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## Illinois Wesleyan to Join National Research Initiative

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## **Illinois Wesleyan to Join National Research Initiative**

February 3, 2011

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – This fall, Illinois Wesleyan University will participate in the year-long National Genomics Research Initiative course through the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI). The HHMI is a not-for-profit medical research organization that ranks as one of the nation's largest philanthropies. The innovative course, which comes through HHMI's Science Education Alliance (SEA), enables first-year students to isolate soil-dwelling bacterial viruses – called phages – and analyze their DNA sequences.

“The students that participate in this program will be fully engaged in research producing new scientific information in their first year of college,” said Illinois Wesleyan Biology Department Chair David Bollivar. “This is a unique and exciting opportunity for our students.”

In the first term, the students isolate phages from locally collected soil. Given the diversity of phage, each one is almost certain to be unique, and the students get to name their newly identified life form. They spend the rest of the term purifying and characterizing their phages and extracting its DNA.

Between terms, the DNA samples are sequenced at one of several research centers across the country. In the second half of the course, the students receive digital files containing their phage's DNA sequence. The students then learn to use bioinformatics tools to analyze and annotate the genomes.

The National Genomics Research Initiative is SEA's first program, and HHMI has committed \$4 million to the course. “I feel like the tide is continuing to roll, that the SEA is really branching out,” said SEA Director Tuajuanda Jordan.

HHMI provides training, research and laboratory materials, as well as support from Jordan and her dedicated HHMI staff. “These schools are very diverse with respect to their resources and their size,” Jordan said. “Just reading their applications you can feel the enthusiasm and you can see that they are thinking ahead to the potential impact.”

The University joins SEA as an associate member. Other new members and associate members include Johns Hopkins University, Brown University, Morehouse College and Trinity College.

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