



Posted on Wed, Dec. 01, 2010

## WSU to help small firms working in composites

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The Wichita Eagle

Wichita State's engineering school is leading an effort to help small companies interested in or already working in composites and advanced materials.

The university on Tuesday announced the start of the Center for Innovation and Enterprise Engagement. The center will provide consultation and aid in the manufacture of composite and advanced materials products, primarily to small and medium-size firms.

That aid and consultation will come in the form of technical and engineering assistance, work force training and business planning.

"It's more in the way of an attempt to help our area manufacturers innovate, maybe scale up or convert over to composite materials," said David McDonald, WSU associate provost of research.

The aim of the center is to accelerate development of the area's composites and advanced materials industry cluster, which WSU said comprises more than 200 firms.

The center will be directed by WSU engineering dean Zulma Toro-Ramos and operated by Debra Franklin. They will report to McDonald's Office of Research Administration.

Franklin said she is already working with several firms.

She said the center formalizes what the university has been doing all along.

"It's more of a systematic way in which we can engage" these companies, Franklin said.

McDonald said the new center is not an extension of the recently created National Center of Innovation for Biomaterials in Orthopaedic Research. CIBOR is a partnership between Via Christi Health and WSU to research, develop and commercialize advanced composite materials for use in bioscience and medical applications.

But the center could work with CIBOR in certain instances, such as if CIBOR research led to the creation of a material or product that a local manufacturer wanted to produce, McDonald said.

"We really see this as part of our role as an urban serving university," McDonald said.

The new center will be funded by government grants and fees collected from companies it assists.

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