Brookhaven Lab Partners with City University of New York
Memorandum of Understanding Signed at 2010 Urban University Conference

By Joe Gettler | May 19, 2010

New York State is recognized as a powerhouse for research and technology advancements and its strengths are being applied to areas such as energy research, homeland security, nanotechnology, and biotechnology. Brookhaven National Laboratory (BNL), one of the world's premier scientific research facilities and home to seven Nobel Prizes, and the City University of New York (CUNY), a leading urban public university with more than 500,000 students at 23 colleges and institutions, provide the state with intellectual capital and resources that it needs to stay in the forefront of these areas of national interest.

Representatives from BNL, CUNY, and DOE at the signing of the memorandum of understanding include (from left) OEP Manager Ken White, DOE Brookhaven Site Office Manager Mike Holland, BNL Lab Director Sam Aronson, CUNY Vice Chancellor for Research Gillian Small, CUNY Associate University Dean for Research Avrom Caplan, and BNL's Deputy Director for Science and Technology Doon Gibbs. (Click on image to download a high-resolution version.)

On April 23, BNL and CUNY signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to formalize their relationship and thus their opportunities to work collaboratively in solving major research challenges.

Facilities at BNL like the National Synchrotron Light Source (NSLS) and its successor-to-be, NSLS-II, the Center for Functional Nanomaterials (CFN), and the Relativistic Heavy Ion Collider (RHIC) will complement the CUNY research initiatives and its planned new 200,000-square-foot Advanced Science Research Center. At the Center, faculty will focus on photonics, nanotechnology, water and environmental sensing, structural biology and neuroscience — all areas of strength for BNL. Specific areas of collaboration will include work on the Smart Grid — a New York State initiative — as well as energy storage, optics, nano-self assembly, protein crystallography, ionic liquids, and transport of atmospheric contaminants.

More than 170 CUNY science students, 50 CUNY faculty and administrators, Brookhaven scientists, and others watched as the MOU was signed during the CUNY Urban University Series Conference, held at BNL this year. The conference was part of a larger program advancing opportunities for students underrepresented in the sciences. This program, the NYC Alliance, is funded by the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (LSAMP) program.

The annual two-day event was organized by the New York City LSAMP and featured NSF's A. James Hicks, LSAMP program director, as the keynote speaker, along with many of BNL's top researchers and program directors. During the conference, students presented their own scientific research at poster sessions, and toured several of the Lab's facilities — the CFN, NSLS, and RHIC — where many hope one day to do their own research.

"One of our concerns for the future of the scientific and technological enterprise in the United States is how we're going to fill its ranks," said BNL Lab Director Sam Aronson as he welcomed the CUNY students and faculty to the conference. "It's a high priority for us to introduce our science and technology to the broadest possible population to try to excite the best, the brightest, and the most diverse pool of potential future scientists."

"This memorandum shows that we are each committed to fostering our relationship and building upon it," added Gillian Small, Vice Chancellor for Research for CUNY. "Collaborating will bring our two communities together and give our students the opportunity to do their research at Brookhaven — and potentially work there in the future too."

The new MOU is partly the result of a 2001 agreement between NSF's Directorate for Education and Human Resources and the Department of Energy's (DOE) Workforce Development for Teachers and Scientists program, which allows faculty and students in NSF-sponsored programs to receive supplemental funding when they participate in research programs at DOE's national laboratories.

"Part of DOE's mission is to educate and develop researchers, technicians, and engineers who will continue to work at our laboratories," said DOE Brookhaven Site Office Manager Mike Holland, as he also welcomed the conference participants. "This partnership will create opportunities to do just that."

BNL's Office of Educational Programs (OEP) began strengthening its relationship with the New York City LSAMP in 2004 by increasing the number of CUNY participants in the DOE internship programs — creating the foundation for more collaborative efforts between BNL and CUNY in the future. Since the inception of the DOE-NSF initiative, more than 175 students and faculty have passed through OEP from CUNY to conduct research at BNL.

Speakers at the conference included New York City LSAMP Program Director Neville Parker, CUNY professor and researcher Sharon Lall-Ramnarine, and BNLers Joanna Fowler, National Medal of Science winner and director of the Lab's Radiotracer Chemistry, Instrumentation and Biological Imaging Program; Deputy Director for Science and Technology Doon Gibbs; Diversity Manager Shirley Kendall; Thomas Ludlam, chair of the Physics Department; Emilio Mendez, director of the Center for Functional Nanomaterials (CFN); Lisa Miller, leader of the Life and Environmental Sciences group at the National Synchrotron Light Source; Associate Laboratory Director for Basic Energy Sciences Jim Misewich; Yolanda Small, a postdoc at the CFN; and Yimei Zhu, a senior scientist and leader for the CFN's Electron Microscopy facility.

In closing the conference, Ken White, OEP manager, addressed the students, "As we heard from the BNL researchers over the past two days, regardless of their area of study, each one said, 'What I am really excited about is...' when they referred to their research. It is my hope that you too find something you are really excited about and pursue it in a career that you truly enjoy — and we hope that career is in science and technology."

With those closing remarks, the first collaboration between BNL and CUNY under the new MOU was complete.