

Northwestern Research Newsletter

February 2009

Volume 1, Number 2

Falk Center Acts as New Model for Treating Brain Disorders

With one foot in McCormick and another foot inside the entrepreneurial world, it seems rather fitting that the Falk Center for Molecular Therapeutics is located just off-campus inside the ITEC Building on the corner of Maple Ave. and Clark St. on the Evanston campus. The Center is close enough to the University to take advantage of all of the resources that an academic community has to offer, while staying relatively independent.

"I didn't just want to be an entrepreneur with the main goal of getting rich. And I didn't just want to be a professor because I didn't think I'd be able to make a product that way," says Joseph R. Moskal, professor of biomedical engineering and director of the Falk Center. "I wanted to create a new 'hybrid' model of a translational research institute."

Moskal brought an already well-established, stand-alone institute to Northwestern nearly six years ago. Now the University acts as an administrative umbrella, while allowing Moskal to continue to seek outside support from the private sector and funding that is not available for non-profits. Accompanying Moskal and his Center were his research team and intellectual property.

With Northwestern's new alliance with Baxter Healthcare Corporation, Moskal's group hopes to receive funding to help his drug-discoveries for brain disorders enter human clinical trials.

"Support from Baxter would go a long way as proof of concept that this new Center model does work," Moskal says.

He has completed the research and development for a novel class of learning and memory enhancers for treating Alzheimer's patients and continues research and development for two other projects: a new approach for creating novel antidepressants based on resilience to depression models and a novel, gene-based therapeutic for the treatment of brain tumors. All three programs are the result of a molecular therapeutic approach, which involves investigating the changes in gene expression in various model systems and validating them using both test tube and animal models.

For example, when examining brain cancer, instead of looking at the structure and trying to fix it, Moskal figured out what genes turned on the enzymes to cause the cells to mutate and invade. Then by altering the enzyme activities through gene manipulations, he found that the cells no longer became invasive.

Story continued on the next page >>



Joseph Moskal stands in his laboratory at the Falk Center for Molecular Therapeutics, next to an oligonucleotide synthesizer, which is used to create probes for measuring messenger RNA expression in cells and tissues.

Photograph by Amanda Morris

In this issue:

Falk Center Acts as New Model	1
Shea, Woodruff Have Top Paper	2
Doors Open at Core Facilities	2
Honors Corner	2
Spotlight on Keck Biophysics Facility	3
Instrument Shop Creates Device for NASA	4
OSR in National Academies' Report	4
Proposal and Award Reports	4
Trimuel Day Set for March 3	5
Six Students Receive Conference Travel Grants	5
Center and Faculty Notes	6
Research in the News	6
Research Administration Training Seminar	7
Training Calendar	7
Grants.gov Slowdown	8
iBio IndEx Registration	8
OR Annual Report Available Online	8

>> *Falk Center: continued from Page 1*

"I have a background in developmental neurobiology, which means examining normal brain behavior," says Moskal. "So, to me, cancer is development gone awry."

After working on these projects for the past 30 years, Moskal is excited to have reached the cusp where these treatments have been successful in animal testing and are moving to the next level. His tool for improving learning and memory has recently received Investigational New Drug approval by the FDA.

"The memory enhancers will be useful for delaying memory loss due to Alzheimer's disease and may even have real interesting importance in schizophrenia as well," he says.

It is this practical approach to research that Moskal values the most -- creating therapeutics with real potential to treat devastating diseases.

"Our Center is aimed at something practical," he says. "My favorite scientist is Thomas Edison, not Albert Einstein. I'd like to make a 'lightbulb' rather than develop a new theory. I am perspiration oriented, not inspiration oriented."

Moskal intends that if the funds arrive from patenting and marketing his drug discoveries, then they will cycle back into the Falk Center to finance research for even more novel therapies.

For more information about molecular therapeutics and the Falk Center, please visit <http://falk.mccormick.northwestern>.

