

Life science careers touted: UB leads consortium promoting variety of job possibilities in Western New York

By George Pyle The Buffalo News, N.Y.

Publication: Buffalo News (New York)

Date: [Wednesday, October 7 2009](#)

Oct. 7--A program designed to bring careers in the life sciences within reach of more Western New York job-seekers was rolled out Tuesday by a consortium of agencies and businesses led by two branches of the University at Buffalo.

The program is called iSciWNY, online at www.isciwny.com and pronounced "I sigh Western New York."

Organizers said the growing life sciences industry -- there are more than 120 such companies operating in Western New York -- does not only employ scientists and researchers with advanced degrees, but it also needs managers and marketers, assemblers and accountants, human resources specialists and customer service representatives, experienced and entry level, who can adapt their skills to the highly technical, and highly regulated, life sciences world.

The program will offer one-day seminars and five-week certification programs in life science business training, as well as outreach information to the area's middle and high schools. It's co-leaders are UB's Educational Opportunity Center, an urban core vocational center, and its New York State Center of Excellence in Bioinformatics and Life Sciences, a downtown Medical Campus hub of scientific research and commercialization.

"The goal of iSciWNY is to demystify the life sciences industry for the Western New York community," said Sherryl Weems, director of the Educational Opportunity Center and co-developer of the new program.

"iSciWNY is truly the front door everyone can enter," said Marnie LaVigne, director of business development at the life sciences center and the program's other co-developer. "The iSciWNY slogan -- 'Stay here. Go Far.' -- means that. Thanks to our growing life sciences industry, Western New Yorkers can stay here and find successful careers in many more fields than the typical laboratory position pictured by most people."

The program is funded by UB, Bank of America, the Life Technologies Foundation, the state Department of Labor and the Genesee County Economic Development Center. Its services are available, at no charge, to residents of Erie, Niagara, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Genesee, Livingston, Orleans and Wyoming counties.

One of the program's backers is the Orchard Park-based medical equipment maker Gaymar Industries. Its president and chief clinical officer, Thomas P. Stewart, said that companies in his industry need people with experience in all facets of business management, support and marketing. Of the 200 employees in its main office, he said, only some about 20 percent are scientists.

But, Stewart said, an industry as highly regulated, certified and documented as his will greatly benefit from employing back-office staff that have the kind of training iSciWNY is designed to provide.

"Having a robust work force is crucial, not only to Gaymar but also to the life science industry in Western New York," Stewart said. "This program is also one of the ways to stop the brain drain and stop our talented young people from leaving our community."

His comments were echoed by Norma Nowak, who is both a professor of biochemistry at UB's medical school and director of the DNA Microarray and Genomics Facility at Roswell Park Cancer Institute.

"There is such talent in this city," Nowak said, "but you have to find a way to get those kids talking to you."

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