AAMU sees marked increase in funding proposals, awards

The number of funding proposals submitted by AAMU faculty and staff this year shows a marked increase over last year. Likewise, the number of awards is up. Of 125 funding proposals submitted to various federal, state, and private agencies since the beginning of the current funding cycle, 87 have already been awarded, thanks to the foresight of several faculty members, and vigorous training efforts and incentives initiated by the office of Institutional Research, Planning and Sponsored Programs (IRPSP).

According to the IRPSP’s office of Sponsored Programs, total cash funding for awards received between October 2007 and August this year is $22.2 million, a 16-percent increase over the $18.5 million total award received between October 2006 and August 2007. With another month to go before the end of the current fiscal year, and with more proposals still on the way, grant administrators believe AAMU should have no problem surpassing last year’s $28.4 million total awards from direct private and public funding for research and development.

These figures do not include federal and state earmarks and other appropriations for operations such as the Research Institute and Alabama EPSCoR.

This steady growth in research funding can be attributed to the quality of applications and the continuing commitment of administrators, faculty and students.

see Awards

Firm seeks multi-disciplinary cooperation with AAMU

Harris Corporation, an international communications and information technology company with annual revenues of more than $5.3 billion, is looking to establish a multi-disciplinary collaboration with Alabama A&M University.

On Thursday, August 28, executives from the company met at AAMU with deans and several faculty members from the Schools of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, Arts and Sciences, Business, and Engineering and Technology to explore potential areas in which the two sides can do business.

“We are looking for cross-disciplinary opportunities with Alabama A&M University in areas of mutual interest,” said Darryl Parker, vice president of Harris Corporation.

Edmond stresses the role of disadvantaged business enterprises in a successful economy

True to its theme, “Partnering through diversity, DBEs, primes and government contractors working together,” the 11th annual Entrepreneurial Development Institute (EDI) Conference, convened earlier this year by the Alabama Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Consortium and the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT), provided a forum for discussion, networking, learning and inspiration.

The luncheon speaker, Interim President Edmond, focused on the history of the DBE program, why it was established and how it has evolved; the role and impact of minority- and women-owned businesses; and the relationship of these businesses to the nation’s economy.

Interim President Edmond addresses participants at the 2008 Entrepreneurial Development Institute conference.

President of Alabama A&M University, focused on the history of the DBE program, why it was established and how it has evolved; the role and impact of minority- and women-owned businesses; and the relationship of these businesses to the nation’s economy.

Dr. Edmond reminded participants that DBEs have a very crucial role in the continuing growth and success of America’s economy.

see Enterprises
Two AAMU graduate students win top honors at food science competition

Alabama A&M University students are continuing their winning ways by garnering top honors and awards at national and international competitions.

Recently, two graduate students from the Department of Food and Animal Sciences beat out students from schools including Cornell, Purdue, Rutgers, the University of Georgia and the Ohio State University to win second and third places in the Institute of Food Technology (IFT) Nutrition Division competition in New Orleans.

Reuel Field and Vishnupriya Gourineni, from AAMU’s Nutritional Biochemistry laboratory, won second and third place respectively, in the IFT competition, which, according to participants, employs a very stringent selection process.

“The object is to ensure that the IFT selects the ‘best of the best’ papers and abstracts each year,” says Dr. Martha Verghese, interim chair of the Department of Food and Animal Sciences, who serves as advisor to the students on research in the area of dietary chemoprevention of colon cancer using phytochemicals, nutraceuticals and functional foods.

AAMU students have always done very well in the IFT competition, according to Dr. Verghese. "In the two previous years (2006 and 2007), our students have won four of the top five awards presented each year," Dr. Verghese says.

As the authoritative voice of food science and technology, the Institute of Food Technologist (IFT) contributes to public policy and opinion at national, state, and local levels. IFT’s Office of Science, Communications, and Government Relations advocates the scientific perspective on food science and technology issues.

Through the IFT Foundation, IFT supports programs such as undergraduate scholarships, graduate fellowships, science-based communications to media and policy makers, career guidance programs, and food science awards.
Likewise, she challenged the DBEs to make the case with prime contractors that partnering with them makes good business sense.

“You must present your business as deserving of consideration not because you are a disadvantaged business, but because you are an effective business,” Edmond told the gathering. “You must silence the critics of set-aside programs by doing the type of quality work you would expect any successful business to perform. Remember, just because you are able to gain certification does not equate to instant success.”

