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SCIENCE

University researchers receive multi-million dollar grant

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A six-year, $20.2 million grant awarded to the University of Kansas on Monday could deepen researchers' understanding of human health.

The National Institutes of Health awarded the grant, the largest federally funded grant ever in the state, to a research team led by Jeff Aubé, professor of medicinal chemistry.

Aubé said the research would be focused on finding molecules for medical research.

The process consists of researchers finding what they refer to as hits, which are molecules with interesting properties that make them good candidates for further exploration.

Aubé said the next step in the process involved turning the hits into what researchers called probes. This involves taking the molecules and synthesizing them to make new molecules. Those new molecules optimize the unique qualities found in the original hits.

"What's really important is the scientific opportunities this will provide," Aubé said. "It's the first step down a long road toward developing new therapies and medicines."

Kevin Boatright, director of research communications, said the University had several advantages over other schools competing for the grant. He said the researchers were renowned in the particular field the grant was given for, and that the University already had a building available for housing the Specialized Chemistry Center.

"The doors are open. The lights are on," Boatright said. "We're ready to go."

The money will provide researchers the opportunity to purchase the expensive equipment and supplies necessary for medical research. Aubé said many of the processes were automated, which helped the Institute arrive at the $20.2 million grant total. A portion of the grant will also go toward hiring new researchers to work at the center.

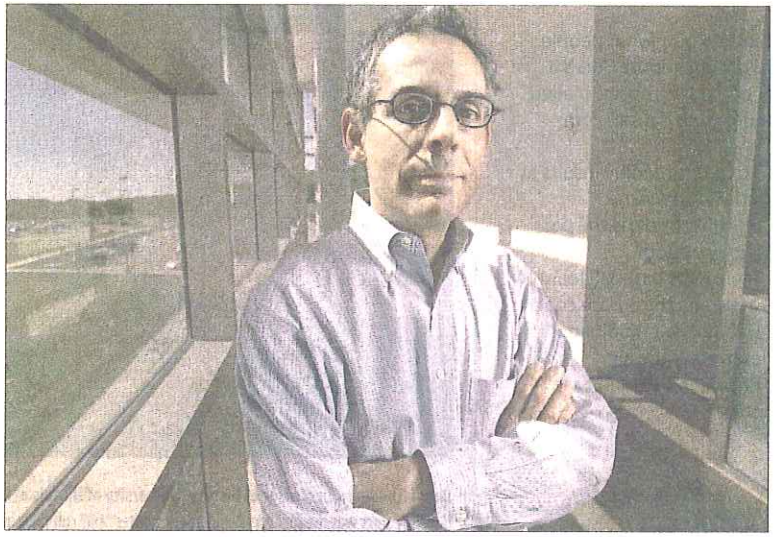
The University is one of two in a nine-institution network to have a specific Specialized Chemistry Center. Other institutions in the network include Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Aubé said collaborating with such prestigious programs was exciting.

"It's pretty good company to be in," Aubé said. "We feel we will be able to bring something to the table."

Kevin Frankowski, another researcher involved with the grant, said the award was rewarding on a personal and academic level. He said that the grant was indicative of the quality of research the University was involved with.

"It's really an honor to be a part of this effort," Frankowski said. "It really gives you a perspective of the elite group we've become a part of."

— Edited by Scott R. Toland



Ryan McGeeney/KANSAN

Jeff Aubé, professor of medicinal chemistry, is the principal investigator on a research project that recently received a six-year, $20.2 million grant awarded by the National Institutes of Health. The research project will focus on finding and exploring molecules for medical research.