STEM students represented UTEP at the 2013 HENAAC Conference

Nine College of Engineering students were selected from a handful of 600 applicants, to attend one of the nation’s most prestigious conferences— the 2013 HENAAC: Great Minds in STEM Conference that was held on Oct. 3-5 in New Orleans, LA.

The HENAAC conference is designed to keep America technologically strong by promoting Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) careers especially in undeserved communities.

In order to be eligible to apply for this scholarship, all student applicants had to be in STEM related majors, have previously demonstrated leadership through academic achievements and campus/community activities, have an overall grade point average of 3.0 or higher and be of Hispanic origin and/or significantly have participated in organizations and activities in the Hispanic Community.

The nine students that were able to represent UTEP were: sophomore mechanical engineering Christian Amezcua, junior lower division civil engineering major Ana Guzman, senior electrical engineering major Roya Edalatapour, senior electrical engineering major Jessica Montes, freshman mechanical engineering major Cynthia Morales, freshman mechanical engineering Erick Salazar, junior metallurgical and materials engineering major Juan Vargas, senior computer science major Michael Velez, senior electrical engineering major Juan Vicente.

Miguel Velez-Reyes Ph.D., electrical and computer engineering professor and chair said that these students are excellent STEM role models for their peers and for future generations of UTEP
students.

“The HEENAC scholars program addresses the immense need that the United States has to produce more domestic engineers and scientists. This award from HEENAC/Great Minds in STEM—is a recognition of the talent and quality of our engineering students and the quality of the education they receive at UTEP. These students are excellent STEM role models for their peers and for future generations of UTEP students.”

According to Montes, she said that being selected as a recipient, demonstrated the great achievements of not only herself but UTEP’s college of engineering as well—since she received much help from faculty and staff on the application process.

“No one individual is solely responsible for his or her own success, behind us all is a reflection of those who give us the encouragement to strengthen us, to guide us, to give us the needed ambition, to take us beyond our own expectations, and to celebrate as a whole the accomplishments of one another,” Montes said.

As an effect of Montes research experience at UT Dallas last summer and working alongside of Dr. Wicker at the W.M. Keck Center for the past three semesters, it led her to acquire more knowledge in the STEM field.

“I have acquired so much knowledge and necessary skills that have given me opportunities such as this one and that will also enable me to apply for future careers,” Montes said. “The mentors in my laboratories have been some of the greatest, my professors have also been of great help as well—their support has been preeminent.”

Montes said that HEENAC has paved the way for future generations of Hispanics and lead by example to empower communities and enhance the nation’s professional technical workforce.

“Attending the conference gave me an opportunity to network and interact with finest minds, from top executives and innovative professional as well as the brightest STEM students —for future opportunities, I was beyond happy to be representing UTEP as a top leading university,” Montes said.
On HENAAC’s 25th Anniversary, more than 40 top leading companies were able to sponsor this scholarship, four of which sponsored eight UTEP students—these being: Cummins Inc., NASA Marshall Space Flight Center, VMware Inc., and Lockheed Martin.

Moreover, attendees were able to have an insight on the current projects that Lockheed Martin, Rockwell, Cummins, Boeing and NASA are currently working on.

“Their projects involved in the fields such as electrical, computer systems, mechanical and aerospace engineering,” Montes said. “I learned so much from several companies in the sessions and the opportunities that are available for those with an education in the STEM field.”

Guzman said that it’s a great honor to have been sponsored by NASA since it will open a lot of doors to opportunities for her to have a successful future.

“This means that I can keep pursuing my dream of becoming an engineer without having to worry about how to pay for college,” Guzman said.

According to Guzman the conference not only helped her practice and strengthen her communication and interview skills, but it also gave her the opportunity to network, meet new engineering friends, and be aware of internship opportunities.

Like Guzman, Montes also learned a lot of tips when it comes to the interview process.

“It was my first time being interviewed on site, however, it taught me to always be prepared for any type of questions and to sharpen up on the communication skills, because it is never enough,” Montes said.

The HENAAC Conference application will open on January 2014. For more information visit www.greatmindsinstem.org

About UTEP College of Engineering

The College of Engineering is a national leader in engineering education and a leading producer of doctoral, masters and baccalaureate degreeed Hispanic engineers. The University of Texas at El Paso
(UTEP) is the second oldest academic institution of The University of Texas System. Washington Monthly ranks UTEP as No. 12 in the nation in its annual College Guide and Rankings. The magazine's rankings were based on a combination of social mobility, research production, commitment to service and cost-effectiveness of degree completion. For more information visit engineering.utep.edu

By Andrea Acosta