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Proteomics is the study of the structure and function of proteins—the enzymes, antibodies and other molecules that make up our cells and tissues. There are an estimated one million different proteins in the human body. The role of many of them is unknown.

In 2006, the UVic team received a \$4-million five-year grant from the US National Cancer Institute for research into leading-edge proteomics technologies relevant to the early detection of breast cancer.

Other partners in the study are the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard University in Massachusetts; the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle, and the Plasma Proteome Institute in Washington, DC.

Mass spectrometers are so sensitive they can identify hundreds of molecules from a single human fingerprint. Those used in this study are housed at the UVic-Genome BC Proteomics Centre, located at the UVic-owned Vancouver Island Technology Park in Saanich.

UVic researchers were awarded more than \$104 million in outside research grants and contracts in 2008/09—more than double the research support of five years ago.

by Peigi McGillivray

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