Honors Corner

Kimberly A. Gray, civil and environmental engineering, has been named one of **Sigma Xi's distinguished lecturers** for 2009-10.

Chad A. Mirkin, chemistry and biomedical engineering, was elected a member of the **National Academy of Engineering**.

Dale T. Mortensen, economics, was one of three economists chosen as **distinguished fellows** of the American Economics Association in 2008.

Jennifer Richeson, psychology and Center for Technology and Social Behavior, is the 2009 recipient of the American Psychological Association **Distinguished Scientific Award for Early Career Contribution**.

Nitasha Sharma, African American Studies and Asian American Studies, was named one of 2009's **"emerging scholars"** by *Diverse Education* magazine.

Cynthia Thompson, communication sciences and disorders and neurology, received the **2008 Editor's Award** from the *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*.

Nature: Shea, Woodruff Have Top Paper



Nature Medicine polled 40 experts to ask which papers have provided the most interesting advances in reproduction research over the past three or four years. A 2006 publication by **Institute for Bionanotechnology in Medicine (IBNAM)** members Lonnie Shea, chemical and biological engineering, and Teresa Woodruff, obstetrics and gynecology, along with their colleagues Min Xu and Pamela Kreeger, received top honors. This work grew out of a 2001-02 IBNAM Incubator Award for the project "*In Vitro* Maturation of Primary Ovarian Follicles." The full *Nature Medicine* article can be found [here](#).
Photograph by Sam Levitan

Doors Open at Core Facilities



Graduate students, post-docs, and research faculty visited presentation booths at the First Annual Research Facilities Fair held Wednesday, Jan. 28, on the Chicago campus. "The goal is to give visibility to the various shared facilities at Northwestern, so people will know what's available and how to take advantage of them," says Philip E. Hockberger, director of core facilities. Twenty cores were on display and offered various information as well as ways for attendees to sign up for facility open houses.

A similar fair showcasing Evanston's core facilities will take place Tuesday, March 24 from 10 a.m. to noon in the second floor lobby of the Pancoe Life Sciences Building. Open houses will follow from noon to 3 p.m. For more information, please visit the [Core Facilities web site](#). *Photograph courtesy of Philip E. Hockberger*

Spotlight on Keck Biophysics Facility

"Who am I?" long has been one of those unanswerable philosophical questions that people pose to themselves when exploring their identity. But finding out just who we are is more than an examination of ideals, thoughts, and values. We can also discover what makes us tick by examining our very own physical make-up at the molecular and even atomic level. Moreover, understanding the molecular basis of life not only tells us about ourselves, but also about how to understand and effectively treat disease.

The [Keck Biophysics Facility](#) on the Evanston campus is home to a variety of state-of-the-art instruments that perform spectroscopy, gel imaging, and analytical experiments to help researchers learn more about the basic fundamentals of life. (See complete listing of the instruments below.)

Instruments at Keck

Spectroscopy:

Circular Dichroism Spectrometer
Fluorescence Plate Reader
Frequency Domain Fluorescence Spectrometer
Fluorescence Polarization Steady State Fluorescence Spectrometer
Stopped-flow Spectrometer
UV/VIS DAD Spectrometer
UV/VIS/NIR Spectrophotometer

Gel Imaging:

Kodak Gel Imaging System
Storm Phosphoimager/Fluorimager

Analytical:

Differential Scanning Calorimeter
Isothermal Titration Calorimeter
HPLC
Rapid Quench Flow Instrument
Dynamic Light Scattering Instrument
Analytical Ultracentrifuge

Other:

Isoelectric Focusing Gel Electrophoresis
Fermentor 1.25L, 15L
Real Time PCR
Rotor Type 45Ti

"Any one instrument typically reports back on one tiny aspect of a molecular property or interaction, but that's only a small part of the story," says Jonathan Widom, biochemistry, molecular biology and cell biology, and director of the facility. "You quickly find that you need a set of instruments to get a fuller picture."

