

Westminster College  
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# Press Release

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Westminster College Announces Creation of the Great Salt Lake Institute**

*Institute will lead efforts to characterize genes from organisms of the lake,  
K-12 curriculum development and stewardship*

**SALT LAKE CITY** – Westminster College is pleased to announce the creation of the Great Salt Lake Institute (GSLI), an organization that endeavors to increase the appreciation and understanding of Great Salt Lake, with interdisciplinary emphases on research, education, commerce and the environment.

GSLI will make its debut by sponsoring a field trip for attendees of the combined meeting for both the International Society for Salt Lake Research and the Friends of Great Salt Lake Issues Forum, being held in Salt Lake City May 11-16, 2008.

With grants from the U.S. Department of Energy and the Department of Labor, GSLI has developed programs for biotech industry internships, research experiences for Westminster undergraduates, and educational outreach to K-12 students and teachers. One of the most exciting initiatives underway is an effort to sequence the genes of GSL directly from water samples. These data will be made public through the GSLI website and accessible to the scientific community at-large.

“We are very excited about establishing an institute that will draw researchers from all over the world, as well as from our own backyard.” said Dr. Michael Bassis, Westminster College president. “Great Salt Lake (GSL) is a unique, understudied and undervalued national landmark. As one of the extreme ecosystems of the world—where life is tested at its limits—GSL provides new territory for exploration, learning and stewardship.”

Once an ancient inland sea, GSL has a rich history, both geological and human. Today it is a critical site for migratory birds, and important resource for industry and recreation, and a valuable laboratory for learning about the biology and chemistry of hypersaline systems.

“Despite its unique qualities, Great Salt Lake has received little academic attention, and it, therefore, offers new opportunities for discovery and potential insight,” said Dr. Bonnie Baxter, Westminster Associate Professor of Biology and Director of GSLI. This special place holds great promise as a source of inspiration art and literature, as well as for research and scholarship in a variety of disciplines.”

“GSLI is capturing this opportunity,” she continued. “We began with significant undergraduate research and educational efforts at Westminster College. But our mission has broadened beyond academia and beyond our campus: We now support an international network of partners interested in all aspects of the lake, including non-profit and industry.”

The Governor’s Office of Economic Development has been one of the early supporters of GSLI.

"Our partnership with the Great Salt Lake Institute and Westminster College provides a wonderful opportunity to encourage our young students to pursue career paths in science, technology and engineering areas," said Tamara Goetz, the State Science Advisor for the Governor’s Office of Economic Development. “This aligns with the Governor's commitment to support the creation of a workforce for Utah that can continue to build a dynamic life science and technology industry for the State."

Lynn De Freitas, President of Friends of Great Salt Lake, a local non-profit organization, also spoke in support of the institute. “The collective talent we have in the Great Salt Lake community holds the promise of good things. GSLI will provide a heartland of resources and inspiration that will help extend the awareness and appreciation about our hemispherically important neighbor.”

Westminster is a nationally recognized, comprehensive liberal arts college. With a broad array of graduate and undergraduate programs, Westminster is distinguished by its unique environment for learning. Westminster prepares students for success through active and engaged learning, real world experiences and its vibrant campus community. Westminster’s unique location, adjacent to the Rocky Mountains and to the dynamic city of Salt Lake, further enriches the college experience. For more information visit [www.westminstercollege.edu](http://www.westminstercollege.edu). For more information on GSLI, visit [www.greatsaltlakeinstitute.org](http://www.greatsaltlakeinstitute.org).