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S P O K A N E

GU exploring run at bio-tech research

[Rob McDonald](#) - Staff writer

Gonzaga University could be entering the world of bio-tech research, an arena that has traditionally been the domain of state schools such as Washington State University and the University of Washington.

The private, Jesuit-run school has signed an agreement to pursue creating an Institute of Systems Biology with one of Washington's more prominent technology leaders and a California scientist who was director of the Human Genome Project.

"This is a remarkable first step," said Lewis Rumpler, CEO of INTEC, an organization that helped facilitate the agreement. "These two fellows are two of the most eminent life scientists in the world."

Leroy Hood is president of the Institute of Systems Biology in Seattle. David Galas, CEO of the Keck Institute in Claremont, Calif., directed the Human Genome Project and created the Keck Institute.

In a prepared statement, GU's president, the Rev. Robert Spitzer, said Gonzaga has agreed to "collaborate" with Hood and a California institute to explore the possibility of developing an institute of systems biology." Spitzer could not be reached for comment.

Systems biology studies disease and treatments through a variety of fields, including engineering, technology, computer science and biology. Hood has emerged as a leader of the systems biology field, according to the GU release.

Last fall at a Spokane Area Chamber of Commerce meeting, Hood told about 1,000 Spokane business leaders that they need to fashion a strong economic vision to carve out their place in biotechnology and biomedical research. Now Hood may be helping Spokane develop that vision.

"A whole lot of things need to be done before we get there," Rumpler said.

A scientific focus, governance and funding issues still need to be worked out, Rumpler said.

"Is it going to be a success? Clearly, none of us know," Rumpler said. "It's the beginning of the story."

The good news is that the involvement of Hood and Galas brings instant credibility to potential investors, Rumpler said. "In the scientific world, when you're trying to do science, you're going to need to have big names."

GU, Keck Institute and Hood's Institute of Systems Biology will begin collaborating this summer to evaluate the region's scientific assets.