

# HIGHER ED MATTERS

Utah System of Higher Education, May 2012

## Building the State's Innovation Infrastructure



James L. Sorenson Molecular Biotechnology Building at the University of Utah



USTAR BioInnovations Center at Utah State University

The State of Utah made a significant commitment to the future prosperity of the state when the Utah State Legislature adopted SB 75, creating the Utah Science Technology and Research Initiative (USTAR). Sponsored in 2006 by then Senate President Al Mansell, the bill authorized state funding support for two buildings at the heart of USTAR's efforts to transform the state's economy: the James L. Sorenson Molecular Biotechnology Building at the University of Utah and its sister facility, the USTAR BioInnovations Center at Utah State University. These structures mark the beginning of a new era of interdisciplinary translational research, scientific discovery and technology commercialization.

The 208,000-square-foot Sorenson building was dedicated April 19, 2012, and is the new home of the Brain Institute, the Nano Institute and the Department of Bioengineering. It also houses USTAR faculty researchers, junior faculty, and administrative and laboratory personnel. The building contains a wet

lab, cleanroom space, a microscopy suite, research computing space, faculty offices, meeting rooms and public areas designed to promote interaction between the scientific community and industry.

A similar story surrounds the 118,000-square-foot USTAR BioInnovations Center. This multidisciplinary facility houses the Synthetic Bio-Manufacturing Center, the Center for Human Nutrition Studies, the Veterinary Diagnostics and Infectious Disease team, and other research teams studying life science and renewable energy.

"Through the USTAR initiative we are crossing traditional boundaries to accelerate research at the interfaces of medicine, pharmacy, engineering, computer science and life sciences," said Dinesh Patel, PhD, a Salt Lake City-based venture capitalist and chairman of the USTAR Governing Authority.

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Michael O'Malley contributed to this article.

## Utah at the Bottom for Student Debt

A report by the Project on Student Debt ranks Utah as the lowest state in the nation for debt upon graduation. The average debt for graduates in Utah is \$15,509



versus the national average of \$25,250 (ProjectOnStudentDebt.org). The Project also reports that less than half of Utah graduates (44%) leave college with outstanding student loans, compared to two-thirds of college graduates nationally.

“This is one area in which we are proud to come in last,” said Commissioner of Higher Education Bill Sederburg. “Undoubtedly a major factor is support by the Legislature, which makes our colleges more affordable than many in the nation.” For instance, the top state for student debt in the nation, New Hampshire, at an average of \$31,048, also receives the lowest state support per personal income in the country for their public colleges and universities (Grapevine.org).

Wise use of debt can be prudent if it helps students graduate sooner and thus be able to boost their earnings more quickly. The worst scenario is to start college, accumulate debt, and then not finish.

## Save on 5•29 College Savings Day

*The Utah Educational Savings Plan encourages Utah families to start saving for higher education expenses on 5•29 College Savings Day.*



**Utah Educational Savings Plan®**  
uesp.org

On May 29, the Utah Educational Savings Plan (UESP), Utah’s official nonprofit Section 529 plan, is celebrating National 5•29 College Savings Day. On that day, UESP hopes to increase awareness among Utah families about the importance of saving for their children’s future higher education expenses. In support of National 5•29 College Savings Day, UESP will match contributions of at least \$25 to new UESP accounts opened on Tuesday, May 29, 2012. Go to [uesp.org/ForUtahResidents/529Day](http://uesp.org/ForUtahResidents/529Day) for more details.