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Bridge to Success

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Forty-seven minority students from 12 states and Puerto Rico are on the University of Dayton campus this week getting a head start on their science, technology, engineering and math academic careers.

During the Minority STEM Summer Bridge Program running through Saturday, incoming minority students in the STEM disciplines will get a feel for the college experience before their first class this fall.

Laura Bistrek, director of the University of Dayton School of Engineering's women and minority engineering programs, said she hopes the program develops a cohesive group of students before the school year starts, facilitates an environment of academic excellence and improves student academic performance and retention.

The program includes courses in calculus, chemistry and physics taught by University faculty members. The week also includes sessions on learning styles; orientation to college life and campus support services; activities to build group cohesiveness; and opportunities for interaction with the wider campus community.

Support from the National Science Foundation, Ohio Science and Engineering Alliance, Messer Construction, the Virginia W. Kettering Foundation, the School of Engineering and the College of Arts & Sciences has made the program possible the past six years.

"Our goals are to have these students actively engaged in the University community, have strong relationships with faculty, staff and students; grasp an understanding of undergraduate research on our campus; learn about graduate school, and understand what academic excellence is before their first semester this fall even begins," Bistrek said. "Research shows this type of head start helps retention."

Thirty-four of the students in the STEM summer bridge program are entering the School of Engineering in the fall. They will be part of a record-breaking first-year class of more than 500 students. The School of Engineering has broken its first-year enrollment record in four of the last five years. The entire School of Engineering will have more than 2,000 students enrolled for the first time ever.

The odds they'll graduate are positive. Engineering Dean Tony Saliba said the school's retention rate for all first-year students is 90 percent and the four-year graduation rate is greater than 70 percent. The numbers for minority students in the School of Engineering are comparable.

For more information, contact Shawn Robinson, associate director of media relations, at 937-229-3391 or srobinson@udayton.edu.