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UCSB gets \$1.5M to create materials

8/31/04

UCSB has been given a \$1.5 million grant to set up a center where researchers will work "outside the box" to create new materials.

The money comes from the National Science Foundation to support work on designing materials with new kinds of electric, magnetic and optical properties, artificial chemical systems that can undergo Darwinian evolution, and materials that could be made in large quantities in an environmentally friendly fashion.

Three institutions have been chosen as the sites of new Chemical Bonding Centers -- UCSB, Massachusetts General Hospital and the University of Washington. The initial \$1.5 million awards are for a three-year period. After that, centers showing "high potential" will be given \$2 million to \$3 million annually for up to five years, and the programs may be renewed for another five years beyond that.

The program is an effort to foster high-risk, high-payoff research, which many scientists say the National Science Foundation has shied away from funding in the past.

"We wanted to encourage very talented people to attack major problems that would engage the public and have a long-term societal benefit," the foundation's Philip Shevlin said in a statement, "and that would not be what they were already doing."

The director of the UCSB-based center will be Nicola Spaldin, associate professor of materials at UCSB. Chemists and materials scientists there will collaborate with others at the University of Houston, Ohio State University and Carnegie Mellon University.

Each of the three centers will tackle a particular problem.



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Researchers with the UCSB-based center will work on designing "smart" materials -- substances that can change and respond to environmental stimulation. They'll use an approach called rational design, in which researchers begin by determining what they want a material to do, then set about figuring out what the material should be and how to create it.

-- *Anna Davison*

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