

FAU officials to discuss climate, energy in London

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BOCA RATON — Florida Atlantic University officials will spend an estimated \$15,000 next week on a London trip to discuss climate change and formalize partnerships with two British schools to study renewable energy.

FAU President Frank Brogan, who will leave Saturday for London, put a freeze on most university-related travel, the hiring of nonessential employees and major equipment purchases earlier this year because of budget cuts that left faculty and staff with no annual pay raises for the second year in a row.

But university spokesman Kristine McGrath said the money for the London trip is exempt from the freeze because it comes from a state grant paying for FAU's Center of Excellence in Ocean Energy Technology, and is not being drawn from the general operating budget.

"We realize that every dollar we get is precious, especially during these tight budget times, and spending it has to meet a benchmark of benefiting the people of Florida," said FAU ocean engineering Professor Rick Driscoll, who oversees FAU's Ocean Energy Technology center at the Sea Tech campus in Dania Beach.

The center, which is studying how the Gulf Stream can be harnessed as an alternative energy source, received a \$5 million grant in 2006. Lawmakers added an additional \$8.75 million this year.

Driscoll and Susan Skemp, executive director of the center, will accompany Brogan to London. Brogan's wife, Courtney, also will go to London but is paying her own way.

"This is all tied in with the state's economic development, and that's a benefit to us," said Eric Shaw, FAU's faculty senate president and a member of the school's board of trustees. "If the president doesn't go in person, then the other organization may feel slighted."

FAU's London trip is part of a statewide business development mission that includes Gov. Charlie Crist and nearly 100 business and university leaders.

The goal is to learn more about environmental policies in Europe and to promote Florida with the inauguration of the Florida Pavilion at the Farnborough Air Show, one of the largest aerospace and aviation shows in the world.

Crist spokesman Erin Isaac said Monday she wasn't sure how much the trip, from Friday through July 23, will cost the state.

Crist also plans to visit France, Russia and Spain.

Brogan is going only for the London portion of the trip and will return July 17.

Driscoll and Skemp will stay a little longer to meet with renewable energy researchers from the University of Edinburgh; Heriot-Watt University, also in Edinburgh; and the New and Renewable Energy Centre, a European agency focusing on alternative energies and the environment.

Brogan will sign formal agreements with the three groups to make it easier for them to share ideas and research with FAU.

"We're just getting into ocean energy and they've been working on this for a decade," Driscoll said. "They've got knowledge that we can leverage to help accelerate our program and do it right."

Source: Palm Beach Post