UTEP Engineering Student Selected for Exclusive Program

Paola Gandara, graduate student in Industrial Engineering has been selected as one of only 20 students from throughout the nation to participate in the Science Mentoring & Diversity Program (SMDP) at the International Center for Professional Development (http://icpdprograms.org/).

"Minorities are underrepresented in the biotechnology industry as in many other science, technology, engineering and math professions and the biotechnology industry is doing something about it," says Scott May, executive director at the International Center for Professional Development. “This effort is important for many reasons, but in particular, a diverse workforce is more productive as it brings a larger pool of ideas, skills and experiences that collectively increases the knowledge base required for scientific innovation.”

SMDP’s goal is to increase the career success of scientists from underrepresented ethnic groups in the biotechnology industry. SMDP provides access to early career education during the program. Participants into the SMDP program will receive professional career development assistance and mentoring from biotechnology industry mentors for a year.

The year long program begins with a three day training session prior to the 2011 BIO International Convention in Washington D.C. (http://convention.bio.org/). The annual conference hosts over 15,000 people from the global biotechnology sector.

Ricardo Pineda, Ph.D., Chair and Professor - Industrial, Manufacturing & Systems Engineering department, states, “Paola has proven once again her talent shines in a national competitions. She will represent UTEP and the Hispanic community of El Paso very well. I have no doubt that she will be very successful in this program.”

Minority populations experience higher rates of mortality due to diseases such as cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and HIV/AIDS. These disparities may be partially attributed to
a low number of minorities in the biomedical workforce. Diverse perspectives in science research leads to better opportunities for scientific advancements and eventually reduced health disparities across the entire population. The companies that support the program recognize that increasing the diversity of the scientists conducting biotechnology research will lead to novel solutions for the healthcare needs of a demographically diverse patient population.

Ms. Gandara said “Being selected will allow me to represent my research field, my engineering department, and most importantly UTEP as a top research institution.” She adds, “I hope that my selection to this program will inspire other students to apply to numerous opportunities available and that they will be assertive in believing that they too represent the caliber of students that are cultivated here at UTEP.”

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