OUTREACH

Jackson School Hosts Fort Valley Students

Eight undergraduate students from Fort Valley State University (FVSU) visited Austin last April to meet students and faculty of the Jackson School of Geosciences and consider transferring into the school to complete their degrees.

The students from FVSU, one of Georgia’s designated Historically Black Colleges and Universities, are members of the Cooperative Developmental Energy Program (CDEP). In the CDEP program, students complete three years of study in math or chemistry at FVSU and then go on to a second university (either UT Austin or Pennsylvania State University) to study geosciences for two more years or petroleum engineering for three more years. At the end of the program, students receive two degrees—one from FVSU and one from the second university.

This was a chance for the Jackson School to display educational and research opportunities, as well as lay out the requirements for admission and degree completion.

Charles Kerans and Peter Flemings, professors in the Jackson School, took the prospective students on a field trip to southwest Austin to study the geological remnants of an ancient volcano. They were asked to develop an explanation for the kinds of rocks they saw—their depositional history and why they changed—and even to predict where a good place might be to drill for oil. The students got a taste of academic life in the school by attending lectures on sedimentary rocks and geostatistics and touring the Jackson Geological Sciences Building.

“It’s a two way street,” said Flemings. “It exposes the students to potential opportunities. On the other side, it’s teaching the Jackson School and the university about what these kids are like, the hard work they’ve put in and their potential.”

All geoscience students at Fort Valley study under professor Aditya Kar. In fact, Kar, a petrologist by training who has taught at Fort Valley for 13 years, is the geology department. In addition to teaching students in their first three years of the CDEP program, he also takes high schoolers out on geological field trips each summer as part of the Mathematics, Science and Engineering Academy (MSEA) program, a pipeline program designed to encourage minorities to go to college and to study geosciences.

Fort Valley State University students with Jackson School Professor Peter Flemings on a field trip near Austin.

After many years working with hundreds of students, he’s starting to see the fruits of his labor. For the first time ever, he now has two students who entered the MSEA program as 8th graders, went through the CDEP program, went on to work in industry, and are now returning to help him lead rafting trips in the Grand Canyon for 8th graders.

“For many years, I didn’t get much feedback on the program,” said Kar. “But now it’s coming full circle. And that’s a good feeling.”

Science Literacy Workshop

Science radio journalists from across the U.S. participated in a Science Literacy Project workshop at the University of Texas at Austin last April to learn about current scientific research and gain tools for better reporting of complex science news stories.

The six-day workshop included sessions on geoscience, chemistry, genes, cells, the scientific method, responsibilities of a science journalist, astronomy and other topics. The workshop also included discussions with science reporters and editors from a variety of media, as well as experts in law, ethics, statistics and research.

Seven scientists from the Jackson School of Geosciences presented their work.

In a climate change panel, Don Blankenship and Ginny Catania discussed their work on large ice sheets, climate change and sea level rise, while Charles Jackson spoke of the uncertainties in climate models.

A second panel discussion focused on energy sources for the future. The panel, which addressed the scientific, technological, societal and political dimensions of energy, featured Eric Potter, Michael Webber and Paul Mann. Sean O’Kelly, associate director of the university’s Nuclear Engineering Teaching Lab, also spoke.

Bridget Scanlon presented her work on the impact of changing land-use on water sustainability, which has implications for the future of global economics and politics. She discussed some of the surprises she discovered in studying the potential worldwide