

## U-of-I researchers seek patent for smaller driving simulator

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By [O.Kay Henderson](#)

Researchers at the University of Iowa's National Advanced Driving Simulator are in the process of getting a patent for a much smaller and more portable driving simulator. The units have been dubbed "MiniSims" and Omar Ahmad, the assistant director of the project, says they run on just two computers.

"Something that used to take a lot more room -- an entire room sometimes -- is now packaged in less than a quarter of the size," Ahmad says. The U-of-I research team has been working for eight years on this technology and they hope to sell these lower-cost and portable driving simulators, most likely through a company that would buy a license to market the machines.

The ultimate consumers for "MiniSims" might include pharmaceutical companies testing whether certain drugs cause driving impairment or researchers at other universities testing whether certain medical conditions impact a patient's driving abilities.

"We've had people contact us specifically for these types of applications the past couple of months and the past couple of years," Ahmad says. The U-of-I has trademarked the "MiniSim" name. Ahmad says eventually they hope to adapt the software so a driving simulator could be loaded on a laptop.

"Applying this research so it becomes a packaged technology that becomes a lot more accessible to end users," he says. One of the biggest hurdle to converting the program to a laptop, though, is the small screen. The National Advanced Driving Simulator at the University of Iowa offers a 180-degree view of the virtual "road" courtesy of three plasma displays, plus there's an actual steering wheel, pedals, a shifter and other instruments that make the user feel as if he is driving an actual vehicle.

Converting that experience to a smaller-scale is not only difficult because of the size of a laptop screen, but Ahmad says using a laptop's joystick isn't quite the same as a steering wheel and pedals either.

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