

science & TECHNOLOGY

THE BATTALION

NSF allots \$10 million to institute New center to focus on revamping science education in Texas schools

By NONI SRIDHARA

The Battalion

Texas A&M is aiming to restructure science education from kindergarten to graduate school with a \$10 million grant from the National Science Foundation. The grant will be given over a five-year period to a new Information Technology and Science Center.

Joseph Newton, dean of the College of Science, said there are three main reasons for behind developing the center.

"First, there is an incredible shortage of math and science teachers today," he said.

"Also there is an incredible amount of information technology available, but teachers are not sure of the best way to integrate these resources into their curriculum. Finally, the center will be zeroing in on the seventh to 12th grades because the science curriculum in these grade levels has lagged behind the scientific community," he said.

He said billions of dollars are spent on placing computers and other high-tech equipment into classrooms, but very little of the resources are used because the teachers are not sure how to incorporate the tools into their curriculum.

Jane F. Schielack, director of the center and an associate professor of mathematics, said the center will focus on providing high-quality science and mathematics education through teacher professional development and education.

"We have research objectives that concentrate on how information technologies impact four areas: how science is done, how science is taught and learned, how to assess the processes and products of learning science, and how to build a networked community of science scholarship that includes all teachers and students of grades seven through 12," she said.

Newton said one of the main goals behind the center is to produce teachers with advanced degrees and who are specialists in science education through professional development experiences.

"We will bring in master teachers from across the state —



RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

teachers who have shown great interest in the restructuring of science education, teachers from the College of Science and the College of Education along with graduate students," he said. "These teams will work to develop ways to solve this problem, incorporating information technology into their solutions."

He said these development experiences will aid in indirectly changing science teachers beliefs systems regarding the ways science is presently taught.

Jon J. Denton, executive associate dean of the College of Education, said there is a compelling need for improvements in science education.

Denton said that since the Texas Academic Achievement Skills exam added science as a test section in Fall 1998, there has been a strong push to focus on science education.

"This is a very high-stakes matter," Denton said. "We've got to make sure that teachers have viable resources."

To attract teachers from across the state at all grade levels, stipends will be given to teachers who participate in these workshops. Newton said faculty participating in these workshops will be awarded grant money, tenure, promotion and raises.

"This is a very daunting prospect, but we sincerely believe it will be worth it because we have all of the partners necessary to change the way science is taught at all levels," Newton said.

In addition to researchers in science, education, engineering, and agriculture, other partners for this center include the University of Texas-Austin, The Texas Education Agency and the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History.

Future initiatives of the center include linking with other information technology institutes at A&M such as the Visualization and Animation Laboratory and the Institute for Scientific Computation.

— News in Brief —
Oceanographers to go on cruise in mini-subma-

Oceanographers from Texas A&M and researchers from Louisiana State University are about to embark on a two-week cruise starting Oct. 16 on the mini-submarine ALVIN to trace the edge of the continental slope from South Texas to Florida.

ALVIN is a submarine that first made its appearance at the Woodhole Oceanographic Institute in 1964 and has since picked up lost H-bombs from the ocean floor and allowed the world to see the remains of the Titanic.

Ian R. MacDonald, a research scientist with Texas A&M's Geochemical and Environmental Research Group who will be on the voyage, said the researchers will take the ship 3,300 meters deep.

"We are really pushing the envelope on submersible oceanography," MacDonald said.

"Our research efforts will be focusing on the biology of animals, the intense current systems of the ocean floor and gas hydrate deposits in the Gulf of Mexico."

"After a generation of discovery in the deep sea, we are about to develop a permanent presence a mile or more below the surface," MacDonald said.

If you have any science or technology related questions please email scifiy@hotmail.com. Include your name, class, and major. You may also drop your question by The Battalion Newsroom in O13 Reed McDonald

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