Approved by the Board of Trustees

March 28, 2024

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Board Meeting

March 28, 2024

# ESTABLISH THE BILL AND JULIE KELLNER CENTER

# FOR NEUROGENOMICS, BEHAVIOR AND SOCIETY, CARL R. WOESE INSTITUTE FOR GENOMIC BIOLOGY, URBANA

**Action:** Establish the Bill and Julie Kellner Center for Neurogenomics, Behavior and Society, Carl R. Woese Institute for Genomic Biology

**Funding:** Gift Funds

The chancellor, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and vice president, University of Illinois System, recommends approval of a proposal from the director of the Carl R. Woese Institute for Genomic Biology to establish the Bill and Julie Kellner Center for Neurogenomics, Behavior and Society in the Carl R. Woese Institute for Genomic Biology.

Twenty years ago, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Swanlund Chair and Director of the Carl R. Woese Institute for Genomic Biology (IGB) Gene Robinson made pioneering discoveries in his laboratory with honeybees revealing that social experience can change the genome. Emphasizing the shared substrates of behavior in animals and humans, Robinson used this pioneering discovery to illuminate the enduring nature-nurture conflict in human behavior. In 2011, Robinson and his colleague Professor Alison Bell wrote a thought piece in *Science* to formalize the concept of the socially responsive brain “dynamic genome.”

The research paradigm of using genomics to study naturally occurring animal behavior pioneered by Robinson has flourished, now with many dynamic genome examples across the animal kingdom. This paradigm has led to the recent discovery that genes do not influence behavior deterministically, but rather operate in the brain as part of complex gene regulatory networks. Thanks to Robinson, Bell, and others, the discipline of neuroscience has now added neurogenomics along with more traditional areas such as neurophysiology and neuroanatomy as an important area of study to better understand how the brain controls behavior.

The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign continues to be a leader in neurogenomics, with a pioneering interdisciplinary team of neuroscientists, geneticists, animal behaviorists, and computational genomicists. The Gene Networks in Neural and Developmental Plasticity theme (GNDP) led by Professor Bell is one of 15 research themes at the IGB, an institute dedicated to using genomics, interdisciplinarity, and team science to solve grand challenges in science and society. The IGB’s motto is “From science to society,” and it has a robust program of public engagement and outreach to translate discoveries in genomics into knowledge that improves lives.

The Center for Social and Behavioral Science (CSBS) was established in 2019 to harness the expertise of over 700 social and behavioral scientists at UIUC to conduct research across disciplines to solve some of the most pressing problems facing society today. A major theme at the CSBS is understanding the social and behavioral determinants of a spectrum of mental and physical health conditions and developing interventions to alleviate such conditions. To ensure research on this and other themes has a societal impact, the CSBS facilitates the translation of social and behavioral science for treatment in clinical settings and communication to policymakers and the general public.

The IGB, in partnership with the CSBS and the School of Social Work (SSW), seeks to create a new interdisciplinary research center that brings together a breadth of fields from genomic biology to neuroscience to social and behavioral science to social work. With cutting-edge collaborative research across these areas, the center will create a new synthesis to advance our knowledge of the complex processes by which genes, behavior, and society shape individuals (for example, mental health). A key priority for the center will be innovative programs in science communication and translation to enhance treatment methods, inform policy decisions, and provide educational opportunities for a variety of audiences.

This center shall engage faculty, staff, and students across the University and at each of the universities within the University of Illinois System as opportunities present themselves to further advance the research and engagement opportunities to serve the state of Illinois to have the broadest impact possible.

Through their generous support, Bill and Julie Kellner have established the Bill and Julie Kellner Neurogenomics, Behavior, and Society Fund at the University of Illinois Foundation to create this center within the IGB to be administered collaboratively by the IGB, CSBS, and SSW.

William L. “Bill” Kellner and Julie A. Kellner reside in Springfield. Bill grew up in Springfield, where his family founded the food distribution business M. J. Kellner Company. He graduated from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in 1973 with a BALAS in political science. Bill was an involved student leader on campus. Julie grew up in New Holland, Illinois. She was a first-generation college graduate when she obtained her BA in Management from the University of Illinois Springfield in 1986. They have been generous supporters of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the University of Illinois Springfield, and the Springfield community.

The Board action recommended in this item complies in all material respects with applicable State and federal laws, University of Illinois *Statutes*, *The General Rules Concerning University Organization and Procedure*, and Board of Trustees policies and directives.

The president of the University of Illinois System recommends approval.