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UMass to create course on wind power

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AMHERST - The University of Massachusetts was one of five Bay State companies selected Tuesday to share in $1 million of funding for wind energy research.

Receiving $252,687, UMass earned the second largest amount of those chosen. The money will go towards developing a university-level course, "Offshore Wind Energy Systems Engineering," that could be used by colleges across the country.

The money is drawn from $25 million in federal stimulus aid that will propel construction of a wind blade testing center in Charlestown, near Boston.

The state was selected in 2007 by the federal Department of Energy for the testing center, which will seek to develop commercial-sized wind turbine blades that reduce costs and achieve technical advances. Construction is set to begin in September, and could be finished by the end of 2010.

Though wind-power proposals have been well-publicized, including the $900 million Cape Wind Project that would locate a wind farm in Nantucket Sound, there are no offshore wind energy installations in the U.S.

However, James Manwell, a UMass professor of mechanical and industrial engineering and director of the university's Wind Energy Center, is optimistic about the future of such projects.

"The expectation is this is going to be the next step in wind energy," he said. "I think it has a huge potential. We all have a lot of work ahead of us."

Manwell will be involved in developing the engineering course.

Manwell said he and his colleagues at UMass learned they were recipients of the funding a week ago in Chicago at the annual American Wind Energy Association Conference, which 1,280 companies and over 23,000 people attended. For Manwell, The conference was a sign that wind energy is moving ahead. The event drew 1,000 people in 2001.

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