



Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Science Foundation Arizona Collaborates with UA to Open New STEM Teacher Education Resource Center at Biosphere 2

Building Statewide Capacity for high-quality Science, Technology, Engineering and Math Education

Phoenix, Arizona (December 8, 2008) – Science Foundation Arizona (SFaz) has awarded a three-year, \$1.5 million grant to The University of Arizona’s B2 Institute, located at Biosphere 2, to establish a teacher resource and training center that will expand the quality and retention of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) teachers in Arizona. The Phileology Foundation is partnering and providing a matching grant to fully fund the Center.

The Center will enhance and deepen the skills of Arizona STEM educators to ensure their classroom teaching translates to successful graduates who can effectively compete and prosper in the 21st century marketplace. Located at the Biosphere 2 facility in Oracle, the Center is part of the UA’s B2 Institute and is slated to engage more than 300 teachers statewide within three years.

“SFaz is pleased to be part of this effort. The unique nature of the Biosphere 2 gives us an opportunity to provide hands-on research experiences and networking for K-12 teachers that are not currently available,” said William C. Harris, president and CEO of SFaz. “Through SFaz’s newly established STEM Education Center, we will work with the B2 Institute to ensure that this effort thrives and opens doors for students and teachers across our state.”

“The UA is a problem-solving university that seeks to improve the lives of Arizona’s citizens through our education, research and outreach efforts,” said UA President Robert N. Shelton. “I am thrilled that our faculty can help enhance science teacher training and professional development, and I appreciate Science Foundation Arizona’s establishment of this STEM teacher center.”

“Supporting this Center for teacher development and training could not be more timely,” said Darcy Renfro, executive director of the SFaz’s STEM Education Center. “Our goal is to build a world-class education infrastructure to support Arizona’s innovation economy. Without a first class base of professional support for teachers, it will not be possible to continue building a world-class education system.”

The center will provide teachers with:

- Intensive summer programs incorporating research projects, formal lectures and curriculum development.
- Themed weekend coursework for building STEM education content and hands-on classroom curriculum.

- More -

- In partnership with the Arizona K-12 Center, professional coaching, mentoring and ongoing classroom support provided by experienced, master-level math and science teachers.
- A STEM teacher Web site and portal with online resources, toolkits, discussion boards and forums for sharing best practices, professional development and mentoring opportunities.
- Broad-based linking partnerships for educators to access state-of-the-art teacher resources through the UA College of Science, the B2 Institute and B2 Earthscience, and other educational entities.

“Strengthening science and mathematics education must be at the forefront of Arizona’s and the nation’s agenda,” said Joaquin Ruiz, dean of the UA College of Science. The SFAz award recognizes this issue and will provide much-needed programs aimed at recruiting and retaining science and mathematics teachers in our communities.”

An essential feature of the Center’s programs is the role played by veteran teachers in developing and enabling statewide teacher professional development, and the universal support of faculty from all three of Arizona universities needed to bring about systemic change.

“A scientifically literate and technically savvy population is essential to the future of the state of Arizona, and to maintain our quality of life in decades ahead,” said UA Regents’ Professor Pierre Meystre, director of the B2 Institute the one of the researchers heading the Center. “It is central to the health of our democratic system, which asks our citizens to decide on, and understand, increasingly complex issues – for instance the management of explosive population growth in a fragile environment and with limited natural resources.”

Meystre believes that significantly more STEM teachers will be needed in the short- and long-term future. “We see the Center as an important component of that statewide training and retention effort.”

“If the U.S. is to remain competitive in this increasingly global economy we must improve our science literacy,” said Martin Bowen of the Philecology Foundation. “The Center will go a long way toward making that happen by enhancing STEM teacher knowledge and skills.”

Laurie Burrell, a fifth grade teacher in the Amphitheater School District who is co-leading the Center, sees extraordinary opportunities available to K-12 science teachers. “STEM educators across Arizona can now meet at Biosphere 2 to find the support they’ve been looking for thanks to the confidence of the Science Foundation Arizona and an amazing team of dedicated visionaries.” Burrell was named the Arizona Educational Foundation Teacher of the Year in 2007.

About Science Foundation Arizona

With the mission of spurring new innovation in Arizona and developing a diversified, robust knowledge driven research and education infrastructure, SFAz, a 501 (C) (3) public/private partnership, has to date awarded \$33.6 million in 59 innovation investments in communications technology, sustainable systems including renewable energies and biomedicine. In just one year, these investments have demonstrated clear strategic advantages to Arizona by attracting an additional \$43.8 million in outside research dollars, seeding the development of eight new companies, and fostering science, engineering and math skills in over 10,800 students statewide.

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