

## Local News

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### Researchers at UW fear federal cuts will hit hard

The University of Washington is bracing for a loss of \$83 million in federal funding if the sequester goes into effect, but nobody knows how the cuts would play out.

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The University of Washington receives more public research dollars than any other public university in the country. And if the federal sequester goes into effect Friday, it may also have more to lose.

Grant money for science research might become more scarce. Young scientists might have a harder time finding jobs. Under one scenario, entire labs could close.

“There will be jobs lost,” said Mary Lidstrom, the UW’s vice provost for research. “This is all about jobs.”

Still, nobody really knows how this region could be impacted under the policy called sequestration, in which a series of automatic budget cuts totaling \$85 billion would take place nationally over the remaining fiscal year.

UW analysts believe that under the terms of the sequester, the university could lose about \$83 million.

Research-funding levels have been on a roller coaster the past several years, with cuts during the early years of the recession followed by an unexpected bounty from the stimulus package.

Now, the sequester promises more turmoil.

Federal agencies that fund science research — the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation — are already holding back some research money, attempting to blunt the sudden impact of a 5 percent cutback, Lidstrom said.

She said the agencies could make an across-the-board cut to all programs, or they could close specific programs, which would result in entire labs being shut down — although she thought the second scenario was less likely.

Lidstrom said it’s the young, up-and-coming scientists getting their undergraduate and graduate degrees who would be most affected. They may be unable to find research projects to join, or may be cut from existing projects. And employees whose salaries come from research grants could also lose their jobs.

“At the moment, everybody’s just hoping the ax isn’t going to fall on them,” she said.

Eliot Brenowitz, professor of biology and psychology, has scrapped plans to hire a half-time employee in his lab. “That’s one less paycheck somebody will get,” he said. “If they restore the money, I will go out and make that hire.”

The National Institutes of Health, which funds Brenowitz’s studies on brain biology, cut his funding by 10 percent when it renewed the grants in February, he said.

If the cuts are permanent, UW geneticist Jay Shendure — whose lab developed a safer alternative to amniocentesis for fetal gene testing — expects to have to reduce his lab staff by two or three people, out of a total 26.

“These grants are the bread and butter of the science we do,” he said.

Developmental neurobiologist Corey Snelson, who’s studying embryonic muscle development in the UW’s biochemistry department, fears she’ll be unemployed when her temporary job comes to an end June 30.

“It’s a been a tense time here for a lot of people,” said Snelson, who has a Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University. If her funding is cut, Snelson is pondering a move back to Maryland, where she would live with her parents.

Snelson has twice applied for research funding; both applications were narrowly rejected. “It becomes frustrating — you have this advanced degree but you can’t really use it,” she said.

Lidstrom does not believe the sequester would eliminate lesser-quality research that doesn’t deserve to be funded. Currently, she said, only about 10 percent of federal grant submissions are funded. “We’re in a situation now where many outstanding projects are not getting funded ... it’s pretty discouraging.”

Under the sequester, nondefense programs would be cut by 5.1 percent. But because the cuts are being made over the final seven months of fiscal 2013, UW analysts believe the cut would be 8.2 percent, or \$83 million, out of \$1.08 billion in federal grant and contract funding. The fiscal year ends Sept. 30.

“The impact on science and research is not going to be something you’ll see instantaneously, but you’re going to look back in a year — or five years — and say, why are we not as far along (on research) as we thought we would be?” said Benjamin Corb, director of public affairs for the American Society of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology.

Lauren Kuehne, a UW research scientist whose lab focuses on freshwater ecology and conservation, predicts researchers are going to spend a lot more of their time searching for funding for their projects.

“In some ways, it’ll make science a little bit less efficient,” she said.

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