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FIU to use grant to open new center

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has awarded a \$286,209 grant to Florida International University's College of Business Administration to train business executives in Central America and the Dominican Republic.

The grant, combined with funding from Florida FTAA, helps to establish the Small and Medium Enterprises Center of Excellence (SMECE) at FIU. The money from Miami-based Florida FTAA, a group working to locate the Free Trade Area of the Americas administration in Miami, brings the SMECE program budget to more than \$379,000.

"Early support from the Florida FTAA was crucial in helping us to develop a top-notch proposal for winning an award from USAID," said Jerry Haar, professor of management and international business and principal investigator on the SMECE project.

The center is to provide business education and executive training to entrepreneurs of small- and medium-size businesses in countries that fall under the Central American Free Trade Agreement.

The FIU College of Business Administration SMECE program is to feature four weeks of Web-based instruction and an intensive, three-day, executive-level, on-campus workshop that includes classroom instruction from FIU professors and site visits to export-import companies in the Miami area.

Entrepreneurs are to learn strategies for accessing U.S. markets and procedures for dealing with port authorities, customs brokerages and wholesale and retail outlets.

FIU said it expects to train 40 entrepreneurs in the pilot program and significantly more in subsequent years. Recruitment for the initial SMECE program is to begin this month the Miami-based university said.