SILS creates data system

UNC is helping lead a multi-million dollar research effort.

By Edward Pickup
Staff Writer

Researchers in the School of Information and Library Science have become part of a multi-million dollar effort to create a national data network.

Plans for the infrastructure are in their earliest stages, with researchers saying they don't know exactly how far their research could take them.

"The significance of the grant is bigger than the actual monetary award as it position's Carolina as a leader in data management," said Karen Green, communications director of the Renaissance Computing Institute, which will be involved in the research.

The University's inclusion in the $8 million grant from the National Science Foundation underlines its prominence in the field of information science, said Barbara Entwisle, UNC's vice chancellor for research.

"UNC is the place to come for library and information science," she said.

The University will receive about $4 million of the $8 million during five years awarded to the DataNet Federation Consortium, as the lead institution and home to the Data Intensive Cyber Environments (DICE) Center.

The consortium is made up of researchers from seven additional research universities.

The technological tool used to create the national network, — the integrated Rule Oriented Data System — is already being put to use by countries such as Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom to build their own data infrastructures.

The consortium will principally address the data management needs of six science and engineering disciplines, but the technology being developed has other significant uses.

Reagan Moore, principal investigator for the consortium and director of the DICE Center at UNC, said the project has implications for research in academics, digital libraries and federal agencies such as NASA.

"The technology could provide an on-campus opportunity for students to start building their own digital libraries of whatever interests them most," Moore said.

This kind of technology use can be seen at Drexel University in Philadelphia, where the engineering department is using it to share design blueprints among faculty and students, Green said.

Entwisle said the grant was the result of a three-year application process.

"We have a powerful and impressive team interested in national data research across a wide range of disciplines," she said.

This foundation could lead to more funding in the future, Entwisle said.

The School of Information and Library Science tied for first in the country for library and information studies graduate schools by U.S. News and World Report.