

FSU NEWS

FSU pursues \$2.2M research bid; Chinese partner triggers state review



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Key Points AI-assisted summary ⓘ

Florida State University seeks to join a prestigious drug discovery study led by a Denmark-based consortium.

The research aims to find new antibiotics to combat a multi-drug-resistant bacteria.

FSU's participation requires state approval due to a Chinese institute's involvement in the consortium.

[Florida State University](#) is looking to participate in what could be a groundbreaking drug discovery study through a Denmark-based research consortium.

But because a member of the proposed study is based in China, it triggers state legislation about foreign countries of concern.

Despite the Chinese company's involvement, FSU's [Board of Trustees](#) met virtually Jan. 22 and unanimously approved to seek permission from the [Florida Board of Governors](#) to be a part of the consortium.

“This is really a great opportunity for Florida State University,” FSU President Richard McCullough told trustees during the virtual meeting Thursday. “We don’t have enormous amounts of corporate-sponsored research at the university, so it’s something we’re working on.”

A research investigator in [FSU's Department of Chemistry](#) – who was not named

– was chosen to be part of the project, which would pay the university \$2.2 million over three years in exchange for its participation, according to FSU's Vice President for Research Stacey Patterson.

“It's a big number for a corporate contract in my experience,” McCullough said, referring to the funding amount. Prior to stepping into his role as FSU's president in 2021, he served as vice provost for research at Harvard University since 2012.

"The prestige of something like this is really, really significant for Florida State University," he added.

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The consortium is sponsored by the [Novo Nordisk Foundation](#), which is a large, multinational pharmaceutical company headquartered in Denmark. The research project would include FSU's participation in a study called the Gram-Negative Antibiotic Discovery Innovator Initiative (Gr-ADI).

Through the project, the FSU research investigator's objective would be to discover new antibiotic regimens that can fight a multi-drug-resistant bacteria called *Klebsiella Pneumoniae*, which is commonly known for causing serious health issues like pneumonia and bloodstream infections.

“Antibiotic resistance is really a burgeoning global public health problem – probably one of the biggest public health concerns of our time,” Patterson said Thursday. “Infections that are caused by bacteria like *Klebsiella Pneumoniae* are increasingly difficult to treat with existing drugs, and this is going to continue to be a greater and greater problem.”

While over 700 proposals were submitted by institutions interested in being a part of the foundation's research study, 22 were selected for the highly competitive consortium, according to Patterson.

But while the foundation's location in Denmark does not trigger [Board of](#)

[Governors Regulation 9.012](#) on "foreign influence," one member of the consortium is the [Beijing Huayi Health and Drug Research Institute](#). Despite the China-based company's selection, Patterson assured the board that a research security screening was completed and did not flag concerns about any of the participating entities.

The consortium would be made up of 22 institutions. Other American universities that were selected include the University of Wisconsin, the University of Washington and Harvard University as well as international institutions such as the University of Oxford and Cambridge University, both of which are in England.

"We would be in good company as part of this consortium," Patterson said, making it clear to the board that none of FSU's resources would be shared or made accessible to any of the partners under the consortium agreement.

FSU trustee and Faculty Senate President Roxanne Hughes says the invitation to be a part of the research study is an "amazing" opportunity for the university's faculty member that would be involved, and for FSU as a whole.

"This is just amazing for this faculty member," Hughes told trustees. "Antibiotic resistance is a huge issue that is going to continue to affect us... so, I fully support this from a faculty perspective. I think it's really exciting for FSU."

A few other trustees also voiced their support.

"It's obviously a great opportunity for FSU," said trustee Jorge Gonzalez, chair of the board's university research committee.

What's next

The FSU trustees' approval for the university to pursue participation in the research consortium will go before the Board of Governors for a final vote. Although that board is set to meet on Jan. 28 and 29 on FSU's campus, it is

unclear when it will vote on the request as the item is not listed on any upcoming meeting agendas.

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