

# Oncological Sciences

Attracting the best scientists from the national and worldwide arenas poses a challenge for any research organization. The Department of Oncological Sciences, which is part of the University of Utah's School of Medicine, has a special relationship with Huntsman Cancer Institute (HCI) that helps draw leading researchers.

HCI's mission focuses on cancer, and so does that of the Department of Oncological Sciences. This creates a subtle difference from other academic departments, says Barbara Graves, PhD, HCI senior director of laboratory research and department chair.

"Usually, academic departments focus on a single discipline such as chemistry or biology or a clinical specialty such as gastroenterology, and the research from these departments may apply to a broad range of problems. In the Department of Oncological Sciences, researchers from multiple disciplines—cell biology, molecular biology, genetics, pharmacology, and biostatistics—all focus on the problems of cancer," Graves says. "This disease-focused model creates a natural bridge between basic science and clinical applications." This organizational concept is gaining acceptance. In October 2006, Graves attended a conference of a national organization of 37 cancer biology academic programs.

Academic departments have both the opportunity and the responsibility to educate the next generations of researchers. Trainees take formal courses, but more importantly, they perform research projects under the mentorship of faculty. Since its creation in 1994, the Department of Oncological Sciences has awarded 68 PhDs and trained 45 postdoctoral fellows. Many of these young scientists are continuing their careers in cancer research.

In 2006, 24 of HCI's 110 investigators held appointments (either primary or secondary) in the Department of Oncological Sciences. Many more HCI researchers held appointments in clinical departments in the School of Medicine, but as Graves says, "we don't draw the organizational diagrams in ink; at HCI we try to blur the boundaries between departments to further the overall research mission."



*HCI provides specialized training for young researchers and an academic career path for cancer researchers through the Department of Oncological Sciences.*

*Huntsman Cancer Institute has a special relationship with the University of Utah's Department of Oncological Sciences that helps draw leading researchers with a shared mission to eradicate cancer.*

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