The featured speaker at the networking reception, Mr. D. J. McLnnes, director of ALDOT, spoke on a wide range of topics including a personal message on reducing Alabama’s highway fatalities. He challenged the DBEs to take advantage of conferences such as the EDI and the DBE programs to improve their companies.

During the workshop on “Business Marketing,” Ms. Sharon Myers, CEO of Myers Technical Services, stressed the importance of mastering what she referred to as “your elevator speech” and the “dos and don’ts of networking.”

This year’s EDI, organized and hosted by AAMU, also offered several seminars and a Bid Opportunities Forum featuring representatives from city, county and state agencies who presented on the procurement and bidding practices of their agencies. Presenters included: Charles Calloway of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA); Anthony Miller and Ronda Allen, of ALDOT DBE Certification Office; and Dr. LeQuita Booth, Amani Harris and David Sadler, of Alabama State University.

The 2008 EDI conference closed with an intimate “On the Bayou” dinner, during which Prof. Eric Ohene-Nyako, director of the Alabama A&M University DBE Supportive Services, passed the gavel to Ms. Earnestine Parrish-Robertson, of Stillman College DBE Supportive Services Program, the 2009 EDI host institution.

According to participants’ evaluations, the 2008 EDI Conference was successful, valuable and informative. Participants believed strongly that the information presented was useful, networking opportunities were plentiful, and the general sessions were valuable.

Participants included representatives from 37 DBE firms, 31 from FHWA, ALDOT and DBE Supportive Services, and 13 presenters and special guests.
Harris Corporation
...continued from page 1
areas that fit into Harris’ diversified markets,” says Darryl Parker, vice president of Business Development at Harris Corporation.

Harris, which is headquartered in Melbourne, Fla., with about 16,000 employees including nearly 7,000 engineers and scientists, serves government and commercial markets in more than 150 countries. The company specializes in developing mission critical systems, tactical radio communications systems for the military, defense information technology services, unattended ground sensor systems, hand-held communication systems, and image processing systems for healthcare solutions.

Harris is also a world leader in the architecture, design and development of highly specialized satellite antennas, structures, phased arrays, and on-board processors that enable next-generation satellite systems to provide the U.S. military and intelligence communities with an unparalleled strategic and tactical advantage.

“Harris has the expertise and resources to help develop different business and research and development modules that you need to support any kind of technology you are interested in,” Parker told the AAMU officials.

Among other areas of cooperation, the Harris executives said their company would provide internship opportunities for AAMU students, as well as backup support and AAMU in developing proposals to government or private agencies for funding to develop leading-edge technology that supports the university’s Harris’ operation geared toward research and development, the Dean of the School of Business, Dr. Amin Sarkar, wanted to know how his school would benefit from a cross-disciplinary partnership with the company.

“Harris operates on commercial business models that are heavy on sales,” parker said. “And this provides great opportunities for the business college (school) at Alabama A&M University. We have established multi-disciplinary technology you are interested in,” Parker said.

Referring to video presentations of the company’s capabilities, he said, “What they (Harris) did was present us with models of leading-edge technologies and made a commitment to support anybody who is interested in those technologies. They even made a commitment to assist us in writing proposals and identifying federal and non-federal agencies where those proposals can be submitted.”

Representing the Dean of the School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, the Chair of the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences, Dr. Teferi Tsegaye, said a partnership with Harris Corporation presented AAMU with many opportunities to market its students. “Our students could benefit greatly from internships with a company like Harris Corporation,” he said.

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In which area he sees a potential for collaboration, Tsegaye said, “We are going to tap into their systems on image sensing and cyber infrastructure.”

Dr. V. Trent Montgomery, dean of the School of Engineering and Technology, said with “such leading-edge” science and technology advances and resources at Harris’ disposal, AAMU would benefit immensely in many areas, while promoting multi-disciplinary relationships between the various departments on campus.

“With such leading-edge science and technology advances and resources at Harris’ disposal, AAMU would benefit immensely in many areas, while promoting multi-disciplinary relationships between the various departments on campus.”

Dr. V. Trent Montgomery

various disciplines. “We are looking for opportunities to build relationships with HBCUs that are centered on innovation,” Parker said.

Dr. Matthew Edwards, dean of the School of Arts and Sciences, said that it is important that “a company like Harris (Corporation) is beginning to find that what we do is of importance” to their company. “I see an opportunity for AAMU and its faculty to tap into the mission of this company,” he said.