So when Northwestern appealed to the W.M. Keck Foundation for a grant to start the facility in 1998, it requested – and received – all 20 instruments that it still has today. The instruments are located in two equipment rooms on the fourth floor of Cook Hall, occupying a total of 2,040 square feet and serving nearly 300 users every year representing approximately 60 to 70 different research groups from Northwestern and other academic and non-academic institutions in and around Chicago.

"The facility is one of the best in the country," says Widom. "We have visits and letters from people from many different universities asking how to build something like this and how to make it work."

While the state-of-the-art instruments certainly set Keck apart from similar facilities at other institutions, facilities manager Arabela Grigorescu adds that it is also important to ensure that it stays affordable and accessible for its users. Grigorescu and her small staff offer individualized, hands-on training as well as sponsor workshops and seminars on new methodologies.

"We want to provide outstanding services in individual training for the equipment, but we also want to provide focused expertise, counseling, and assistance for our users," says Grigorescu, who works with a small staff to oversee the daily operations.

Because the instruments are funded by the University and outside grants, researchers have to pay only a small fee to help recover costs of maintenance and personnel. Payments and reservations of equipment can all be completed through an online system.



(above) Jonathan Widom sits in his office in Cook Hall. Photograph by Jill Carlson. (below) Arabela Grigorescu. Photograph courtesy of Arabela Grigorescu.

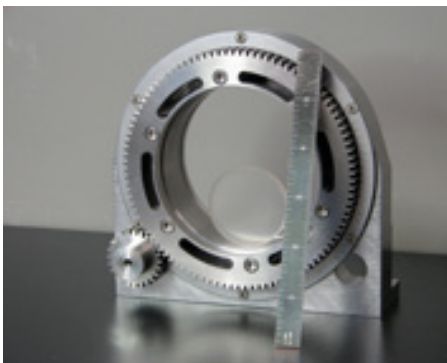


Grigorescu says that the biggest challenge is ensuring that the facility stays current and that older instruments stay upgraded. She is currently applying for a gel scanner capable of scanning gels with fluorescent molecules, which will allow users to characterize the multiprotein machines that carry out most of the cell's functions, and the protein-nucleic acid complexes that regulate the cell's genes. She plans to submit the application to the National Institutes of Health next month.

"We try to accommodate a variety of projects," she says. "When people come in, I like to ask what project they're working on, and I'm always amazed by the interesting things they're doing."

"We have an excellent staff to keep the instruments running and teach new users how to use them, so people here are really limited only by imagination," Widom says.

Instrument Shop Creates Device for NASA Balloon



A cryogenic rotator (top) has been built in Northwestern's [Instrument Shop](#) for the [BLAST-pol](#) experiment to which Giles Novak, physics and astronomy, and his lab are contributing. BLAST-pol, which stands for Balloon-borne large aperture submillimeter telescope plus polarimeter, is scheduled for launch in December from McMurdo station in Antarctica, and will create large area maps of polarized emission from magnetically aligned dust grains in galactic star-forming clouds.

BLAST-pol is a polarimetric upgrade to BLAST, which was successfully flown from McMurdo in 2006 (lower image).

Novak and his group hope to learn more about the role that the Milky Way Galaxy's magnetic field plays in the process of stellar birth. BLAST-pol will produce three-color polarization maps covering the entire extent of each cloud, with high enough resolution to map fields deep in cloud cores.

The rotator will hold BLAST-pol's four-inch diameter multi-layer crystal polarization modulator that is being built at Cardiff University in Wales. It operates at 4 degrees above absolute zero.

Novak's research group previously has developed a similar polarimeter for use at the South Pole. The clear disk in the upper photo is the crystal modulator used in this polarimeter, which was called [SPARO](#) (Submillimeter Polarimeter for Antarctic Remote Observing). SPARO was operational at the South Pole station during 1999-2004 and exploited the exceptional transparency of the polar skies to carry out observations that are now guiding the BLAST-pol plans.



