

South Florida businesses are striving for stimulus dollars. Starting today, The Miami Herald follows four of them as they navigate their way through the system.

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

Seeking millions and more national prestige

For the University of Miami, the federal stimulus act could mean a major leap forward in its quest for greater academic stature.

As of last week, the university had applied for 470 grants totaling more than \$400 million. So far, nearly \$30 million has been received, and much more is expected in the months to come.

The money would help more than 100 UM scientists — mainly in biomedical fields — advance their search for treatments for conditions as severe as blindness.

Meanwhile, the money could create hundreds of jobs here in Miami.

So far, more than 80 percent of the money would come from the National Institutes of Health.

Like many younger universities, the University of Miami faces stiff competition from older schools for research grants. Key funding sources like NIH tend to funnel the lion's share of their money to the most established researchers and institutions. As a result, Florida ranked 18th in the country for NIH funding last year, even though the state ranks fourth in population.

But with the stimulus act, Congress gave the NIH an extra \$10.4 billion and told administrators to make a one-time change in the way they distribute the money. This time, in addition to scientific merit, they're considering geography.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and we don't want to blow it," said Richard Bookman, UM's vice provost for research.

The university created a task force of 21 administrators, who have been



MARICE COHN BAND/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

CLEAR VISION: Dr. Jeffrey Goldberg, left, watches student Tommy Apará prepare an experiment. Goldberg is seeking NIH grants totaling \$1.5 million to study why certain cells in the eye die.

meeting for months to lead the stimulus efforts. Stimulus grant applications have taken up thousands of hours of faculty and staff time. And they're still sending in applications, with a barrage going to the National Science Foundation in the next few weeks.

"We're going to blow past \$500 million [in applications] before we're done," Bookman said.

Unlike some other stimulus programs, however, the NIH grants are not based on formulas that feed money to states based on population. Although the agency is considering geography and trying to direct money

to hard-hit areas like Florida, it can't promise a specific amount to any specific state.

"We don't have any formula, but we do look at that [geography] when we make programmatic decisions," said Sally Rockey, acting deputy director for external research at NIH.

She added that funding decisions will be made at NIH, not at the White House.

One of the UM professors seeking stimulus money is Dr. Jeffrey Goldberg, an ophthalmologist with both a

*TURN TO UM, 14

Universities seek millions to study, prevent diseases

•UM, FROM 12

medical degree and a Ph.D. in neuroscience. His quest: two NIH grants totaling \$1.5 million to study why and how certain cells in the eye die, and what can be done to forestall this process — or even replace cells already lost.

Thanks to several other grants, Goldberg already has a busy lab with 11 employees. If he gets the stimulus grants, he'll hire four more people to help him build a three-dimensional

model of a retina using cells from animals or tissues donated by people who have died.



GOLDBERG

He and his team could then use the retina in experiments using stem cells, again from animals or people who have died. The stem cells, called retinal progenitors, normally are found in the eyes of adult humans.

Eventually, Goldberg's research could lead to new and more effective treatments for degenerative diseases of the eye, such as macular degeneration, glaucoma and retinitis pigmentosa.

While UM's request is noteworthy for its size and scope, other South Florida universities also are seeking stimulus money.

Nova Southeastern University, for example, will seek more than \$75 million. The university's projects include research on

autism and an effort to use stem cells to regrow the insides of teeth.

Two construction projects include a shared life-sciences research building on the Davie campus and an oceanography center in Dania Beach. The projects could create 2,000 jobs, said George Hanbury, NSU's chief operating officer.

"We could start construction within 60 days," Hanbury said. "We even have the building permit. We would be ready to go — but for the money."

UM at a glance

- **Stimulus \$ targeted:** 470 projects totaling \$414.2 million (so far).
- **Application status:** Some already in, but may apply for about \$100 million more.
- **Response expected:** Approval for 35 grants worth \$29.5 million already received; others expected October through January.