With nearly all aspects of relationships with Rochester Institute of Technology, Central Florida University and Tennessee State University in almost all disciplines at those institutions.”

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“This is the kind of activity we are looking to do a lot more of in the future,” Montgomery said. Referring to video presentations of the company’s capabilities, he said, “What they (Harris) did was present us with models of leading-edge technologies and made a commitment to support anybody who is interested in those technologies. They even made a commitment to assist us in writing proposals and identifying federal and non-federal agencies where those proposals can be submitted.”

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2008 Summer Academy: Peer-based discussion, networking

by Rażi Hassan

At the behest of the Institute for Higher Education Policy, teams representing institution—focused solutions that, if proven successful, may influence national education policy. AAMU was represented by Dr. Teresa Merriweather Oror, VP for IRPSP; Dr. Fayequ Majid, associate professor of Mathematics; Dr. Rażi Hassan, associate professor of Chemistry; Mr. Jarrod Patterson, assistant professor of English; and Mr. Torin Malone, technical communications specialist in IRPSP.

Below, Dr. Hassan gives an overview of the Summer Academy, its goals, objectives and expectations.

The Summer Academy is an annual gathering of college and university teams in which participants help identify measures to improve access and success for students of color and other historically underserved populations in higher education. With the aid of expert consultants and a rich array of working sessions, teams create comprehensive action plans for institutional change. This unique event allows participating campuses an opportunity to develop institution-focused solutions while contributing to broad questions of national higher education policy.

The Summer Academy is a major initiative of the Institute of Higher Education Policy (IHEP), a Washington, D.C.-based independent, nonprofit organization that is dedicated to access and success in postsecondary education. This highly acclaimed event draws influential campus leaders at colleges and universities from across the nation. Participants include senior academic administrators, faculty, student affairs representatives, students, and other campus stakeholders. Past team projects have addressed myriad topics such as first-year programming, student mentorship and support services, faculty and student engagement, learning communities, STEM curriculum reform, and transfer and articulation.

IHEP invites college and university teams from across the nation, ranking in size from three to 10 participants, to attend the Summer Academy. Teams prepare for the event by identifying the vision and goals for their campus project. During the Summer Academy, team members engage in workshops and plenary sessions to refine their projects for successful campus implementation. Project activities include one-on-one consultation by national higher education leaders and IHEP staff.

Designed as a working conference, the Summer Academy also serves as a retreat for participants to escape the many demands of campus life for strategic conversations and action planning, institutional and cross-institutional teamwork, networking opportunities, tailored workshops and plenary sessions, and access to national leaders in higher education.

Each year, the event destination is selected to provide a serene and productive atmosphere in regions of the country where colleges and universities serve significant populations of students of color. Past destinations have included Rio Grande, P.R., and Santa Ana Pueblo, N.M.

Some of the highlights from the meetings and workshops that I attended were:

1.) There was a great concern that we would return to our respective campuses and revert to our old ways of doing things. 2.) In talks with members of HBCU’s, TC’s, and HSI’s, there was a general concern: the over concern to “raise the standards of the institutions,” to the detriment of the students who attend them. We agreed that such efforts, if improperly handled, subvert the common mission of these institutions: to improve the academic abilities of the students; not to improve the quality of the students that we recruit.

3.) It was generally agreed that the public school system in America is failing too many students. This is evidenced by the high dropout rate in schools with large African-American populations. This is worse in the Native American and Hispanic communities.

Some strategies discussed for attacking the problems:

1.) One institution has established a 24-hr, 365 days a year, tutoring and mentoring center. 2.) State and federal laws placing under-prepared students in 2 year colleges, as opposed to HBCU’s, TC’s, and HSI’s must be challenged. The public schools simply are not
High school and college students interested in careers in the health industry have a new opportunity to realize their dreams, thanks to a $1.9 million award to reestablish a Health Careers Opportunity Program (HCOP) at Alabama A&M University.

The program, funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is an interdisciplinary initiative with the AAMU Schools of Arts and Sciences, and Education. It will run over a three-year period under the leadership of Dr. Razi Hassan, associate professor of Chemistry, as the Principal Investigator, and Dr. Delores Price, associate professor and director of Curriculum, Teaching and Educational Leadership, as Co-investigator.

In announcing the award, the Vice President of Institutional Research, Planning and Sponsored Programs, Dr. Teresa Merriweather Orok, said she was thrilled about the opportunity to reestablish the HCOP program at AAMU. “It is quite a joy to bring a program on our campus that will provide opportunities to area high school students and college students to prepare and give them access to careers in the health industry,” Dr. Orok said.

