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UK to compete for best solar-house design

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Posted: 2/4/08

A big blue sky and a green house may be the winning combination at a solar house building competition in 2009.

UK is one of the 20 schools in the world selected to design and build a house solely operated by the sun in the U.S. Department of Energy 2009 Solar Decathlon. Students and faculty will construct a house in spring 2009, test it during the summer and then transport it to Washington in the fall for a competition against other schools' designs.

During the weeklong competition, houses are judged by architects and engineers in 10 areas: architecture, engineering, market viability, communications, comfort zone, appliances, hot water, lighting, energy balance and transportation. In past years, winning designs have included slanted glass roofs, wooden floors and houses that glow at night.

UK's project leader, Donald Colliver, decided to apply for the competition after attending the 2007 Solar Decathlon.

"I saw the interaction of students during the events and realized that it was a great opportunity for UK to try to pull together a project that will move us toward the university's strategic plan," Colliver said, referring to UK's top-20 goals.

Six of UK's colleges, along with 16 departments and centers, will work together to design and complete the solar-powered house. Because UK was just selected last week, Colliver and others are still in the beginning stages of finding students to work on the design.

"This is a wonderful opportunity for many disciplines to learn how to work together," said Hilary Bryon, an architecture professor who also attended the Solar Decathlon last year. "It is also an opportunity to represent our state by taking something special from Kentucky to Washington D.C.," she said.

To generate suggestions for the design, UK is inviting people across campus to "Open Ideas Competition: What about Blue is Green?" at noon on Thursday in the Center Theater at the Student Center.

"We are looking to get input from a huge, diverse range of Kentuckians, from kids to adults," Bryon said.

People who attend can contribute thoughts about materials, technologies and lifestyles that are unique to Kentucky.

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