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Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute at FAU and University of North Carolina Wilmington to Jointly Lead NOAA's Cooperative Institute for Ocean Exploration, Research and Technology

Institute will be headquartered at HBOI and co-managed with UNCW to address NOAA's research and development priorities.

BOCA RATON, FL (May 12, 2009) – The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has announced a five-year, \$22.5 million award of a new cooperative institute which will be headquartered at Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute (HBOI) at Florida Atlantic University in Fort Pierce, Florida, and co-managed by the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW). This is the single largest competitive research grant awarded to HBOI/FAU since their inception. The Cooperative Institute for Ocean Exploration, Research, and Technology is a consortium; limited partners are SRI International in St. Petersburg, Florida, and the University of Miami, Rosentiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science in Miami, Florida. The consortium will coordinate the work and resources of all of the member organizations for the purpose of advancing NOAA's priorities.

“This is an important day for Harbor Branch, Florida Atlantic University, our partners and the coastal ocean of the eastern seaboard,” said Dr. John Pritchett, university provost and chief academic officer of FAU. “This cooperative institute will advance ocean science, gather the information necessary to formulate better policies and improve the process of innovation.”

The new institute will conduct research under three main themes: development of advanced underwater technologies, exploration and research of frontier regions of the eastern continental shelf and beyond, and improved understanding of deep and shallow coral ecosystems. NOAA's Office of Ocean Exploration and Research will be the institute's primary NOAA partner, which will replace the four east coast centers of NOAA's Undersea Research Program.

“We are thrilled by this opportunity to enter into an equal partnership with FAU, taking full

advantage of the specific areas of expertise and research strengths of both institutions,” said Dr. Steve McFarland, vice provost at UNCW. “UNCW has had a strong, productive relationship with NOAA for many years. This partnership provides us with even greater opportunities to leverage the leadership, innovation and ocean research expertise of UNCW’s Center for Marine Science and FAU’s Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute to support areas of NOAA interest.”

Dr. Shirley A. Pomponi from HBOI/FAU will serve as the executive director and co-principal investigator of the institute and Dr. Daniel Baden from UNCW will serve as the managing director and co-principal investigator. Baden is the William R. Kenan Jr. Distinguished Professor of Marine Sciences and director of the UNCW Center for Marine Science, home to 35 faculty members who collaborate to foster a multidisciplinary approach to questions in basic marine research. **Pomponi has been with HBOI since 1984, most recently as the executive director. She has been instrumental in the institution’s drug discovery program and has led numerous research expeditions.**

“We are extremely proud of the contributions and research expertise of these exceptional scientists from FAU and UNCW,” said Pritchett. “This was a highly competitive national award and thanks to their efforts and commitment, our two organizations, working together with our partners, will be in the forefront of ocean exploration and helping to advance products and tools that enhance NOAA’s operational mission.”

Collaboration on this joint effort with FAU and UNCW started with a serendipitous, initial dialogue between Pritchett and McFarland, who were former colleagues at Auburn University. The two co-principal investigators also have a long history, having been graduate students together at the University of Miami in the 1970s; Pomponi at RSMAS, and Baden at the School of Medicine. UNCW and FAU brainstormed and explored the possibility of pursuing this important project jointly. As a result, the proposal submitted by FAU and UNCW was selected from among a pool of top contenders to spearhead the institute.

“We expect some exciting things from NOAA’s newest cooperative institute, such as discoveries that further our knowledge of the ocean along our East Coast and the development of advanced underwater technologies,” said Dr. Richard Spinrad, NOAA assistant administrator for oceanic and atmospheric research. “Those discoveries and technologies will help resource managers deliver value to society in terms of ocean products and protections.”

The cooperative institute will use the oceanographic expertise of UNCW, HBOI, SRI International, and the University of Miami to identify breakthrough technologies and processes that will be vetted and developed through a multitude of “Notion to Ocean” © paradigms including the innovation process invented, perfected and practiced by SRI International.

Each of the 22 cooperative institutes are NOAA-supported, non-federal organizations that have established an exceptional research program in one or more areas relevant to the agency's mission. The institutes collaborate with NOAA scientists on long-term research topics, provide significant coordination of resources among all nongovernment partners, and promote the involvement of students and postdoctoral scientists in NOAA-funded research. Institutes also benefit from funding stability, allowing them to support and expand their research and educational missions.

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About Harbor Branch at FAU:

Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute at Florida Atlantic University is a research institute dedicated to exploration, innovation, conservation, and education related to the oceans. Harbor Branch was founded in 1971 as a private non-profit organization. In December 2007, Harbor Branch joined Florida Atlantic University. The institute specializes in ocean engineering, at-sea operations, drug discovery and biotechnology from the oceans, coastal ecology and conservation, marine mammal research and conservation, aquaculture, and marine education. For more information, visit www.hboi.fau.edu.

About the University of North Carolina Wilmington:

The University of North Carolina Wilmington is a comprehensive public master's university focused on high quality teaching, research, and outreach. UNCW offers bachelor's degrees in 52 majors, 35 master's degrees, a Ph.D. in marine biology, and an Ed.D. in educational leadership. For the eleventh consecutive year, UNCW is ranked among the top ten public master's universities in the South by U.S. News and World Report. The Center for Marine Science at UNCW promotes basic and applied research in the fields of oceanography, coastal and wetland studies, marine biomedical and environmental physiology, and marine biotechnology and aquaculture.