$400,000 NRC Grant To Develop Nuclear Engineering Faculty At Clemson

EurekAlert

CLEMSON, S.C. - The environmental engineering and Earth sciences department at Clemson University has received a three-year, $400,000 faculty-development grant from the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to help recruit and retain younger faculty in nuclear science.

Clemson is one of 16 U.S. universities to receive the faculty-development grants, which are given by the NRC to boost nuclear education and expand the work force in nuclear safety and nuclear-related disciplines.

"Maintaining a critical mass of faculty with academic training in the nuclear environmental engineering and science field is critical for the long-term viability of the program as well as for maintaining ABET ASAC accreditation of our environmental health physics program," said Tanju Karanfil, head of the department and and co-principal investigator on the new grant. "This grant will be extremely helpful in keeping our program strong and strengthening the research capabilities of our faculty."

The NRC grant program is devoted to developing the careers of junior faculty - those in the first six years of tenure-track jobs - in nuclear environmental engineering and science.

The Clemson grant will be devoted to a current radiochemistry assistant professor Brian Powell and to recruiting a new assistant professor in health physics to succeed Robert Fjeld, who recently retired. The new faculty member is to start in the fall.

"The new NRC Faculty Development Grant, coupled with existing NRC Education and NRC Fellowship Grants, will provide resources for the continued improvement and expansion of our very successful nuclear environmental engineering and science program and will establish an excellent base for Dr. Powell to establish a successful academic career," said Timothy DeVol, co-principal investigator on the grant.

The timing of the grant is especially important for the state of South Carolina, where the nuclear industry is burgeoning, Karanfil said. A $4 billion mixed-oxide fuel facility at the Savannah River Site - a major component in the U.S. program to dispose of surplus weapons-grade plutonium - is scheduled to be completed by 2014, and the NRC recently granted 20-year license extensions to the commercial nuclear reactors in and around South Carolina.

With a significant portion of the current nuclear work force nearing retirement, academic programs in the field are especially important, Karanfil said.

The NRC faculty-development grants support such areas as research proposals, curriculum and course development, research equipment stipends, participation in professional societies and funding for graduate students to assist in establishing research programs.

The agency provides the grants to support education in nuclear science, engineering and related trades to develop a work force capable in the design, construction, operation and regulation of nuclear facilities, as well as the safe handling of nuclear materials.

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