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UB to create materials-design department, add 12 faculty members

The University at Buffalo is playing a significant role in several Buffalo Billion projects, including an advanced manufacturing and genome-supercomputer project.

To that end, the university has announced it is launching a department specifically geared toward the market segments those programs will serve.

The Department of Materials Design and Innovation will get off the ground with the help of a $1.5 million gift from Erich Bloch to establish the Erich Bloch Endowed Chair. Bloch, who earned his bachelor's degree from UB in 1952, later became a high-ranking IBM executive and directed the National Science Foundation from 1984 to 1990. He was part of a team that won the National Medal of Technology in 1985.

The department will initially establish master's and Ph.D. programs and coincide with the hiring of 12 tenure-track faculty members. University officials expect an undergraduate program will be added later.

MDI was formed through a collaboration of the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences and the College of Arts and Sciences, and will “address regional and national demand for new materials that accelerate research and education in advanced manufacturing and biotechnology,” according to a UB news release. It will also “build on UB’s existing research expertise to discover, develop and bring to market new materials that are critical to the economic security of the region, nation and world.”

UB has launched an international search for a scholar and researcher to fill the endowed chair and lead the department.

“New and improved materials, with increased functionality, lower costs, lighter weights and...
lowered environmental impacts, play a critical role in advanced manufacturing and biotechnology,” said Liesl Folks, dean of the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences.

MDI researchers will work closely on several ongoing UB initiatives, including its Center of Excellence in Materials Informatics, which was established recently and will eventually find a physical home; its Center for Computational Research, which is a key part of a partnership with the New York Genome Center being backed with $105 million in state funds; and the Buffalo Niagara Advanced Manufacturing Institute, another state project which will seek industrial partners to focus on developing new technologies and improving existing products and processes.

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