
Research teams awarded over \$1 mil. in grants

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Last Wednesday, the Rhode Island Science and Technology Advisory Council awarded state-funded grants totaling over \$1 million to six research teams, each with an affiliation to Brown, according to the Providence Business News.

Christine Smith, the council's innovation program manager, said that of the 38 proposals reviewed for the grants, about half included a Brown representative as a primary proposer.

"It just gives you an idea of the level of research activity that's being conducted at Brown," she said. "It's representative of the environment."

The projects included research of an anti-cancer drug found in turmeric, a spice used in Indian curry, and the development of an instrument allowing three-dimensional vision of the bladder that would allow urologists to detect bladder cancer in its earliest stages, according to the grant-winners.

Associate Professor of Engineering and Computer Science Gabriel Taubin is researching the 3-D camera with George Haleblan and Gyan Pareek of the Rhode Island Hospital and Jason Harry of Lucidux Corporation. The team was awarded \$199,895, according to the Business News.

"We are very excited because this (grant) will give us the resources to work on this problem," he said. "As we make progress within six months or so, we will be able to make the project bigger and get more funding and eventually commissioning."

Smith said this is precisely what the grant is intended to do. "Its purpose is to provide funding at a catalytic stage of a group's work so that we can give them a jump-start until they apply for federal funding or commercialize the product," she said.

Wayne Bowen, chair of the Department of Molecular Pharmacology, Physiology, and Biotechnology, is researching the anti-cancerous qualities of turmeric with James Jacob of Organomed Corporation, a life sciences research company. The pair was awarded \$200,000, according to the Business News.

"The spice has been shown to have lots of medicinal value and has been used for many years in Indian medicine," Bowen said. Curcumin is an "active component" in the spice's effect on cancer cells, but it is scarce in nature, he said. "Our goal is to determine whether there are other bio-available compounds that have anti-cancer activity."

He added that the council's grant will create many jobs for chemists at Organomed.

Providing jobs and aiding the economy are also an important goal of the grants, Smith said. After the proposals go through a peer review process by a scientist in the field, and are evaluated for their "intellectual merits and broader impacts," they are also reviewed for their economic impact by council members who are "active in the academic and business community," Smith explained.

"The proposals that are awarded grants represent the best of science as well as the strongest proposals for the purpose of the grant, which is to improve economic development in Rhode Island," Smith said.

With the state's current fiscal situation, Smith said the state government has considered cutting the council's funding by \$200,000.

“We’re hopeful that won’t happen,” Smith said.

“There’s a lot of support for this program and a really great need to do economic development across a continuum. We need programs that help people right now but also for the future.”

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