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Case is awarded grant for new polymer center

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Plain Dealer Reporter

The National Science Foundation has awarded Case Western Reserve University \$19 million over five years to establish a research center dedicated to the study of polymers, more commonly known as plastics.

This is the first-ever NSF science and technology center grant awarded to the university.

The foundation chose six centers for funding in this round, out of 160 applications. Only 11 other science and technology centers operate at academic institutions in the United States.

The center will be housed at the Case School of Engineering and begins its work Aug. 1. Anne Hiltner, a macromolecular science and engineering professor at Case, said she is ecstatic about the NSF grant. Hiltner will serve as the center's director and principal investigator.

"These centers are awarded on a very competitive basis, and only to the top research institutions in the nation," Hiltner said. "This is confirmation of the research strength at Case and our partner institutions."

The center's research will focus on using a distinctive microlayering and nanolayering process created at Case to create new uses for polymers. The innovative applications could lead to new types of camera lenses or sophisticated packaging materials.

Hiltner said the center's work could have an impact beyond the campus by helping Greater Cleveland entrepreneurs commercialize ideas or establish companies.

Aside from research, the center aims to expose a diverse group of students to science and engineering fields.

A partnership between Case and Fisk University, a historically black college in Nashville, Tenn., promises to broaden the participation of black students in the science and technology programs at both universities.

In addition, the NSF money will go toward strengthening a collaborative program between Case and the Cleveland Municipal School District that now brings high school juniors and seniors on campus. Students spend the summer and afternoons during the school year conducting laboratory research.

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