

IMS2021 Project Connect: Connecting to Broaden Participation

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In the last seven years, more than 120 students from groups underrepresented in engineering have attended the IEEE Microwave Theory and Techniques Society (MTT-S) International Microwave Symposium (IMS) as



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participants of IMS Project Connect (PC). Most of these students would not have attended IMS were it not for the opportunity provided through PC. For many, the experience of participating contributed to their decision to pursue graduate studies and/or a career in the microwave field.

Each year, the PC program, housed within the IMS, hosts approximately 20 students from underrepresented groups for four days of community building and professional develop-

ment. Most participants are juniors or seniors in undergraduate programs, along with a smaller cohort of first-year students in graduate programs. The groups, consistently mixed in gender and ethnicity, are provided an opportunity for direct interaction with fellow PC participants, practitioners, academics, and leaders in the field and of the MTT-S. PC has been in operation since 2014 and is sponsored jointly by the National Science Foundation and the IMS Organizing Committee

(in 2020, a private donor, the Julio and Maggie Navarro family, provided additional support).

The invaluable support that PC receives from academic and industry leaders who participate in panel sessions and one-on-one conversations with the students is a major reason for its success. These personal interactions provide unique opportunities for students to glimpse career path opportunities that would otherwise seem out of reach. The chance to talk with the companies and individuals who are creating the technology that powers our profession is another factor that students consistently rank as a major highlight of the program.

Above all else, the most important ingredient in the PC recipe is the support that members and friends of the IEEE MTT-S community give to encourage students to apply to the program. Over the past seven years, PC has been fortunate to have student participants from more than 36 different universities (Figure 1). Within each university, at least one individual faculty or staff member has taken an interest in personally reaching out and lending support. This is so important because, for many students from underrepresented groups, there is a steep potential barrier even to apply.

Not surprisingly, the format of the PC program is evolving with the times. In 2020, a virtual version of the traditional four-day format was adopted, with everyone, organizers and students, remotely located (Figure 2). Community building is a hallmark of PC, and, despite the virtual setting, a combination of presymposium team interactions, amazing involvement from panelists and speakers, and several small group-based activities during IMS2020 resulted in a remarkably successful event. For 2021, Project Connect will continue the virtual agenda.



Figure 1. Over the past seven years, PC student participants have come from more than 36 different universities.

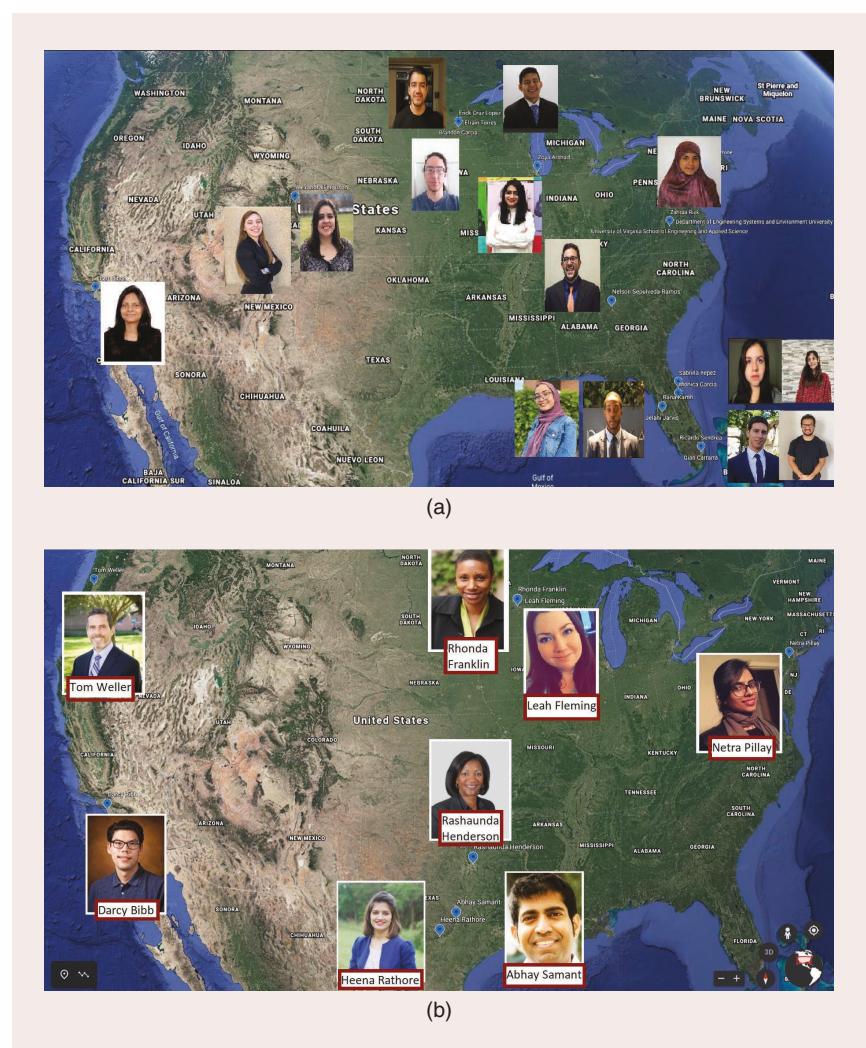


Figure 2. The IMS2020 PC program: the (a) student cohort and (b) organizers.

We invite you to join us as a virtual volunteer to influence and mentor future microwave engineers in Atlanta,

Georgia. You can email imsprojectconnect@gmail.com for more information about how to help.