SURA Energy Workshop
August 11-12, 2009
Atlanta, GA

SURA Board of Trustees Meeting
October 20-21, 2009

The SURA Development Committee convened a workshop to explore potential energy research collaborations involving Member institutions and other research centers (such as national laboratories) in the SURA region. The workshop was held August 11-12 at a hotel near the Atlanta airport to facilitate access. Twenty-two participants from SURA Member institutions[1] and invited speakers from Oak Ridge National Laboratory, the Biofuels Center of North Carolina, and the University of Minnesota were involved in the meeting.

Representatives from each of the universities gave presentations summarizing energy related research and facilities at their institutions. The first invited speaker was Steven Burke, President and CEO of the Biofuels Center of North Carolina. The Biofuels Center of North Carolina is a private, nonprofit corporation initially funded with a $5 million appropriation from the 2007 General Assembly. It receives continuing funding from the General Assembly to implement North Carolina's Strategic Plan for Biofuels Leadership. The Biofuels Center supplements its appropriations with funding from private foundations, partners with corporate entities, and provides funding support for grant proposals.

Jason Hill, a resident fellow of the Institute on the Environment at the University of Minnesota, presented "Costs and benefits of transportation biofuels" to the group. His analysis involved a full cost accounting of various biofuels, taking into account green house gas and particulate matter emissions and was used to compare the economics corn and cellulosic feed stocks. Brian Davison, Interim Director of the DOE Bioenergy Science Center – one of the three bioenergy centers funded by the Department of Energy, gave the third invited talk. He discussed the scope of the center's work and the preparation of the proposal to the DOE, describing in detail how collaborators were organized into an integrated team.

Considerable discussion among the group lead to a recommendation that two collaborative research areas could be appropriate for SURA and its member institutions. The first involved bioenergy, perhaps including algae or other non-food feedstocks. The other was related to hybrid energy systems, including energy harvesting technologies that could be substantially more efficient than present photovoltaic technologies. The workshop participants formed two break-out sessions to further discuss these possible collaborations. Session leaders compiled the notes that will be used as a basis for additional discussions.

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[1] Louisiana State University, University of Georgia, University of South Florida, North Carolina State University, University of Virginia, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, University of Florida, West Virginia University.