

FIU News Release

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Conference Aims To Attract Minorities to the Sciences

MIAMI -- There is a critical shortage of minorities working in the sciences in this country, according to the most recent data available from the National Science Foundation. In 1989, there were 14,760 postdoctoral scientists and engineers in the U.S.. Only 469 of those were Hispanics and only 214 were African American. Both minority groups combined made up approximately 4.5 percent of the scientists working in the U.S.

To help rectify this shortage, Florida International University and Quality Education for Minorities (QEM) Network are hosting a two-day state-wide conference to study ways to attract more minorities to the fields of mathematics, science and engineering.

The conference, *"Together We Can Make it Work in Florida ,"* will take place December 1 and 2 at the Hotel Sofitel, 5800 Blue Lagoon Drive. QEM Network is a Washington D.C. based non-profit organization that was established in 1990 to help improve education for minorities throughout the nation.

Gordon Hopkins, dean of the College of Engineering at FIU, said that the university is in a good position to host this conference, given that FIU is a national leader in graduating minorities in the sciences both at the graduate and the undergraduate levels.

"We have done so well in this area that now it's our turn to spread

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the message and help other institutions do more," said Hopkins.

FIU has an array of programs designed to attract and retain minorities in the sciences. One of these programs is the recently-created mentor program launched by Irma Becerra Fernández, director of the Southern Technology Applications Center at FIU and one of the conference panelists.

Fernández, who was the first Hispanic female to earn a doctorate in electrical engineering from FIU, hopes that the program which pairs up FIU engineering students with successful professional engineers will encourage the involvement of more minorities in the field.

"Even at FIU, where we are lucky to have a diverse student population, there's work to do in terms of encouraging minorities to pursue the sciences at the graduate level," said Fernández.

One of QEM's main purposes is to identify strategies for increasing the production of minority graduates in the sciences within the state to a level commensurate with the state's minority K-12 population.

The QEM conference will bring together educators, legislators, industry leaders, school officials, parents and students. Similar gatherings have taken place this fall in New York, South Carolina and Puerto Rico.

For more information about the conference or to obtain a program, please call Debby Planas, FIU conference coordinator at (305) 348-1635.

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