

FAU joins IBM project linking most powerful computers

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Florida Atlantic University researchers are about to get a boost of super computer muscle they never had before.

The Boca Raton school is one of just four in the United States invited to join a year-old IBM project that connects the world's most powerful computers so scientists can solve problems using the fastest and smartest equipment available.

Linking the mega computers, two of which are at FAU, is possible through new grid technology that allows computers of all types to communicate. Understanding the specifics of grid technology requires a lot of under-the-hood computer knowledge.

But what the non-expert should know is that if one super computer is good at solving problems, many super computers working together are better.

Already, FAU has several medical and public safety projects in mind for the computers, including finding ways to compress surveillance film from thousands of cameras so that it can be sent electronically in a matter of minutes, instead of days. FAU researchers also are working on a human genome project to identify markers that signal a person's susceptibility to diseases.

"This will significantly enhance our capabilities to do some projects that simply wouldn't be feasible without the super computer power," said Larry Lemanski, FAU's vice president for research.

The international project, called Latin American Grid, or LA Grid (pronounced lah grid), also aims to increase the number of Hispanic researchers, which is one of the reasons FAU was chosen to participate.

About 16 percent of FAU students are Hispanic.

Other schools involved in the project include Florida International University, the University of Miami, the University of North Florida, the University of Puerto Rico and Mexico's Monterrey Tech.

The world's second most powerful computer at IBM's T.J. Watson Research Center and the fifth most powerful computer at the Barcelona Super Computing Center also are part of the project.

Pete Martinez, vice president for IBM Consulting Services, said FAU was chosen to participate in LA Grid because of the quality of its research and the number of Hispanics involved in it.

"This was not by accident," Martinez said. "I was impressed with the talent at FAU."

IBM's first priority for LA Grid is to work on hurricane prediction and disease related research - both of which affect Latin American countries and the U.S.

Martinez said he hopes LA Grid will expand to include as many as 30 universities in areas of the country with high Hispanic populations such as Texas and California.

Schools must sign a formal agreement to be part of the project.

"This is not a social club," Martinez said. "We want this to be extremely successful."