

# University of Florida News

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### UF receives \$12.2 million to establish national network of scientists

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GAINESVILLE, Fla. — Imagine a Web site like Facebook, but instead of using it to share videos or post quizzes like “What ‘80s song are you?” scientists could scour a national network of researchers, only a few mouse clicks separating them from information needed for a scientific breakthrough.

That’s the goal of a \$12.2 million [National Center for Research Resources \[http://www.ncrr.nih.gov/\]](http://www.ncrr.nih.gov/) grant awarded today to the [University of Florida \[http://www.ufl.edu\]](http://www.ufl.edu) and collaborators at [Cornell University \[www.cornell.edu/\]](http://www.cornell.edu/) , [Indiana University \[http://www.indiana.edu/\]](http://www.indiana.edu/) , [Weill Cornell Medical College \[http://www.med.cornell.edu/\]](http://www.med.cornell.edu/) , [Washington University in St. Louis \[http://www.wustl.edu/\]](http://www.wustl.edu/) , the [Scripps Research Institute \[http://www.scripps.edu/\]](http://www.scripps.edu/) and the [Ponce School of Medicine in Puerto Rico \[http://www.psm.edu/\]](http://www.psm.edu/) . The funding stems from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

During the next two years, researchers will implement a new type of networking system at the seven schools that eventually will link researchers across the country and world to like-minded peers and potential collaborators.

By making it easier for scientists to find each other, researchers will be able to improve their ongoing studies and forge collaborations that could lead to new discoveries, said [Michael Conlon \[http://www.ehpr.ufl.edu/conlon/\]](http://www.ehpr.ufl.edu/conlon/) , interim director of biomedical informatics for UF and the principal investigator on the grant.

“The goal of the program is national networking of all scientists,” Conlon said. “Scientists have problems finding each other. We often find that researchers have pretty good networks with students or with scientists at institutions where they received their degree or worked before. But they don’t always know people even at their own institutions.”

The new program will draw information about scientists from official, verifiable sources and make it available using a type of technology called the Semantic Web.

For example, information about researchers’ positions will come from their employers and a listing of their published articles will come from the journals, while researchers will provide information regarding their interests. Although users will still view the information on what looks like regular Web pages, the software developed by Cornell researchers actually collects the facts a person wants and assembles its own page.

“The Semantic Web is a collection of facts, rather than pages. It is really for computers to

search and find things and present them in a reasonable way," Conlon said. "It's a next-generation type concept."

The idea for a database of researchers first sprouted at UF when two librarians at UF's Marston Science Library proposed using Cornell's VIVO software at UF to help scientists better find research articles published by UF faculty members.

Touted as a research discovery tool, VIVO is open-source software that allows people to search all publicly known information about a specific topic or researcher in one site. On Cornell's VIVO site, a search for the word "cancer," for example, yields dozens of results, but they are broken up into categories like "people," "opportunities" and "topics." Clicking on "topics" takes one to another set of subgroups that allows searchers to more quickly find exactly what they want.

"I saw the power VIVO had to show the research coming out of an institution," said Valrie Davis, a UF outreach librarian for agricultural science who teamed with UF librarian Sara Russell Gonzalez to propose using VIVO at UF after seeing it presented at a conference. "VIVO is an open source tool to connect people with common research interests. It's going to link people together. I think that is the most important part of this grant."

The grant supports a [National Institutes of Health \[http://www.nih.gov/\]](http://www.nih.gov/) goal to establish a national network of scientists. The NIH also wanted such a network to contain verifiable data. Using VIVO was a perfect fit, Conlon said.

"Five years of time, energy and imagination created VIVO, and now that work is paying off in ways we had only imagined before," said Anne R. Kenney, the Carl A. Kroch University Librarian at Cornell. "This major partnership enables us to extend the capabilities of all of our institutions and reach further than we would be able to alone. Creating strong connections between institutions is a fundamental building block in advancing the mission of 21st-century research libraries."

Initially, each institution involved in the grant will establish its own network of researchers. Librarians will implement the software and will offer support to researchers once they begin using it. Within two years, the team hopes to have the network connected across the country. Eventually, Conlon says the researchers would also like to broaden the scope of the project to include researchers around the world.

"We think this will have a huge multiplier effect and will allow researchers to find new partners and other ways to use their research," said Judith Russell, dean of the University Libraries at UF. "For years, librarians have helped researchers find the information they need. This is another type of critical information scientists need."

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## Credits

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