Message from the director

Since its inception in 1996, the BellSouth Minority Engineering Program has enjoyed nine productive years of continued success. As the new director of BMEP, I am honored to manage the recruitment, retention and student development programs into the next phases of success. It is my personal goal to optimize the BMEP student experience at Auburn University by building on an already successful program.

As we move forward, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many sponsors of BMEP for their financial support. Our programs would not be possible without it, in addition to which many of our sponsors take time from their busy schedules to partake in our Sunday Evening Workshops. This kind of interaction provides our students with career search strategies and background information about prospective career opportunities.

In reflecting on the 2004-2005 academic year, one of the highlights was several Southern Company representatives hosting our ninth Annual Awards Ceremony in April. Forty BMEP scholars received recognition for their academic achievements.

Mentors and tutors are the nuts, bolts, wheels and spokes of BMEP. All of our programs connect and evolve around their involvement. I would like to thank our 51 mentor/tutors who give their time and energy in providing incoming freshmen with the study tools and strategies to overcome learning obstacles normally experienced during the first year of college.

Our BMEP parents are remarkable. It has been a pleasure talking with concerned parents interested in motivating their sons and daughters to reach their dreams.

Whether you are a parent assisting your child with a college search, a transfer student, educator, student counselor or friend of the BMEP, enjoy your journey through our Web site at www.eng.auburn.edu/bmep. If you have questions, please don’t hesitate to call us at 334-844-2330. I encourage you to learn more about the BellSouth Minority Engineering Program in the Samuel Ginn College of Engineering.

Cordially,

Shirley Scott Harris
AU among top producers of African-American engineers

In the most recent *Diverse — Issues in Higher Education* (formerly *Black Issues in Higher Education*) survey, Auburn University ranks 14th nationally in the number of engineering bachelor’s degrees awarded to African-Americans (see survey results on next page). The ranking marks the fifth consecutive year the periodical has placed Auburn among the top 25.

*Diverse — Issues in Higher Education*'s rankings are based on graduation data from colleges and universities provided to the U.S. Department of Education for the 2003-04 academic year. The data comes from both public and private institutions and includes historically black and predominately white institutions.

"The BellSouth Minority Engineering Program has played a major role in the academic success of the college’s underrepresented students," says Larry Benefield, dean of the Samuel Ginn College of Engineering. "The graduation numbers continue to provide positive proof that structured learning environments outside the classroom that incorporate proactive mentoring and tutoring can make a significant difference in student retention." The Ginn College of Engineering has averaged 36 African-American baccalaureates since fall 2000.

"The academic support programs have helped create a strong work ethic in students, which significantly contributes to their success," adds Benefield.

During the 2003-04 academic year, Auburn produced 40 African-American engineers, ranking ahead of such programs as Ohio State University, 18th with 37 graduates; Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 24th with 31 graduates; Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, 28th with 28 graduates; Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 33rd with 27 graduates; University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 41st with 22 graduates; and Penn State, 46th with 21 graduates.

Georgia Tech was first and North Carolina A&T State University was second in the survey, with North Carolina State at Raleigh rounding out the top five.

Among southeastern schools, Auburn ranked ahead of Clemson University, 18th with 37 graduates; University of Florida, 21st with 34 graduates; University of South Carolina, 28th with 28 graduates; Louisiana State, 33rd with 27 graduates; and Vanderbilt University, 48th with 19 graduates. The University of Alabama was not ranked in the survey.

"Relative to other academic support programs, BMEP has taken a very proactive approach to retaining students," says Shirley Harris, director of BMEP. "Participants are asked to maintain a weekly tutorial schedule that consists of several one-hour sessions between class times. This way, tutoring and mentoring are a part of the student’s daily routine."

According to Harris, research suggests that providing structured academic support in this way is more effective in meeting the student’s academic needs.

"The sessions provide assistance in mathematics, chemistry and physics," she adds, "and include one-on-one tutoring and cooperative learning group study that allow them to benefit from upper-level engineering students as well as from their classmates."

Reva Ladd, a junior in AU’s aerospace engineering program from Mobile who just participated in a summer research program at the University of Notre Dame, agrees.

"BMEP has made a huge difference in my focus and preparation for my engineering courses."
### Survey Results

*Diverse — Issues in Higher Education* (formerly *Black Issues in Higher Education*) June 2005 ranking of number of engineering bachelor’s degrees awarded to African-Americans

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Joe White, a distribution engineering representative from Mississippi Power (left) and Michelle Hackney, a recruiting representative with Southern Company (right), speak to BMEP students about a career in engineering during the 2005 BMEP Scholars Awards on the Auburn campus in April.
ExxonMobil visits BMEP, students learn marketability

"GPA, extracurricular activity, and experience," ExxonMobil representatives Scott Arvin, Billy Bundrick and Dwayne Sanders emphasized as they spoke to BMEP students during a recent Sunday night tutorial. They were looking to recruit eager students who are interested in working for a great company that has sites all over the world.

