CONTACT: KIRK STARCZEWSKI or
HOPE FERGUSON
518 587-2100, ext 250

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

EMPIRE STATE COLLEGE SCIENTIST GARNERS GRANT FROM LOUNSBERY FOUNDATION TO STUDY SCIENTISTS' ATTITUDES ABOUT STEM CELL RESEARCH

(New York, NY — February 5, 2003) Ever since human stem cells were successfully extracted from embryos in 1998, controversy has attended scientific research using these "pluripotent" cells that contain within them the power of infinite renewal, with the promise to heal disease and regenerate limbs and organs. From high-profile advocates like the actor Christopher Reeve and former First Lady Nancy Reagan, to the strong voices of opposition in the pro-life and some faith communities, debate about this new technology has echoed from Congress, to the halls of the academy, to the public square.

Isaac Rabino, Ph.D., professor of biological and health sciences at Empire State College, State University of New York, recently received a two-year grant of $170,000 from the Richard Lounsbery Foundation to examine the current views of working scientists and clinicians – in both the scientific and medical communities – about the ongoing debate regarding the ethics of human embryonic stem cell research. There is little, if any, such systematic exploration of the perspectives of the investigators and physicians who would carry out the research and apply any useful results of this technology.

Knowing these views not only will give invaluable insight into any possible future practical applications, but also will help shape public policy. Therefore, Dr. Rabino will examine the climate of controversy out of which official policy will be formulated, and will report some of the implications that government regulations will have on contemporary medical research, clinical practice and healthcare.

The study will also consider the ramifications of U.S. policy in light of scientific progress and American productivity and competitiveness.

Dr. Rabino notes that the new technologies have stirred contentious debate in the United States over an array of ethical choices that go to the core of the meaning of human life: abortion, in vitro fertilization (IVF) and "excess" embryos, and whether there are limits beyond which medicine should not intervene. Other topics to be included in the study are concerns about safety, efficacy, patient consent, equity in access to new treatments based on possible technologies, and commercialization and government oversight of the research, and the policy governing studies of stem cells.

-more-

Dr. Rabino has conducted a number of comparable surveys of scientists in relation to bioethical topics. His most recent research project, also funded by the Richard Lounsbery Foundation, and still in progress, surveyed the attitudes and perceptions of some of the 3,000 scientists from the American Society of Human Genetics (ASHG) on such issues as the Human Genome Project, gene therapy, germ-line research, patenting, cloning, and other human genetics issues, as well as the ethical and legal issues pertaining to new information and rapid changes arising from innovative research in human genetics.

In endorsing the earlier project, Uta Francke, former president of ASHG, told members, "I am confident that results of this study will enlighten many people, including ourselves, about the attitudes of our colleagues ... [T]he views of scientists working in the field are critical in developing an information basis for determining institutional and public policy."

Another survey, undertaken in 1995, achieved an impressive 63 percent rate of return. In it, Dr. Rabino questioned 1,257 scientists working in the field of recombinant DNA. Rabino's first survey, in 1988 and '89, investigated funding trends, patenting, freedom of inquiry and regulation. Dr. Rabino's survey conducted in 1991, compared American scientists' attitudes with those of European scientists, who tend to face greater opposition from the public for their work.

Dr. Rabino is the author of numerous academic articles published in such respected journals as *American Scientist*; *Science, Technology & Human Values; Nature Biotechnology; Politics and the Life Sciences;* and *Public Understanding of Science*. Results were also reported in national and international scientific meetings.

Empire State College was designed with the needs of the nontraditional student in mind. Founded in 1971, the college offers flexible degree programs in the arts and sciences through independent study, web-based courses and study groups, as well as credit earned through college-level life learning. With 40,000 alumni, Empire State College enrolls 15,000 students per year in its associate, bachelor's and master's degree programs. Easily accessible at more than 32 locations across New York State and through its Center for Distance Learning, Empire State College is the SUNY solution for working adults.

-30-