Photographs courtesy of Giles Novak

OSR Named in National Academies' Report

Susan Ross, director of the Office for Sponsored Research in Evanston, participated in a workshop for the Partnerships for Emerging Research Institutions that resulted in Northwestern's mention in the National Academies' report. With the help of Doug Medin, psychology, Ross and Adam Kessel, also psychology, described Northwestern's collaborative research with the American Indian Center (AIC) of Chicago on a National Science Foundation (NSF) project.

The project examined the cultural context of Native American science education. Kessel, affiliated with the AIC, focused on the benefits of building capacity to complete new research in a Native American community. Ross discussed the process of creating and supporting the necessary administrative infrastructure that enabled the AIC to apply for and receive awards directly from the NSF.

The full text of Northwestern's mention in the report can be read on the National Academies Press [web site](#).



Native American youth visit the Indiana Dunes as a part of the 2007 Urban Explorers Program. Photograph courtesy of Adam Kessel.

Proposal and Award Reports through Dec. 2008

The total amount of award funding received this fiscal year through December 2008 is \$94.3 million, according to the Office for Sponsored Research.

The dollar volume of awards to Weinberg increased by 38% (\$2.5 million), while awards to the Research Centers and Institutes grew by 26% (\$1.9 million). The School of Law and McCormick awards also rose by 373% (\$1.1 million) and 1% (\$0.1 million) respectively. The dollar volume of awards to Feinberg decreased by 12% (\$7.9 million).

For more details and a complete breakdown of numbers, please visit the OSR [web site](#) to find the monthly reports. All visitors are required to have a valid Northwestern user NetID and password to log in.

Mayor Daley Declares “Trimuel Day” March 3

Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley proclaimed an official day to recognize the parents of Damien Trimuel, Office for Research, Planning, Finance, and Communication; and aunt and uncle of Latonia Trimuel, Office for Research Development; Joan Trimuel, Office of Financial Operations; and Sheree Trimuel, Weinberg Administration. “Fred Trimuel, B&G Heinz Pharmacy Day” will take place on March 3 to honor Fred and Allie Trimuel for their 40 years of service to the community.

After graduating from the University of Illinois at Chicago, Fred Trimuel took a job at B&G Heinz Pharmacy in 1968, later buying the small business in 1975 with his wife, Allie. The pharmacy quickly earned a loyal customer base in the Morgan Park neighborhood and became a strong fixture in the community. The family business was most recently profiled on ABC7’s “Someone You Should Know” segment. ([Click here to view the segment.](#))

Six Students Receive Conference Travel Grants

Since the start of the 2008-09 academic year, six students have received [Undergraduate Research Conference Travel Grants](#) from the [Office of the Provost](#). The award covers half of the total conference expenses, providing that the student will present a paper or poster at an academic conference hosted by a recognized scholarly organization and that the student’s name appears on the conference abstract as the primary presenter. The recipients are Ellen Abrams, Andrés Carrasquillo, Begum Dora, Samantha Gitelis, Rebecca Fischer, and Eric Kramer. *Photographs used courtesy of respective students.*



Ellen Abrams, sophomore
Major: Engineering
Research: Catholicism in Brazil
Conference: International Association of Intercultural Communication Studies



Andrés Carrasquillo, junior
Major: Creative writing
Research: Mourning practices on Facebook
Conference: American Academy of Religion 2008 Annual Meeting



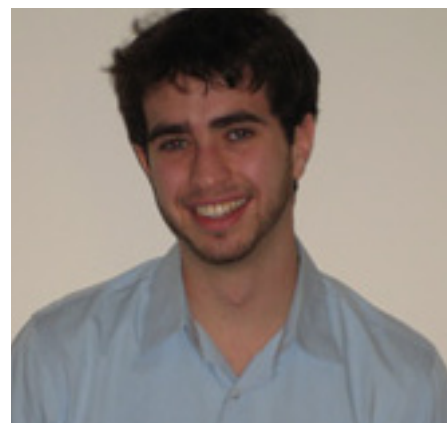
Begum Dora, senior
Major: Psychology, International Studies
Research: Development of quantity discrimination in infants
Conference: Society of Research in Child Development