Sanders also spoke about the characteristics and skills he feels are important for students to possess in order to be competitive in the business world. Some of the qualities noted were leadership skills and interpersonal skills.

After the session, the ExxonMobil representatives treated the students to pizza and answered questions.

"It was great that ExxonMobil came out to speak to us," says Jermaine Dovine, a senior in mechanical engineering from Fairfield, Ala. "I hope more companies will do the same."

BMEP mentor, mentee share thoughts

Mentor
Olange Anise, sophomore in computer science and software engineering from Mobile

What in your opinion is the most difficult thing about engineering?
The difficult thing about this field of study is that even though you put your hard work into classes and study a lot, sometimes it doesn’t show.
What's the most enjoyable thing about engineering?
When I complete my degree … the reward of the paycheck.

What would be your dream job?
My dream job would be working with IBM managing software projects.

What organizations are you involved in?
BMEP, Successfully Orienting Students, National Society of Black Engineers

What is your best quality?
My best quality is my friendly attitude and my ability to connect with different people.

What is your biggest obstacle to overcome?
My biggest obstacle is trying to obtain my computer science degree because plenty of times I wanted to change my major.

What do you like most about Auburn University?
Auburn is a great place to network and find potential employers.

What is the one thing you would change about the world we live in?
I would change how we view the different third world nations, especially how we look at "helping" them with their problems. Also, how we look at the poor. We (as the world) tend to look down on the poor instead of helping them.

Mentee
Gabriel McNabb, freshman in chemical engineering from Birmingham

What in your opinion is the most difficult thing about engineering?
The most difficult thing about engineering has to be the problem-solving you face on a daily basis.

What’s the most enjoyable thing about engineering?
You don’t have to worry about being on an island by yourself because you have team players who are willing to stick it out with you.

What would be your dream job?
I do not have a dream job because I don’t believe there’s a job out there that I have to dream about to become reality.

What organizations are you involved in?
BMEP

What is your best quality?
I have mind over matter.

What is your biggest obstacle to overcome?
My bad study habits.

What do you like most about Auburn University?
It is a good learning environment, and everybody seems to be polite and nice.

What is the one thing you would change about the world we live in?
I would not change anything because God made it just the way it should be. I say that because many people say that they will change this and that to make the world a better place, but if you weren’t challenged by obstacles, what would you do if one happens to pop up?
Alumnus Smith checks in
2001 alumnus, electrical and computer engineering

What was the most difficult adjustment you had to make leaving college and entering the professional world?
The most difficult thing about leaving college was not being around people my own age. When you graduate and get that first job, you’re in the real world and you have a more “grown up” attitude about things.

When you got your first job, did you ever doubt your skills or abilities or wonder if you really knew enough to do your job well?
My first job coming out of college required me to program in Java, a language I didn’t really know. On top of that, I didn’t really like programming when I was in school. I often wondered if I would really be cut out for the job, but I hung in there and everything worked out okay.

With whom are you currently employed and what are your responsibilities?
I work for FedEx as a programmer analyst.

Was getting hired for your current job difficult, and in general, what do job prospects look like for other young African-Americans coming out of college?
I had interned with FedEx while I was in college, so actually getting hired by them wasn’t really tough. What’s important for recent graduates and college seniors to remember is that there aren’t as many technical jobs out there as there used to be, so you need something such as good communication skills and leadership experience to set yourself apart from other applicants.

Of course being in a technology-related field, you may have to get used to being the only African-American on your team and sometimes even in your division. Is this true for you and if so how do you cope with race issues in the workplace?
For me, most entry-level positions were held by people from all around the globe, so the difficulty wasn’t the typical black/white issues that many would think of, it was more of adapting to and learning about different cultures.

How much of what you learned at Auburn must you actively apply in doing your job? Specifically, what classes or concepts?
I find that the programming classes I took play a vital role in doing my job, more so than theory or math classes.

Like the saying goes, hindsight is 20/20. If you could do it all over again, what is the one thing you would have done differently in college to better prepare yourself for the working world?
I would have chosen to be a part of more efficient study groups, taken the time to get to know people who are smarter than me, and studied with members of different races.

What do you miss most/least about being in college?
What I miss most about college would have to be the people and the different athletic events I was able to go to. What I miss least about college would be the exams, the exams, and the exams!

