Jennifer Barton Named Director of BIO5 Institute

Office of Research, Discovery and Innovation
December 2017

After a national search, biomedical engineer Jennifer Kehlet Barton has been named director of the BIO5 Institute [1].

BIO5 is a universitywide institute that brings together researchers from across the five main bioscience disciplines—agriculture, bioengineering, biomedicine, pharmacy and basic science—to develop creative, bold solutions to humanity’s most pressing health and environmental challenges.

Barton [2], a professor of biomedical engineering, electrical and computer engineering, optical sciences, and agricultural and biosystems engineering, has been on the University of Arizona faculty since 1998. She served as BIO5 assistant director from 2009 to 2012, and became interim director in 2015. Her research expertise is in translational biomedical optics, as well as the prevention and early detection of cancer. Barton has published more than 100 peer-reviewed journal articles.

"I'm honored to have this opportunity," Barton said. "I've been a member of BIO5 since day one, I've had my lab in the Keating (Bioresearch) Building since it was built and became home to BIO5, and during my time as interim director, I've been impressed with the outstanding work of the faculty and staff and the engagement of our stakeholders. Through my own research, I know the absolute necessity of an interdisciplinary approach in solving important health challenges. BIO5 is renowned for this, and I'm looking forward to continuing this tradition of excellence while always looking for new ways to expand support for our members, students and community."

Barton is currently the principal investigator on a number of active awards, including one from the National Cancer Institute for the identification of the earliest image markers of ovarian cancer, and one from the National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering to develop a small endoscope that can image the fallopian tubes and ovary.

"I am thrilled to have Dr. Jennifer Kehlet Barton continuing in the role of director of the BIO5 Institute on a permanent basis," said UA President Robert C. Robbins. "Dr. Barton is an outstanding researcher, and her work developing miniature endoscopes and optical imagining techniques for early cancer detection offers excellent examples of the interdisciplinarity that has made BIO5 a leading site of bioengineering and biomedical research. Her success as a biomedical engineer and her commitment to community impact, mentorship and teaching make her an ideal leader for this important center."
Since 2001, BIO5's interdisciplinary approach has been an international model for translating scientific discoveries and technology advancement into innovative diagnostics and devices, and promising new therapies. Its mission also includes contributing to the economic development of Arizona, and providing hands-on training for the next-generation workforce.

Barton is focused on positioning BIO5 to capture the momentum of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, a concept focused on a new era — one that is highly automated and cross-disciplinary. The UA, with its work on everything from autonomous vehicles to implantable medical devices, is uniquely poised to contribute to such a revolution.

"I'm very excited about implementing the strategies of our new president, Dr. Robbins," Barton said. "Our signature at the UA is an interdisciplinary approach. BIO5 is, and has always been, perfectly positioned at the nexus of the physical, biological and digital worlds. From this construct is where the world's grand challenges will have to be tackled, and we will be engaging our world-class researchers and talented students in this process."

"BIO5 has an outstanding record of achievement in advancing collaborative, interdisciplinary life science research. Dr. Barton has the essential experience to grow our impact even further," said Kimberly Andrews Espy, senior vice president for research. "Jennifer's ability to bring people together, which she has done throughout her career at the UA, makes her a great fit for leading BIO5. With her leadership, BIO5 will accelerate the convergent integration of physical, life, digital and health sciences for research that will benefit all of Arizona."

As the leader of a connecting hub like BIO5, Barton is identifying opportunities to facilitate collaborative research outcomes by providing flexible physical space, funding pilot grants, and bringing the academic, student, industry and stakeholder communities together through workshops and other events.

"I believe that BIO5 is here to serve the members of BIO5, the entire University, the community, and the next generation — our students," Barton said.

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