Samantha Gitelis, senior
Major: Psychology
Research: Hemodynamic response in infants
Conference: Society of Research in Child Development



Rebecca Fischer, senior
Major: Integrated science, Earth and Planetary Sciences
Research: Wustite in the Earth’s core
Conference: 2008 American Geophysical Union Fall Meeting



Eric Kramer, senior
Major: Integrated science, mathematics
Research: Metabolic networks across a population
Conference: 13th Annual International RECOMB Conference

Center and Faculty Notes...

Luis Amaral, chemical and biological engineering, and **Daniel Diermeier**, managerial economics and decision sciences, have created a model of how prices fluctuate in prediction markets – a model that could eventually be used to tell how certain events affect the outcomes of elections. [Full Story](#)

Camilia Kuhnen, finance, and **Joan Chiao**, psychology, conducted a study that links specific variants of genes to risk-taking in financial investment decisions. [Full Story](#)

Richard Burt, immunotherapy, led a clinical trial that appeared to have reversed the neurological dysfunction of early-stage multiple sclerosis patients by transplanting their own immune stem cells into their bodies and thereby “resetting” their immune systems. [Full Story](#)

After spending 15 years investigating and identifying causes of endometriosis, **Serdar Bulun**, obstetrics and gynecology, and his colleagues have discovered key epigenetic abnormalities in the disease and identified existing chemicals that now help treat it. [Full Story](#)

Mercouri G. Kanatzidis, chemistry, and his team have developed a class of new porous materials that are effective at separating hydrogen from complex gas mixtures. [Full Story](#)

William Klein, neurobiology and physiology, authored a study reporting that insulin may slow or prevent the damage and memory loss caused by toxic proteins in Alzheimer’s disease. [Full Story](#)

Mary M. McDermott, general internal medicine, led a study published in *JAMA* showing that exercise improves walking endurance for people with peripheral arterial disease. [Full Story](#)

Ken Paller, psychology, led a study reporting that lucky guesses are linked to valid, unconscious memories. [Full Story](#)

Tanya Simuni, neurology, and researchers at Northwestern Memorial Hospital are conducting a study to determine if a fading sense of smell signals Parkinson’s disease. [Full Story](#)

Nelson Spruston, neurobiology and physiology, and his research team published a new study in *Neuron* reporting a discovery of a new cellular mechanism that could be critical to the formation of memories in the hippocampus. [Full Story](#)

Northwestern Research In the News, Jan. 14 - Feb. 18

Robert Bonow, cardiology, discussed the ability of prescribed statins to reduce death from cardiovascular disease in *Time*.

James Brown, anthropology, discussed underwater stones in Lake Michigan in the *Chicago Tribune*.

Paul Bryce’s, allergy, mouse model that mimics symptoms of humans who have an allergic reaction to peanuts was subject of an article by *United Press International*.

Sedar Bulun’s, obstetrics and gynecology, study about the cause and identification of endometriosis was the topic of an article by *United Press International*.

Richard Burt, immunotherapy, discussed stem cell treatments for multiple sclerosis in *Reuters*, *Bloomberg*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Agence France Press*, *UPI*, *Washington Post*, and *CBS News*, as well as various local television news outlets.

Martha Daviglus, preventive medicine, discussed ways to avoid a heart attack in *Forbes*.

Gary Alan Fine, sociology, discussed the benefits of gossip in the *Chicago Tribune*.

Richard Fessler, neurological surgery, discussed the FDA approval of embryonic stem cell human trials in *United Press International* and *Chicago Tribune*.

Loren Ghiglione, journalism, wrote an article featured on the *History News Network* web site about writing a biography of CBS’s Don Hollenbeck.

The **Herskovits Library’s** collection of Barack Obama paraphernalia was mentioned in the *Huffington Post*.

