UTEP to Oversee Push for 'Green' Engineers, Scientists

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has awarded a four-year, $3.2 million grant to The University of Texas at El Paso to oversee a multi-university effort to produce more scientists and engineers who can develop new alternative energy sources and ways to increase energy efficiency.

Heidi A. Taboada, Ph.D., assistant professor of industrial, manufacturing and systems engineering, is the principal investigator of the BuildinG a Regional Energy and Educational Network (BGREEN) project. The USDA announced the award Tuesday, Sept. 27.

Interdisciplinary teams from UTEP, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, Texas State University-San Marcos and New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, N.M., will work with the USDA and agricultural agencies to prepare students and graduates who can develop efficient renewable energy sources, incorporate biomass conversion, improve feedstock logistics, optimize supply chains and processes, and develop green infrastructure, as they enhance the competitiveness of our nation in the global economy.

“Demand for professionals with sustainable energy knowledge is increasing as employers need graduates who can better respond to energy challenges in all professional and business contexts,” Taboada said. “This demand also will create green-collar jobs in the industrial sector and in new technology fields and will put our country on track to a sustainable, low-carbon energy future.”

The program will help place student interns and train graduate students at sites in Texas, Arkansas, New Mexico and Oklahoma, as well as Panama City, Panama.

Taboada will work alongside her UTEP colleagues: co-principal investigator Jose Espiritu, Ph.D., assistant professor of industrial, manufacturing and systems engineering; William Hargrove, Ph.D., director of the Center for Environmental Resource Management; Salvador Hernandez, Ph.D., and Shane Walker, Ph.D., assistant professors of civil engineering; and Juan Noveron, Ph.D., associate professor of chemistry.

She said the grant will bring UTEP national visibility among others in the sustainable energy field.
Richard Schoephoerster, Ph.D., dean of the College of Engineering, said this was an example of the kind of research programs the University has undertaken on the road to become a Tier One institution.

Sustainability, with a particular focus on renewable energy and the energy-water link, is among the areas of study that bring national prominence, he said.

“With support by the USDA, Dr. Taboada and her faculty colleagues will be establishing the infrastructure, training, and university partnerships necessary for us to make that national impact,” Schoephoerster said.