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Nevada Institutes Rewarded \$15 Million Grant to Study Climate Change

The University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) and Desert Research Institute (DRI) will lead a \$15 million research project to examine climate change and its effect in Nevada.

“For our region climate change is one of the most important issues because the southwest is vulnerable to climate change impact and warming of the region,” said Thomas Piechota, co-principal investigator and UNLV director of sustainability and multidisciplinary research.

The overall goal of the research project is to stimulate education, research and outreach programs in Nevada on the effects of climate change. This will lead to better informed decisions by the public and policy makers regarding climate change and further educate them on the subject of climate change.

“We want to interact with state quarters, construction and casinos to provide the public and policy makers information on the resources in our state and how those will be impacted,” said William Smith, UNLV professor and policy, decision making and outreach component lead.

The Nevada based climate change research has national and global implications along with state benefits as well.

“The Southwest United States is the most vulnerable region to climate change in the nation and other parts across the world have similarities that would have the same vulnerability. They would all benefit from the research being done here in Nevada,” Piechota said.

The research project will focus on six main infrastructure components and they are climate modeling, ecological change, water resource, cyber infrastructure, education, policy, decision making, and outreach. The six components are split evenly among the three institutions to cater to each one’s strength.

“No one person has all the knowledge pertaining to climate change as you need individual disciplinary skills to cover all six components,” Smith said.

No one person or group of researchers is enough to tackle such a substantial issue and a social network is being created to include the community. The social science network is designed to help collect social science data related to climate change and provide outreach to the community.

“Getting partners in the community to connect with will help create a social science climate change network. We want to integrate their concerns and make outputs that they can work with to change policies that effect climate change,” Smith said.

Members of Nevada communities are able to help by adjusting a few daily habits such as water and energy conservation.

“Changing the habits of people is really most effective and cheapest way that will have a major effect,” said Nick Lancaster, co-principal investigator and DRI research professor of the division of earth and ecosystem sciences.

The idea of a climate change research project was proposed to the National Science Foundation (NSF) last year and went through a long evaluation process before being accepted.

“Once it was submitted to NSF, it went through a rigorous peer-review process that took about seven months,” said Gayle Dana, Nevada NSF Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research

(EPSCoR) project director.

The funding for the five year, \$15 million research project is financed by the NSF's EPSCoR program through a grant that will be distributed over the course of the research. The funding for the research project makes it the highest funded climate change project in Nevada.

"It is certainly the highest funded research project in Nevada," said Penny Amy, Nevada NSF EPSCoR Project Administrator.

Further financial support will be provided by Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE). NSHE is expected to provide an additional \$6,597,790 over the five year course of the research.

"Approximately one third of the total amount will be split to each of the research institutions and some to NSF for outreach activities," Amy said.

The grant was approved in September, and the researchers are wasting no time getting started.

"The preliminary stages have begun, and we are currently gathering further data and information as well as buying necessary equipment for the research," Piechota said.

Approximately 20 faculty members from UNLV and 25 additional researchers statewide will be participating in the climate change research. An additional 25 researchers and an undisclosed amount of graduate students will also be involved to work on other aspects of the research and provide assistance.

"The number of researchers including graduate students will grow over the five year life of the grant," Dana said.

Future plans include the development of a virtual center for climate change to notify the public of the findings.

NSF EPSCoR funding has been instrumental in creating nationally competitive programs in Nevada. The level of success can be seen in Nevada's total NSF awards increasing from \$3 million in 1991 to \$18.2 million in 2007.

-Byrant Nguyen

This entry was posted on Friday, November 28th, 2008 at 12:10 pm.

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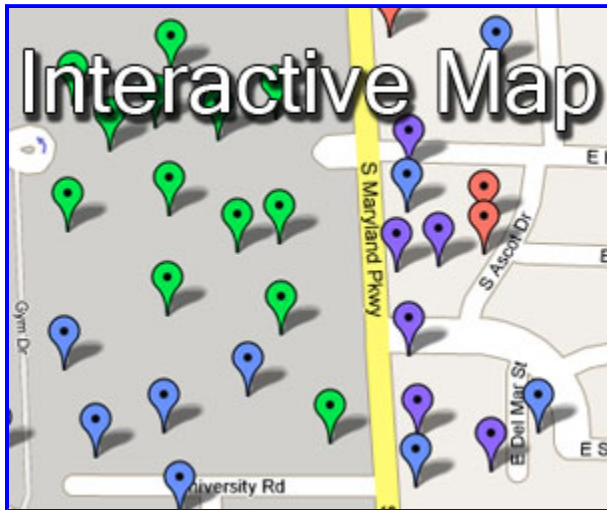
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