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UC Berkeley Given Funds for Stem Cell Labs

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UC Berkeley received \$20.18 million in state grants from a California research institute yesterday to be used to construct stem cell laboratories.

The California Institute for Regenerative Medicine awarded the Center of Excellence grant to the campus to fund construction and projects at stem cell research facilities. The institute awarded 12 grants totaling \$271 million.

The funds will be directed toward the construction of two floors of stem cell research labs in the Li Ka Shing Center for Biomedical and Health Sciences, a campus research facility slated for completion in 2010, and will house stem cell researchers in the same facility, according to Robert Tjian, director of the Berkeley Stem Cell Center.

"At the current time, the stem cell biologists are spread out over half a dozen buildings," Tjian said. "None of it is centralized."

California voters authorized the lab funding in 2004 with the approval of Proposition 71, which distributes \$3 billion in bond funds to stem cell research over 10 years. The proposition called for funds specifically for embryonic stem cell research not supported by the federal government.

About 60,000 square feet of the center's planned 200,000 square feet will be used for 12 laboratories devoted to stem cell work, including the study of human embryonic stem cells.

Don Gibbons, chief communications officer for the institute, said the grants will fund specialized facilities and lab equipment necessary for stem cell research.

"Researchers are running short of lab space, which makes it hard for them to recruit young and established scientists," Gibbons said. "The laboratories require specialized energy facilities and structural supports designed for stem cell research."

Tjian said the new funding would also benefit students conducting stem cell research on the Berkeley campus by allowing more opportunities for collaboration within the Li Ka Shing Center.

"These labs are really built for the purpose of housing our undergraduate and graduate students so they can do research," Tjian said.

Gibbons said he agreed that the new centralized facilities would have the benefit of bringing different types of researchers into one building.

"It will foster collaboration and accelerate the field," Gibbons said. "It's all about accelerating the pace of the field so we can get therapy for patients more quickly."