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## Great Minds in STEM

University of Dayton

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Friday October 13, 2017

## Great Minds in STEM

The National Science Foundation listed two University of Dayton chemical engineering faculty among its Great Minds in STEM; they will receive professional development opportunities for up-and-coming researchers at national conferences.

Kristen Comfort, assistant professor of chemical engineering, will attend the Society of Women Engineers Academic Leadership for Women Engineers program held as part of the SWE annual conference Oct. 26-28 in Austin, Texas. Selection for the competitive program is offered to only 40 female engineering faculty members per year nationwide.

Erick Vasquez, also an assistant professor of chemical engineering, will attend the 2017 Great Minds in STEM engineering faculty career symposium Oct. 18-22 in Pasadena, California, that is part of the HENAAC Conference for Hispanic engineers.

Rising stars in their fields, both have been on the radar of the National Science Foundation for the past year.

Comfort won a five-year, \$542,000 National Science Foundation CAREER award to support her quest to build a cellular model that acts more like a human body, allowing for a better understanding and visualization of human-drug interactions.

According to the National Science Foundation, CAREER awards are among the foundation's most prestigious and support the early career-development activities of teacher-scholars who most effectively integrate research and education. About 150 engineering faculty receive NSF CAREER awards annually, Comfort said.

Vasquez received a three-year, \$300,000 National Science Foundation award to share equally with a University of Mississippi researcher to

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find ways that nanoparticles and magnets can separate ethanol from water in biofuels.

If successful, this new process will extract ethanol more quickly, at a lower cost and in a more environmentally friendly manner than processing fossil fuels, according to Vasquez. The process could be used with any biofuel, including fermented corn or algae that generates ethanol.

The University of Dayton is ninth in the nation for sponsored research among private comprehensive research universities without medical schools.

For more information, contact Shawn Robinson, associate director of news and communications, at 937-229-3391 or [srobinson@udayton.edu](mailto:srobinson@udayton.edu).

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