

## **VGTI, FAU partnership will have grad students, scientists working side-by-side**

By Christin Erazo

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PORT ST. LUCIE — The Vaccine and Gene Therapy Institute is partnering with Florida Atlantic University in a collaboration that will enhance the biotech company's future workforce and the university's scientific graduate programs.

Both institutions will participate in an ongoing, open-ended partnership of research, education and training, which will have FAU graduate students working side-by-side with VGTI scientists, and VGTI researchers doubling as faculty.

It's a win-win for both sides, said John Schatzle, manager of scientific affairs at VGTI.

"For FAU students, they now have access to professors and faculty through this collaboration they wouldn't have had access to otherwise," Schatzle said. "It means a lot for us to have access to graduate students, because we like to train students in our laboratories to continue that educational component of our careers."

The partnership will help boost FAU's integrative biology doctoral program at its Jupiter campus.

VGTI and FAU will collaborate on research to discover new cancer treatments, gene therapies and virus studies. The partnership will also involve the institutions sharing equipment and facilities, co-hosting seminars and writing dual grants to state and federal agencies.

Schatzle said the partnership formed a few months ago after the biotech institute realized the importance of joining forces with local schools as a way to engage students and scientists in the future of life sciences.

The collaboration ensures VGTI that students are receiving the appropriate training for future jobs in the field.

"If we want to have local talent to feed our laboratories and help us out with our research, it's important for us to play a role in interacting with the local educational entities to make sure the types of training that we need is being provided for students," Schatzle said. "It's a lot better to have a local talent pool here than to have to ship those people in from elsewhere."

Ramaswamy Narayanan, associate dean for research and industry relations at FAU, said the university has worked closely with other biotech companies such as the Max Planck Florida Institute in Jupiter and Torrey Pines Institute for Molecular Studies in Port St. Lucie, but its partnership with VGTI, an institute that studies vaccines and genes, will expand students' scientific scope.

"It expands our potential to reach out to many different areas of life sciences," Narayanan said.

VGTI has worked with University of Miami and Indian River State College in smaller partnerships, but this is the first time the nonprofit research institute will offer in-depth guidance to graduate students. Schatzle said VGTI's joint venture with FAU would have a long-term impact in making the university's graduate science programs nationally competitive.

"We can really change the face of the program at FAU and really enrich it."



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