Dr. Beverly Edmond, Interim President of AAMU, who described the award as “the result of an excellent work,” congratulated Drs. Hassan and Price for their efforts. “I am particularly pleased that the interdisciplinary efforts we have talked about are beginning to bear fruit.”

According to Dr. Hassan, the new program will offer tutorial and other support services for up to 200 students at the junior high school, high school and college levels. Hassan says he also is negotiating to have one outreach program located at an area high school. “We want to continue the things we’ve been doing,” says Dr. Hassan, who was also instrumental in AAMU’s receipt of a major HCOP grant a few years ago. “This time around, we really want to enhance the tutorial component of the program. If at all possible, I’d like nothing more than a 24/7, 365-day tutorial center.”

HCOP aims to build the academic skills of disadvantaged students and to support them in the matriculation process leading toward successful careers in the health professions, Hassan says.
Innovators invited to cash in on Launchpad business plan competition

If you think you have the right stuff for a start-up company, then register today - you could win $100,000.

Registration for the third year of the Alabama Launchpad Business Plan Competition is in full swing. And no doubt last year’s third-place winner, Alabama A&M University, is looking to improve its chances to field a team to vie for the top spot in this year’s running. Organizers are calling for as many teams to sign up by the November 14, 2008, deadline for the competitive phase of the competition.

In two years, the competition has given out $350,000 to six university start-ups. And, these winning businesses have gone on to raise over $2 million in follow-up money from the angel and venture investment communities in Alabama.

AAMU’s last year third-place winning team of Dr. Michael Curley, associate research professor of physics, and former professor Dr. Sergey Sarkisov, was awarded $25,000. Their start-up company, SSS Optical Technologies (OSSOT), used the money to develop a new, patented sensor that can detect ammonia in animal feeding operations. SSSOT is incubated at BizTech (www.biztech.org) in Huntsville.

Registration for the optional and non-competitive Phase I began September 2. Participating teams must submit an executive summary of their business idea and will receive feedback/suggestions from a panel of experts experienced in university start-ups and entrepreneurship. Submissions for Phase I are due September 26. Teams that wish to skip this optional stage may still enter the competition up until November 14. The business plan competition is for innovative, high-growth business ideas in the concept or early growth stages.

The seven public universities in Alabama participating in the competition are Alabama A&M, Alabama State, Auburn, University of Alabama at Birmingham, University of Alabama in Huntsville, and the University of South Alabama. At least one member on the business team must be a current student (of any level), current faculty member, or employee of a member institution. Even recent alumni and former faculty are eligible. Winning companies must establish and maintain their headquarters and primary business operations in Alabama for at least five years. Teams compete for seed capital to launch their business. First place team receives $100,000; second place $50,000; and third place $25,000.

Alabama Launchpad is an annual business plan competition for technology and high-growth ideas. For more information about the program, visit http://www.alabamalaunchpad.com/about.html. Also, more information about the competition itself can be found at http://www.alabamalaunchpad.com/competition.html.
WIN $100,000
If you are an entrepreneurial-minded individual, we want you!

AAMU is currently seeking contestants for the Alabama Launchpad competition. Individuals may either form teams or participate as members of a school team. If you have an entrepreneurial spirit and are a student, recent graduate or part of the AAMU faculty or staff, we encourage you to register for the Alabama Launchpad Business Plan Competition. Registration begins September 2nd for Phase I (Optional) and ends September 26th. Interested teams may now skip Phase I and enter directly into Phase II. The deadline for Phase II submissions is November 14, 2008. Participating teams could win up to $100,000 to launch a business.

Formed in 2006 by the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama and seven of the state’s research universities, including AAMU, Alabama Launchpad is a not-for-profit organization promoting entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial education and state economic development via funding of new high growth ventures. Through the competition, Alabama Launchpad provides opportunities to obtain startup capital, receive expert guidance, and establish working relationships within Alabama’s business, academic, and investment capital communities. The competition is open to any high growth venture with at least one team member who is affiliated with a founding university. Affiliations include student, faculty or staff member, alumnus of five years or less, or former faculty member of three years or less.

At AAMU Contact: Dr. Teresa Merriweather Orok, (256)372-5675
Submission Deadline: November 14, 2008
To Register for Competition: www.alabamalaunchpad.com