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## HHMI to Phase Out Predoctoral Program

The Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) announced today that it would phase out support for predoctoral fellowships in the biological sciences over the next five years. It will seek new ways to support graduate and medical education.

"The fellowship program has been highly successful in attracting the very best students over the past 15 years, and has enhanced the nation's biomedical science infrastructure," said Thomas R. Cech, the Institute's president.

HHMI has invested more than \$141 million in the training of nearly 1,200 doctoral candidates from the U.S. and overseas since the program's inception in 1988. The final group of predoctoral fellows — who will be supported by the Institute for the next five years — will be selected shortly through a national competition administered by the National Research Council.

"The time has come to evaluate whether this is the most effective and innovative means of fostering biomedical research education. We feel strongly that a private philanthropy has a unique opportunity to explore new areas of research and approaches to the learning and translation of modern biology into medical practice," Cech said.

Cech said the decision to phase out the fellowship program in part reflects the Institute's need to reduce spending in the wake of an economic downturn, but emphasized that the decision was as much philosophical as financial. Cech said he has asked Peter J. Bruns, vice president for grants and special programs, to identify new approaches for supporting medical research education.

The Institute will continue two outstanding programs aimed at enhancing research training for medical students, including a partnership with the National Institutes of Health.

"This is an opportunity for us to explore how medically relevant research education of the 21st Century should be structured, and how HHMI can act as a catalyst in its implementation," said Bruns, a geneticist who joined the Institute two years ago from Cornell University.

Bruns said he would seek innovative approaches for the Institute to consider. These might include support for doctoral training in new and emerging areas of biomedical science that incorporate advances in the mathematical, computational and engineering sciences, as well as training programs that link basic science with medical practice.

"We would like to see whether it's possible to incorporate new elements that go beyond apprenticeship in a lab, and foster broadly based interdisciplinary research," he concluded.

Through its grants and special programs, Howard Hughes Medical Institute, a private philanthropy, supports innovative science education at colleges and universities, biomedical research institutions, museums and other science centers across the nation and international biomedical research in selected countries. HHMI has awarded competitive fellowships to promising medical, predoctoral and physician-scientist trainees. Since 1988, the Institute has awarded more than \$1.2 billion in grants in these areas.