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Head of UA's BIO5 Institute quits to take job in Calif.

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University of Arizona BIO5 Institute Director Vicki L. Chandler will step down in February to become chief program officer, science for the nonprofit Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation in the San Francisco area.

Chandler, a Regents' professor in plant sciences and molecular and cellular biology, will retain her research work at UA, including with the iPlant Collaborative that she helped establish this year through a \$50 million National Science Foundation grant.

"She's taking a leave of absence for a year," said Leslie Tolbert, UA vice president for research, graduate studies and economic development. "We want her to know there's a home here for her forever. She has a research group here and she'll keep it going."

Chandler has been at UA for 12 years and has directed BIO5 for the past six years. Her salary is \$244,038.

She said in a phone interview from San Francisco that she is "incredibly blessed" by her time at UA.

"I wasn't looking for a job and I have a lot of loyalty and respect for UA, but this is an incredible opportunity for me," she said.

Chandler, who holds the Weiler Endowed Chair for Excellence in Agriculture and Life Sciences at UA, will be working with other members of the foundation leadership to decide how to invest its annual \$300 million philanthropic budget, setting a path for the foundation "for the next five to 10 years."

"Some of the (foundation's) projects will be winding down and this is a very interesting time to see how the foundation can support transformative science," she said. "I think our world - our planet - is in trouble, and bringing science to bear on those issues is really exciting."

As director of the foundation's science program, Chandler will run a program that invests in the work of researchers and organizations at the frontiers of science. In particular, the program works to promote collaboration across scientific fields, something Chandler has experience with through BIO5.

BIO5 brings together faculty from UA's colleges of medicine, engineering, agriculture, pharmacy and science to tackle complex biology-based problems affecting humanity.

"She is a first-class scientist, and significantly, she has a strong background in interdisciplinary research and is a very successful collaborator," said Christine Pallatto, spokeswoman for the foundation. "Tucson's loss is a gain on a broader spectrum because Dr. Chandler can now contribute to a broader scope of scientific efforts."

Chandler said UA reaction to her move has been similar across the board.

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"They are sorry to see me step down from director of BIO5, but they understand why this is an exciting opportunity," she said. "It wasn't like I was trying to use this to get a better deal at the university; this is a really different direction for my life and my career."

Tolbert said Chandler will spend about 20 percent of her time at UA on research, but details have yet to be worked out as to when she'll be in Tucson.

"We want to keep her engaged with the university," Tolbert said. "It's a huge loss for us . . . we'll be losing the day-to-day commitment of a really, really stellar faculty member, but she's going to do wonderful things for science in her new position."

Chandler's research at UA, exclusive of the iPlant grant, is worth about \$750,000 annually, about \$250,000 of which goes into university coffers.

Tolbert said she'll appoint an interim director to run BIO5 and hopes to launch a national search, but doesn't know when a new director will be hired given the economic climate and UA's hiring freeze.

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