The Mack-Blackwell National Rural Transportation Study Center was established by a grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation to provide educational opportunities and conduct research in the area of rural transportation. Additional support is received from the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department.

The broad objective of the center is to improve the quality of life in rural areas through transportation. The educational objective is to provide graduates qualified to enter the transportation-related professions with the diversity of backgrounds needed to lead transportation development in the 21st century. Although housed within the Department of Civil Engineering, the Mack-Blackwell Center's activities are not limited to engineering. All disciplines related to or impacted by transportation participate in the center's research and educational activities.