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Center of Excellence approved  
FSU project will develop materials

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DEMOCRAT SENIOR WRITER

A \$4 million Center of Excellence in Advanced Materials is coming to Florida State University.

The \$4 million will allow a team headed by FSU industrial engineer Ben Wang to develop prototypes that use the researchers' super-light, ultra-strong composite materials in vehicles. The goal of a Center of Excellence is to generate commercial products and jobs.

"An excellent day," FSU Provost Larry Abele said Thursday, after the Florida Board of Governors approved six Centers of Excellence, including the one for FSU, out of \$30 million appropriated by the 2006 Legislature.

"Because our materials are very strong and lightweight, we think they are ideal candidates for making light, safe and efficient planes, boats and cars," Wang said. "We want to bridge the gap between university research and what's needed in the marketplace."

FSU endured cliffhangers after an advisory board miscount and a changed number of funded projects before the Centers of Excellence deal was made.

The day then got even better.

The university also will receive \$4 million of the \$20 million allocated by lawmakers last spring to recruit world-class scholars.

This money will offset the more than \$6 million that FSU invested a year ago to recruit the Applied Superconductivity Center and its superstars to FSU. Center director David Larbalestier, now at FSU, and colleague Eric Hellstrom, just hired, agreed to come to FSU in part based on the equipment and laboratory facilities the university could provide.

The \$4 million "replaces the money we spent gambling we would get these scholars," said Abele, explaining that now FSU can spend the money to recruit other top-notch faculty.

The \$4 million Center of Excellence in Advanced Materials accelerates FSU's coming investments in this area. A \$17 million building devoted to the program is about to be started on FSU land in Innovation Park. It's financed through the university's Research Foundation. And FSU has made materials science one of its cluster hiring initiatives aimed at research excellence. It plans to use \$5.7 million to hire six new professors, plus provide additional equipment and graduate students. Already, Wang's interdisciplinary team includes 15 professors and about 55 students.

"We're trying to push our university to be a real leader in materials science," said Kirby Kemper, FSU vice president of research. With dozens of companies including Lockheed Martin interested in FSU-developed advanced materials, Kemper predicted commercialization results within two to three years.

Centers of Excellence approved by the Board of Governors:

1. University of South Florida's Florida Center for Excellence in Biomolecular Identification and Targeted

Therapeutics, \$8 million

**2.** Florida Atlantic University's Center of Excellence in Ocean Energy Technology, \$5 million

**3.** University of Florida's Florida Institute for Sustainable Energy, Energy Technology Incubator, \$4.5 million

**4.** University of Central Florida's Florida Photonics Center of Excellence Laser Technology Initiative, \$4.5 million

**5.** University of Florida's Center for Nano-Bio Sensors, \$4 million

**6.** Florida State University's Center of Excellence in Advanced Materials, \$4 million

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