

Expanding higher ed: Gillian Small

Gillian Small is vice chancellor for research at City University of New York.

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Vice chancellor for research

A cell biologist who has made a significant contribution to our understanding of how the body breaks down fats, Gillian Small still has her own research lab at CUNY—but she has little time to spend there. These days, she devotes most of her time to planning labs and facilities that will help other scientists excel.

The vice chancellor for research at CUNY, Ms. Small is spearheading the plan for the system's Decade of Science, a \$2 billion project for programs and facilities that can catapult City University into the top echelons of science research and education.

“To be a great university, you need great research and great science,” said Ms. Small, 55. “In previous years, science and science facilities were neglected. They were the most expensive to support and maintain.”

The plan's showpiece, a 200,000-square-foot Advanced Science Research Center on the City College south campus in Harlem, is due to open in 2014. New science buildings are also rising—or existing ones are being renovated—at Lehman, Brooklyn, Queens and Hunter colleges.

On Ms. Small's watch, CUNY also has tripled its outside funding for scientific research to \$150 million annually and opened a tech commercialization office that has helped to spin off at least eight young companies in recent years. Between 2001 and 2010, the number of doctoral graduates in science, technology, engineering and math rose 49%.

All of which are major accomplishments for a public university competing in a city with six deep-pocketed private institutions renowned for their research. CUNY, too, has had its share of Nobel laureates in science, medicine and economics, but over the years, budget woes ate into funding for science.

Changing times, however, are working in CUNY's favor as collaboration among scientists becomes essential. Under Ms. Small, CUNY is in talks with NYU, Stanford and other universities: prospective partners on a proposal in response to Mayor Michael Bloomberg's offer of public land for a new research institution.

Born in Britain, Ms. Small arrived in the U.S. in 1985 to work under Nobel laureate Christian DeDuke at Rockefeller University. In 1988, she became a professor at the University of Florida and in 1992 returned to New York and joined Mount Sinai School of Medicine.

“Frankly, I missed New York,” said Ms. Small, who joined CUNY in 2001.

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