics research is on the brink of a revolution that might bring huge financial and humanitarian rewards for institutions that take part in it.

N.C. research universities are intent on getting in on the action, but growth in the area of genome research depends on state funding, which is scarce these days in North Carolina.

Scientists say that if the state legislature does not build facilities and pay faculty competitively, schools will lose the talent that attracts much-needed grants.

Anonymous donors recently created an endowed UNC-CH professorship in memory of the late Chancellor Michael Hooker, who died last year from cancer.

Research universities like N.C. State University and UNC-Chapel Hill receive grant money from federal organizations such as the National Institutes of Health and private companies to support their work in genome research.

"We are in competition with other university systems (in genome research)," said Charles Moreland, N.C. State vice chancellor of research. "There is urgency because people who get out front and get the results are going to reap the benefits."

Unraveling the human genome, the raw data behind humans' genetic make-up, could end human diseases such as

cancer and Parkinson's disease and improve agriculture and medicine.

Researchers and lawmakers say the legislature has to fund research at its public universities because the universities contribute to the state's economic health.

"A state government makes an investment in bricks and mortar and talent and then the talent goes out and gets more money," said Jeff Dangi, a UNC-CH biology professor.

But some say the state is failing in its obligation to research universities.

Rep. George Miller, D-Durham, is co-chairman of a legislative committee evaluating campuses' capital needs. He called a recent decrease in state higher education funding, from 17 to 13 percent of the budget, "a lack of foresight." "We have not been careful to maintain our institutionism," Miller said.

A multibillion-dollar bond package for capital improvements aimed at attracting quality faculty and students failed in the legislature last summer.

Sen. Tony Rand, D-Cumberland, admitted that the state economy would suffer if the legislature did not begin investing more money in universities.

But he was not sure of where to find that money. "We've taken all the money we can find for hurricane relief," he said. "So we're really out of money."

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## HOOKER

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standing faculty members to Carolina," he said.

Faculty members in the Department of Biology echoed Hallman's sentiments.

Gustavo Maroni, associate chairman of the department, said the endowment was very timely.

The human genome, which contains

## QUARRY

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much water will be needed, but (our local officials) have a responsibility to the community to be prepared," he said. "Our entire staff agrees that an expanded water quarry is a good thing."

Experts predicted demand for water would increase from its current demand of 9 million gallons per day to about 22 million gallons per day in 2050.

David Parrish, a resident near the proposed quarry expansion site, said he was worried that the damages his property would suffer as a result of the

## STUDY

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impartiality in cases similar to the Shearon Harris expansion.

"If we had an unbiased federal agency doing the study, it would probably help more," he said. "With the NRC, you never know."

As far as the status of the Shearon Harris expansion proposal, Hannah said

genetic information that we carry and pass on to our children, should be sequenced this summer, Maroni said.

"It's like a code; we will be able to read those genes," he said. "There are about 80,000 of them."

Biology Professor Jeff Dangi said the endowment was a significant step in furthering genomics research but also for attracting and retaining quality faculty.

"I think this is huge because there's been a discussion of retention of midyear faculty," he said.

expansion would be ignored.

"I'm concerned that American Stone and OWASA want to provide a 10-acre park, but what are they willing to do for the damages that have already been committed against my house?" he said. "They have not done anything, and I want answers."

OWASA and American Stone, a private quarrying corporation that would like to expand its operations to its 25-acre quarry in the area, have offered up about 20 concessions to residents affected by the proposed expansion.

The proposal, dubbed the Mitigation Program, includes plans for a 10-acre community park as well as a promise to

the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board was close to making a decision on whether to allow the expansion or call another evidentiary hearing.

A group of officials representing the Chapel Hill Town Council, the Carrboro Board of Aldermen and the Orange County Board of Commissioners met with Sen. John Edwards, D-N.C., in February to request his assistance in the matter and share their concerns.

"This professorship allows us to keep midyear faculty from being courted by prestigious universities."

Dangi said the professorship would help the University teach students better.

"Sixty percent of the incoming freshman class have identified themselves as science majors," he said. "We need resources to teach and train them."

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only use the site for reservoir and quarrying purposes.

Paxton Batum, a representative from American Stone, said the company offered to secure a 500-foot buffer area around the reservoir, pay for repairs to private wells damaged in the expansion process, establish strict noise ordinances on construction and provide compensation for any losses in property value.

"It's not like we're going into a pristine garden to start a quarry," he said.

"We want to be good citizens and we want to be good neighbors."

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Edwards continues to be involved in the issue, said Mike Briggs, his press secretary.

"He is still monitoring the issue and talking to the NRC about holding another hearing," he said.

"Apparently some decision is coming down the pike in April that will address that."

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## ADMISSIONS

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minority enrollment.

They settled on an admissions program where the top 10 percent of high school seniors statewide would be accepted into colleges. "At UT-Austin and at Texas A&M (the two most selective schools in the system), the minority enrollment has gone back up to what it was before being affirmative action was outlawed," Jones said.

But problems still exist, and minority enrollment is still lower than administrators would like, he said.

And opponents of rank-based admissions argue that the number of minority students would be redistributed rather than increased throughout the public university systems.

Jerry Lucido, director of undergraduate admissions at UNC-Chapel Hill, said an automatic admissions policy was not educationally sound and that administrators needed to examine whether it would actually increase minority enrollment.

"What has happened now is, because of that 4 percent (automatically accepted in California), Berkeley and UCLA and San Diego - their most selective schools - their diversity has dropped considerably and been redistributed to other campuses," Lucido said.

And in Texas, he said, minority enrollment might have gone up to earlier levels at two universities, but it has gone down at others.

In adopting admissions policies for incoming UNC students, administrators have always used race as one of many considerations, Lucido said.

"It's not the only factor, it's not the predominant factor, but it is a factor," he said. "We want that class to be bright."

"(And) we want that class to reflect many different cultures."

Lucido said minority enrollment at UNC was an issue that had been consistently discussed for the last several decades, but that a class-rank admissions policy had never been considered.

"I know our system will be discussing very soon our minority presence, and we will be looking at how to enhance minority presence," he said. "(But) I know of no similar movement (to the class-rank policy) in our system."

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