The Tennessee Board of Regents has granted approval to MTSU to become the home for the new WISTEM Center.

WISTEM—Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics—will be located in Room 106 of the Midgett Building starting Wednesday, July 1, said Dr. Judith Iriarte-Gross, professor of chemistry and center director. It will fall under the College of Basic and Applied Sciences umbrella. “I see WISTEM being a center for today and for the future,” Iriarte-Gross said. “If we don’t have women professionals in STEM, who’s going to discover the cure for breast cancer, develop an energy-efficient vehicle or find an answer to the nuclear-waste storage problem? We’re losing men in STEM, and it’s even tougher for women. Women professionals in STEM are providing us with clean water and air, new materials, medical breakthroughs and other exciting innovations because of their dedication to their science."

Dr. Diane Miller, interim executive vice president and provost, said she welcomes yet another center to campus. She was one of 11 MTSU administrators endorsing the WISTEM proposal.

“We are excited by the recent approval of the WISTEM Center at MTSU and appreciative of the time and efforts by many, but particularly the leadership of Dr. Iriarte-Gross, whose vision for bringing more women into the STEM disciplines will be realized through this center,” Miller said.

“The mission of the center will advance many of the university’s institutional goals and support the Academic Master Plan by helping MTSU pursue regional recognition in mathematics and science education,” Miller added. “I commend Dr. Iriarte-Gross and other faculty and staff members who participated in the process that brought the WISTEM Center to MTSU. Its existence will benefit many MTSU students plus have a significant positive impact on STEM teacher preparation and STEM education programs across the state.”

Iriarte-Gross said the center will have four primary goals:

- collaborating with the community to maximize efforts to support women in STEM;
- supporting female STEM faculty in their academic development and career growth;
- maximizing resources and opportunities for girls and women to pursue STEM education and careers; and
- supporting the education community from pre-kindergarten to college in promoting best practices of gender equity in STEM education.

To meet these goals, WISTEM will continue to provide its signature programs—Expanding Your Horizons, Girls Raised in Tennessee Science, the GRITS Collaborative, and Women In Science and Engineering—to the campus and MTSU community, Iriarte-Gross wrote in the proposal.

The center will work with the CBAS; the Tennessee Mathematics, Science and Technology Center; MTSU’s Learning, Teaching and Innovative Technology Center; MTSU’s Association of Faculty and Administrative Women; and other interested and qualified organizations to support all STEM faculty and graduate students with professional-development opportunities.

Iriarte-Gross said she anticipates the “pulling together of all resources between MTSU and the middle Tennessee community to leverage what we have.”

She added that she already has heard from Dr. Chrisila Pettey, professor in computer science, who shared information about a Women in Computer Science organization led by associate professor Brenda Parker and how the organizations could benefit from each other.

Iriarte-Gross said she plans to talk to various chairs in CBAS and other departments like geosciences and psychology to discuss “what we can do and how we can help women in STEM.”

“All too often, I hear women students say, ‘I was lucky I got a good grade’ or ‘I was lucky I got a good job.’” Iriarte-Gross added. “They’ve got to get out of that mindset and realize they are good at what they do, and say, ‘We’re not lucky. We know our stuff.’”