Dean Ho, biomedical engineering, explained his research on nanodiamonds on *National Geographic’s* “Known Universe.”

Yonggang Huang’s, civil and environmental engineering, research into flexible materials in technology circuits was discussed in *Popular Science* magazine and *United Press International*.

John C. Hudson, anthropology, discussed reasons why people choose to live in colder climates in the *Chicago Tribune*.

John Kessler, neurology, discussed the world’s first test in people of a therapy derived from human embryonic stem cells in *The New York Times*.

Stephen Kinzer, political science, had an op-ed in *The Guardian* about Obama’s relationship with Iran.

Camilia Kuhnen, finance, and **Joan Chiao’s**, psychology, research on linking genes to risk-taking in financial decisions was referenced in *Reuters*, *BBC*, and *Scientific American*.

Mary McDermott, general internal, discussed the benefits that walking has for arteries in *Washington Post* and *Reuters*.

Chad Mirkin, chemistry, and **Shad Thaxton’s**, urology, development of a synthetic form of good cholesterol was subject of an article by *Reuters* and in *U.S. News and World Report*.

Aldon Morris, sociology, discussed the comparison of Barack Obama to Martin Luther King, Jr. in the *Chicago Sun-Times*.

A **Northwestern study** about walking robots was mentioned in *Scientific American*.

Ken Paller’s, psychology, study about lucky guesses was the subject of an article in *Scientific American*.

Tina Tan’s, pediatrics, study about a whooping cough vaccine for new mothers was topic of an article in *USA Today*.

Shad Thaxton, urology, talked about metabolite biomarkers in *Chemical and Engineering News*.

Robert Vassar, cell and molecular biology, discussed Alzheimer’s and blood flow to the brain in *USA Today*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *Reuters* and *UPI*.

Joel Voss’, psychology, study about subliminal messages was the subject of an article in *New Scientist*.

Laurie Zoloth, bioethics, discussed human testing of embryonic stem cells in the *Washington Post*.

Research Administration Training Seminar

The Office for Research Integrity offers a four-session seminar -- held on a quarterly basis -- geared toward research administrators and staff involved in research administration. The next seminar will be held at the end of February and early March. Participants are encouraged to attend all four sessions. While the seminar is free, registration is required.

Please contact the Office for Research Integrity to reserve a seat at nu-ori@northwestern.edu or (312) 503-0054. For more information, visit the ORI [web site](#).

Dates and topics include:

Tuesday, Feb. 24, 9 - 11 a.m.

Research roles and responsibilities
Research policies and procedures overview

Thursday, Feb. 26, 9 - 11 a.m.

Grant charging overview
Cost-sharing
F&A rate
Cost transfers
Program income
Recharge centers
Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

Tuesday, March 3, 9 - 11 a.m.

Center for Comparative Medicine
Proposal submission and endorsements
Budgeting
Effort reporting

Thursday, March 5, 9 - 11 a.m.

Released funds
Pre-spending, grants vs. gifts
Contract and consulting
Travel and inventory policies
Award establishment, monitoring and close-out
Conflicts of interest
Scientific misconduct
U.S. export control laws and working with industry

Training Calendar

Chicago

Radiological Emergency Management
Wednesday, Feb. 18, 1 – 2 p.m.
Montgomery Ward Building

Hazardous Waste Management
Thursday, March 5, 1 – 2 p.m.
Montgomery Ward Building

Lab Safety and Personal Protective Equipment Training
Thursday, March 5, 10 – 11:30 a.m.
Montgomery Ward Building

CRC Basic Training
March 9, 10, and 11, 8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Abbott Hall

Advanced Laser Operator Training
Wednesday, March 11, 1 – 2 p.m.
Montgomery Ward Building

Bloodborne Pathogens Training
Tuesday, March 17, 10 – 11:30 a.m.
Montgomery Ward Building

Safe Shipping of Biological Materials
Tuesday, March 17, 2 – 4:30 p.m.
Montgomery Ward Building

