NOTED CELL BIOLOGIST SELECTED AS NEW LEADER OF THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH’S HUNTSMAN CANCER INSTITUTE

August 16, 2006, Salt Lake City—University of Utah biologist Mary Beckerle, Ph.D., has been selected as the new executive director of the University’s Huntsman Cancer Institute (HCI). The announcement was made today by A. Lorris Betz, M.D., Ph.D., University of Utah senior vice president for health sciences, executive dean of the medical school, and CEO of University Health Care.

“Following an extensive national search, it became apparent that Dr. Beckerle has the best combination of expertise, leadership skills, national recognition, and vision to lead the Institute,” said Betz. “I’m confident she will be a highly effective and collaborative leader and that the research and clinical programs of the University’s Huntsman Cancer Institute will continue to flourish.”

Beckerle has served as HCI’s deputy director and senior director of laboratory research. Her research is focused on how cells move and stick together, both important to understanding how cancer spreads throughout the body. Her laboratory has discovered and characterized pathways that control these activities in normal cells and is currently exploring how these processes are disturbed in cancer.
A faculty member at the University of Utah since 1986, Beckerle is a professor of biology and adjunct professor of oncological sciences. Since 1999, she has held the Ralph E. and Willia T. Main Presidential Endowed Chair in Cancer Research. She is also the current president of the American Society of Cell Biology, an international research organization with more than 11,000 members.

In recognition of her research accomplishments, Beckerle has been named an Established Investigator of the American Heart Association and has received a Senior Research Award from the American Cancer Society. In 2000, she was appointed as a Guggenheim Fellow and Rothschild-Yvette Mayent Award Scholar at the Curie Institute in Paris. In 2001, Beckerle was honored with the Utah Governor’s Award for Science and Technology.

An active participant in national scientific affairs, Beckerle was appointed to the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB) Public Affairs Advisory Committee in 1997. She has served as a member of the selection committee for Howard Hughes Medical Institute Physician-Scientist Fellowships and the National Institutes of Health CDF4 grant review panel. She has served on the editorial boards for Annual Reviews of Cell and Developmental Biology, Current Opinions in Cell Biology, and Molecular Biology of the Cell, where she was an associate editor. She has organized a number of scientific meetings, including the annual meeting of the American Society for Cell Biology, the Gordon Research Conference on Motile and Contractile Systems, and a Human Frontiers in Science Conference.

Beckerle has 20 years of experience training students and postdoctoral fellows, most of whom hold scientific positions as faculty members or researchers. She has a strong commitment to training young scientists and has taught a variety of courses in the biological sciences. In 1994, she was nominated by her students and received the University of Utah’s Biology Award for Excellence in Teaching. She guided graduate education at the University as the director of the Interdepartmental Graduate Program in Molecular Biology for two years. In addition, Beckerle developed the Multidisciplinary Cancer Research Training Program at HCI and served for several years as principal investigator of a National Cancer Institute grant that supports this cancer-focused training initiative.

Beckerle replaces Randall Burt, M.D., who has served as HCI’s interim director since June, 2005. Beckerle’s appointment is subject to the approval of the University’s Board of Trustees.
Editors: An electronic photograph of Mary Beckerle is available. Contact Linda Aagard at linda.aagard@hci.utah.edu or (801) 587-7639.