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06/16/2009

# Cancer Institute Selects Chemistry Professor to Receive Three-Year Grant

## Quick Facts

- The three-year grant will build on Sumter's ongoing research to better understand the events associated with the initiation and progression of cancer.
- Sumter and other faculty members have been awarded five major grants totaling more than \$1 million in funding for Winthrop undergraduate research.

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Takita Sumter

ROCK HILL, S.C. - The [National Institute of Health's \(NIH\) Cancer Institute](#) recently awarded Winthrop University faculty member **Takita Felder Sumter** a \$232,500 grant to investigate what transforms normal cells into cancer cells. The grant is funded through the **Academic Research Enhancement Award (AREA) program** which supports innovative research at undergraduate institutions as a means of providing students with hands-on learning experiences in biomedical research. University officials said this is the first AREA grant awarded to a Winthrop faculty member.

The three-year grant is funded from September through 2012 and will build on **Sumter's** ongoing research to better understand the events associated with the initiation and progression of cancer. The research project, entitled "Structure Function Studies of the HMGA1 Functional Domains Involved in Malignant Transformation," is the second major research proposal awarded to **Sumter** since she's been at Winthrop.

In addition to providing the resources for cancer research, the award will provide support for up to 10 summer research internships, travel funds to report results at scientific conferences, and academic year research assistantships for students.

**Sumter** was recruited to Winthrop in 2004 from Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine Department of Pediatric Oncology. A year after her arrival, **Sumter** began participation with a **IDeA Networks of Biomedical Research Excellence (INBRE) grant** awarded to Winthrop and meant to increase research activities of faculty and students throughout the state. Winthrop has used the INBRE funding to drastically increase its undergraduate student research in biology and chemistry and to apply for and win significant grants from federal agencies. As a result of **Sumter's** mentorship of students and participation in INBRE, she was initially awarded a Research Initiation Grant from the National Science Foundation and has now secured the AREA.

"This is an exciting time for chemistry and biology majors at Winthrop," said **Sumter**, who was promoted this summer to associate professor of chemistry. Her work with INBRE helped provide the data to secure this grant, which was based on the recommendation of a peer-review panel of biomedical scientists. Students who've conducted research with **Sumter** have successfully matriculated into professional and medical programs at schools including the University of South Carolina, Medical University of South Carolina and Harvard University School of Medicine.

Pat Owens, chair of Winthrop's **Department of Chemistry, Physics and Biology**, said the award could not have happened at a better time because of sharp declines in state funding. Enrollments of biochemistry, biology and chemistry students at Winthrop have surged over the past four years so student research has grown even faster.

"More students realize that they need to engage in an undergraduate research learning experience as

critical preparation for graduate work, for medical school and for scientist positions in industry," he said.

Over the past four years, Winthrop INBRE faculty members have demonstrated a significant track record in winning grants for undergraduate research from non-INBRE sources. Sumter is joined by other chemistry faculty members Cliff Calloway, Jason Hurlbert and Robin Lammi who together have been awarded five major grants totaling more than \$1 million in funding for Winthrop undergraduate research from the National Science Foundation or from the National Institutes of Health, the two major sources of government-sponsored science research.

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