UCSD's Institute for Biomedical Engineering receives $3 million grant from Whitaker Foundation

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UCSD'S INSTITUTE FOR BIOMEDICAL ENGINEERING RECEIVES $3 MILLION GRANT FROM WHITAKER FOUNDATION

A $3 million grant to establish a center of excellence to improve research and educational opportunities in biomedical engineering has been awarded to the University of California, San Diego by the Whitaker Foundation, a private foundation based in Mechanicsburg, Pa. and Washington, D.C.

UCSD was one of three institutions selected from among 57 competing institutions to be awarded the Biomedical Engineering Development Award. Also selected were biomedical engineering programs at Georgia Institute of Technology (collaborating with Emory University School of Medicine) and the University of Utah.

"The aim of the program is to promote graduate education in biomedical engineering," said Shu Chien, director of the Institute for Biomedical Engineering (IBME) at UCSD. "This will be a tremendous boost for our program."

Among other things, Chien said that funding from the four- year program will allow UCSD to recruit up to four new bioengineering faculty, to increase graduate student funding, to set up core facilities for shared research, and to introduce new educational initiatives.

"This grant has multiple, lasting effects with the end result of fostering biomedical engineering at the University," said Chien.

In its announcement, the Whitaker Foundation said the three universities chosen to receive the award are developing initiatives in molecular and cellular biomedical engineering that enhance their strong traditional programs.

"The program's educational goals are linked to their research goals, which are to create new devices, tissues, and materials for medical applications," the announcement said. "With Whitaker Foundation support, they are developing the infrastructure--tools, human resources, and institutional support structures--for the creation of new artificial organs, biological sensors, implants, biomaterials, orthopedic devices and imaging devices for the 21st Century."

The Institute for Biomedical Engineering at UCSD, established in November 1991 by the University of California Board of Regents, now includes an interdisciplianry group of 82 researchers from engineering, molecular and cellular and integrative biology, and medicine. Researchers from the La Jolla Cancer Research Foundation, The Salk Institute, and Scripps Research Institute also are participating in the program.

Chien said the group's application to the Whitaker Foundation focused on the science of tissue engineering. This encompasses three areas at UCSD: the cardiovascular system, somatic tissue (structures that include skin, muscle, cartilage, tendon, ligaments, bones and joints), and the neuroendocrine system.

"These three special areas are tied together with general approaches in bioengineering sciences along with molecular, cellular and integrative biology," said Chien. "With these as the underpinnings, eventually we want to see applications for clinical and industrial products." The Institute for Biomedical Engineering has just established an Industrial Advisory Board formed by leaders in industry related to biomedical engineering in the San Diego area.

The Whitaker Foundation was established in 1975 by U.A. Whitaker, the founder of AMP Inc. The foundation promotes interdisciplinary research and education involving biologists, engineers, physical scientists and physicians through four types of biomedical engineering programs. In addition to the Biomedical Engineering Development Awards, now at five institutions, the foundation's programs include the Biomedical Engineering Research Grants (research grants awarded to investigators early in their careers), Special Opportunity Awards (up to $75,000 grants to initiate innovation educational or research programs in biomedical engineering), and Graduate Fellowships in Biomedical Engineering.

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