Evanston

Radiological Emergency Management
Thursday, Feb. 19, 1 – 2 p.m.
Technological Institute

Hazardous Waste Management
Tuesday, March 3, 2 – 3 p.m.
Technological Institute

Radiological Surveys by Laboratory Personnel
March 4 and 5, 1 – 2 p.m.
Technological Institute

Safe Shipping of Biological Materials
Tuesday, March 10, 2 – 4:30 p.m.
Technological Institute

Bloodborne Pathogens Training
Tuesday, March 10, 10 – 11:30 a.m.
Technological Institute

Advanced Laser Operator Training
Thursday, March 12, 1 – 2 p.m.
Technological Institute

Lab Safety and Personal Protective Equipment Training
Thursday, March 12, 2 – 3:30 a.m.
Technological Institute

For a complete schedule of events and details, please visit www.research.northwestern.edu/events

Grants.gov Slowdown

Northwestern researchers attempting to access Grants.gov to post applications for grants funding ran into problems as the February 5 NIH deadline approached.

The Grants.gov blog reported that an ice storm in Texas, a phone outage in Kentucky, and limited capacity slowed the ability of the system to accept submissions in late January. OSR grant and contracts officers waited for hours for grants submissions to go through the electronic process the night of the deadline even though weather and phone problems had subsided. The NIH showed some leniency toward those who had difficulty submitting their proposals on time for the February 5 NIH deadline, and OSR staff managed to get every proposal submitted.

Susan Ross, director of the Office for Sponsored Research on the Evanston campus, commented that capacity and system speed have been problematic throughout the past year. "Unfortunately, those who are submitting to the Department of Defense and other federal agencies should not expect the same kind of leniency the NIH offered if their proposal submissions are delayed due to Grants.gov technical problems. DOD is especially inflexible," said Ross.

Site rebuilding over the Feb. 7–8 weekend was intended to add capacity to a system that previously allowed just 200 users at a time so that up to 2,000 users could concurrently access the system. "OSR was prepared for the February delays and we informed the faculty as much as possibly could, which is why things turned out so well in February," said Bruce Elliott, Chicago director of the Office for Sponsored Research. "Our next big deadline is March 5, and we advise faculty that, in order to reduce concern, they should get their proposals in early."

Grants.gov is a central storehouse for information on more than 1,000 federal grant programs and provides access to approximately \$500 billion in annual awards. Submission for these grants is required through Grants.gov. Daily system status is posted on the blog: <http://grants-gov.blogspot.com/>.



Come listen to Northwestern faculty members and learn about the life sciences at the Illinois Biotechnology Industry Organization's annual iBIO IndEx. The all-day event takes place Wednesday, March 18, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at the [Hyatt Regency Chicago](#).

Speakers include James Greenwood, Mark Ratner, J. Fraser Stoddart, Jack Kessler, Douglas Losordo, and Miles D. White. There also will be networking sessions and business panels.

For more information, please visit the [iBIO web site](#).

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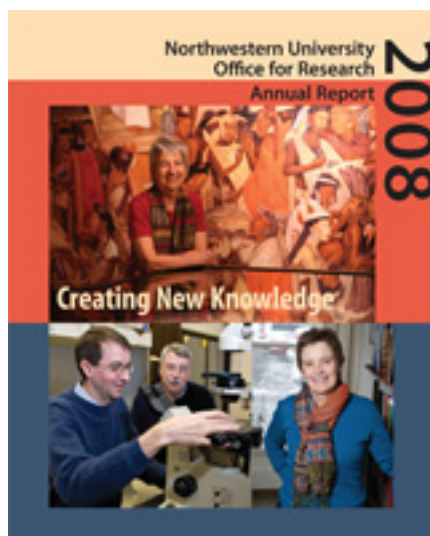
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The Office for Research 2008 Annual Report is now available online. In this issue: A letter from the Vice President, faculty awards and recognition, 28 faculty members present their excellence in research, and proposal and award data. [Click here to visit the web site and download the PDF.](#)



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