

INCLUSIVE INNOVATION: CREATING A CONFERENCE TO PROMOTE DIVERSITY IN SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING, AND MATH

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The College of Engineering at the University of Missouri, Columbia (MU Engineering) develops engineering leaders who positively influence society and bring innovation to the global workforce. Recruiting top students from around the world to fuel an atmosphere of excellence and cutting-edge growth, MU Engineering prepares out-of-the-box thinkers, innovators, and entrepreneurs who stand ready to lead today and adapt to tomorrow. To engage all of our students with industry in an inclusive space, the MU Engineering Office of Diversity and Outreach Initiatives established the Diverse Engineering Professionals Conference in 2017 in partnership with a student committee. The committee included representatives from various organizations, including the National Society of Black Engineers, Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, Engineering Student Council, Society of Women Engineers, and Out in STEM. Industrial sponsorships were secured with assistance from the MU Engineering Leadership, Engagement and Career Development Academy. The daylong conference recognizes diversity organizations and diverse students and their achievements while promoting our core college values of integrity, excellence, and collaboration. The conference includes professional development and diversity education workshops, research presentations, keynote speakers, and a closing ceremony. In its first year, the conference featured nine companies and attracted about 75 attendees. In year two, the conference nearly doubled its impact with 12 companies and 150 attendees, including students from all majors, years, and demographics. The conference was well received across both years and continues to grow as an annual effort in the college. Feedback from company representatives and students re-emphasized the need for an intimate company-student environment like that found at the Diverse Engineering Professionals Conference.

Key words: Diversity; Inclusivity; Student development; Career; Leadership; Industry; Industrial engagement; Inclusive Excellence

INTRODUCTION

There is a growing need for inclusive innovation and the removal of barriers for the next generation of students in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). STEM in higher education has

garnered great interest in recent years, with reports of the advantages such a degree holds for students in terms of financial stability and easier job placement, among other benefits (1). The National Science Foundation (NSF) reports that demographics in

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