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SCIENCE FOUNDATION ARIZONA, UNIVERSITIES BRING GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOLARS TOGETHER

Focus on linking industry and education to attract more tech firms to Arizona

(Phoenix, AZ) - Science Foundation Arizona (SFAz), in conjunction with the state's three public universities, is bringing graduate students and local high-tech, knowledge-based companies together this week as part of an overall strategy to build, attract and retain more Arizona-based talent to fill the needs of the 21st Century marketplace. SFAz's Graduate Research Fellows will attend the second annual two-day "Grand Challenges Conference," co-sponsored by Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University and the University of Arizona, which takes place April 12th - 13th.

The conference, being held at the Sheraton Downtown Phoenix, features a host of nationally-recognized speakers and presenters, including: retired CEO and Board Chair for Intel, Craig Barrett, Harvard University Dean Dr. Cherry Murray and Nobel Laureate and President and Director of the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, Dr. Lee Hartwell. Additional speakers include Linda Hunt, President of Catholic Healthcare West and St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center and Dr. Alan Nelson of Arizona State's Biodesign Institute. Dr. Murray, whose speech is titled "Grand Challenges in Information Technology," is scheduled to speak on Monday, April 12th at 1:00 pm; Dr. Hartwell will address the group on Tuesday, April 13th at 9:00 am to discuss "Personalized Medicine: Where Are We and How We Get There?"; and Dr. Nelson will present on lung cancer and its biosignature as a key to early detection.

SFAz's Graduate Research Fellowship program - with 230 participants - is one of the largest of its kind in the country, and is geared toward attracting the best and brightest students in key areas of strategic value to Arizona, critical to bringing more high-tech, innovative industries to the state. The fellowships are awarded through each of the state's universities (for up to two consecutive years, based on performance) to top graduates in science, math and engineering. The universities sponsor the fellows for an additional three years, until the students earn their Ph.D.'s.

"America will succeed in the 21st Century if it is able to excel in all areas of education," said Dr. William C. Harris, President and CEO of SFAz. "Education is key to innovation and new companies are essential for Arizona's future. SFAz has encouraged a new level of aspiration for Arizona's universities — to attract the truly talented young scientists and engineers that normally have gone to places like Stanford and MIT. These students are incredibly talented and they are the seed corn for our future. We are excited by what they are doing and what they will do."

"Google" Internet search was created by graduate students Larry Page and Sergey Brin while the two were post-graduates at Stanford University; in the 1950's, James Watson and student Francis Crick conducted important work that led to the discovery of the structure of DNA. A pipeline of well-educated, research-oriented graduates with advanced degrees will be needed to fill the jobs of the 21st century economy, as well as also to attract high-paying, knowledge-based industries.

Some of the work on which the students focus includes research into disease proteins to design pharmaceuticals, cancer treatments, climate change and sustainability.

“Bringing industry to the table to give these research students exposure to a real world high-tech environment is a key part of what is needed to bring the best and brightest minds to our state, and keep them in Arizona,” said Dr. Len Fine, SFaz Scientific Program Officer. “Industries will always need qualified people, and this is an important step to making it possible for more high-quality students to come to this state and stay after they earn their degrees.”

As part of the conference, students will take part in a poster session competition, in which 50 of the conferees will vie for first place among their peers in presenting their research information in a way that is relevant and easy for the general public to understand. The presentations will be judged by non-scientists, including representatives of Phoenix-area media outlets, businesses and government entities. The top three winners will be announced on Tuesday.

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About Science Foundation Arizona: Science Foundation Arizona (SFaz) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization initiated in 2006 by the Greater Phoenix Leadership Inc., Southern Arizona Leadership Council and the Flagstaff Forty in conjunction with the executive and legislative branches of state government. SFaz serves as a catalyst for high-wage, knowledge-based jobs and economic diversity through administration and strict oversight of research, development and education grants to public education and other non-profit research performing institutions. For more information, visit www.sfaz.org.