Would you ever consider graduate school? If so, would it be to advance your current degree or would you try something else such as an M.B.A?
Currently I am working on my M.B.A. online through Auburn University and will graduate at the end of the fall semester. I would encourage undergraduates to think about pursuing an M.B.A. or other advanced degree because of the opportunities that become available because they’ve gone the extra mile.

A lot of engineering students are motivated to keep moving forward by a lot of things, particularly the salary they hope to receive. Do you feel that the work you put into college is being rewarded or should students expect to have to work their way up to those salaries they dream of?

What students need to remember when they look these salaries up is the figure that’s given tends to be specific to a certain region of the country. Companies that are located out west or up north tend to offer higher salaries simply because the cost of living is higher than in the South. So a job in Georgia may not offer the same pay as the same job in California in terms of actual figures, but once you factor in cost of living, you may be getting the same thing.

Students participate in cooperative education

Four BMEP students took advantage of co-op opportunities during the 04-05 academic year. Co-op prepares students for professional careers by combining academic training with practical work experience in industry, business and government. Congratulations to:

Charles Gilbert, junior in electrical and computer engineering from Lanett, Ala.
Co-op: Regions Technology, Montgomery

Brandi Tate, junior in electrical and computer engineering from Ethelsville, Ala.
Co-op: Mississippi Power, Hattiesburg, Miss.

Jeremy Echols, junior in electrical and computer engineering from Auburn, Ala.
Co-op: Vulcan Materials Company, Birmingham

Rodmesia Clarke, junior in chemical engineering from Prichard, Ala.
Co-op: British Petroleum, Decatur, Ala.

Representing ChevronTexaco, Brian Porter (seated left) and Jackie Sims (seated right) present a check to Larry Benefield, dean of engineering (seated center), in September 2004. The funds are shared by four departments and the BellSouth Minority Engineering Program. Standing from left are David Dyer, mechanical engineering department chair; Victor Nelson of the electrical and computer engineering faculty; Chris Roberts, chemical engineering department chair; Hulya Kirkici of the electrical and computer engineering faculty; and Shirley Harris, BMEP director.
ExxonMobil presents a check to the BellSouth Minority Engineering Program in October 2004. Seated from left: Scott Arvin, U.S. ethylene/propylene supply manager; ExxonMobil Chemical, Houston; John Heilman, provost and vice president for academic affairs; Larry Benefield, dean of engineering. Standing from left: Gene Hess, corporate controllers, system account manager; ExxonMobil Global Services Company, Houston; DeWayne Sanders, Baytown complex lab supervisor, Baytown, Texas; Billy Bundrick, intermediates Americas sourcing manager; ExxonMobil Chemical, Houston; and Shirley Harris, BMEP director.

BMEP recognizes donors

Donors of 2004-05

BellSouth
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ChevronTexaco
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Harris Corporation
Kenneth Kelly (individual donor)
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Rod and Geneva Grandy Endowment
Seeds of Love/Willie T. Grant
Southern Company
Texas Instruments
William F. and Brenda W. Hayes Endowment for Diversity
Students, alumni, industry share enthusiasm

“Your enthusiasm rubbed off on the students and me. These are such fine young men and women, and I love seeing them excited about engineering. You are doing an outstanding job!”

— Veronica Chesnut, former director, college and community relations, Wallace Community College

“I work at ExxonMobil in Houston and attribute much of my success at Auburn University and my current job to BMEP.”

— Jeremy Ellis, BMEP alumnum
“Through this program, Auburn has also reached out to the corporate community as a partner in the entire process of educating, mentoring, developing and career selection for minority students. Of all its achievements and recognition around diversity and mentoring, BellSouth is especially proud of its sponsorship of and partnership with Auburn University in the BellSouth Minority Engineering Program.”

— Michael Watson, senior director, communications relations, BellSouth
“The BellSouth Minority Engineering Program continues to be a viable entity on the Auburn campus for recruitment and retention of African-American and minority engineering students. The long-standing success of this program has brought national recognition to Auburn’s reputation for graduating African-American engineering students and serves as a model for other institutes of higher education.”

— Keenan Grenell, Marquette University-Milwaukee, formerly interim assistant provost, diversity and multicultural affairs, Auburn University

“I have been part of BMEP since I was a freshman. I started college in August 2000 as a mentee in the program. BMEP nurtures the whole student, ranging from academics, finances, and professional development to support for the individual’s personal growth and creation of lifelong friendships.”

— Nicole Burrell, software engineering major, Auburn University
The BMEP Newsletter is published once yearly by the BellSouth Minority Engineering Program. Mailing and e-mail address changes, news items, and suggestions should be sent to Shirley Harris, 108 Ramsay Hall, Auburn University, AL, 36849-5341 or shirleys@eng.auburn.edu.

www.eng.auburn.edu/bmep