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UT, ExxonMobil Hook Up To Develop Energy Technologies

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By Velda Addison, Hart Energy

The coffers of the University of Texas at Austin's Energy Institute received a \$15 million funding boost courtesy of ExxonMobil.

The two are teaming up in search of technologies to meet the world's growing energy needs while reducing emissions, specifically impacts on water, air and climate. According to a news release, the joint research initiative's focus will include uncovering ways to meld renewable energy sources into the current supply mix, which is currently dominated by fossil fuels.

Their efforts could tap advanced computing, environmental management and additive manufacturing as they search for the next big technological breakthrough.

"The University of Texas at Austin has extensive experience and expertise in identifying innovative energy technologies," Sara Ortwein, president of ExxonMobil Upstream Research Co., said in the release. "Our scientists and engineers look forward to collaborating with UT-Austin's faculty and students through the Energy Institute to develop breakthrough technologies that can help reduce emissions."

The research will take advantage of UT's renewable energy, battery technologies and power grid modeling expertise.

"The University of Texas at Austin is proud and deeply appreciative of its long history of collaboration in education and research with ExxonMobil," added Gregory L. Fenves, president of the university. "This investment further unites two of the world's leading energy organizations to pursue innovations for a better energy future."

The institute's areas of research are plentiful. A few of the 20 examples highlighted on its website show researchers are covering the gamut: from algae-based biofuels and carbon sequestration to deepwater oil exploration and EOR to methane hydrates, nuclear engineering and renewable energy.

Among the latest accomplishments touted by the institute is X-ray fluorescence, a tool that analyzes the mineral composition of rock to improve drillers' knowledge of reservoirs and the commerciality potential of hydrocarbons they may contain. It was developed by geologists at UT-Austin's Bureau of Economic Geology, according to the website.

The partnership could perhaps benefit from the institute's wide reach. Its tentacles are not constrained to UT-Austin's College of Natural Science. The institute branches into UT-Austin's architecture, engineering, geosciences, law, public affairs and business schools—a trait that enables the institute to think of energy through various lenses.

This is not the first time the world's largest publicly traded company has teamed up with universities to research energy technologies. ExxonMobil said it has worked with more than 80 universities worldwide.

In 2015, the company collaborated with Princeton University's Andlinger Center for Energy and the Environment. As part of Princeton's E-filiates Partnership, to which ExxonMobil pledged \$5 million over five years, the two worked together in the area of energy and environmental innovation, the release said.

"In 2014, ExxonMobil became a founding member of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Energy Initiative, investing \$25 million over five years toward research and graduate-level energy fellowships,"

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