

Thursday, January 24, 2013

NSF's Joan Ferrini-Mundy speaks at UAB on diversity and advancement of minorities in science, technology, engineering and mathematics

In this year of recognizing the gains of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, and with a longstanding commitment to diversity, it is a natural fit for UAB to focus on making sure minority students advance in education.

On Wednesday at the President's Diversity Luncheon, Joan Ferrini-Mundy, Ph.D., assistant director of the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Directorate for Education and Human Resources, spoke to a large group on diversity in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). The event was sponsored by the UAB offices of the President and the Vice President for Equity and Diversity. Alabama's participation in the NSF's Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (LSAMP) has helped more than 12,500 minority students earn undergraduate and graduate STEM degrees.



Guests reviewed student research posters at the UAB Alumni House before hearing Ferrini-Mundy's message: Science benefits from diversity, and a diverse and highly capable workforce will lead the nation into competitiveness internationally.

She showed the audience statistics and information about the NSF, minorities in education, the current landscape of STEM undergraduate, graduate and K-12 education, as well as how to keep students on the right track to success. She praised UAB's achievements.

"You're cranking out proposals and bringing us more diversity, both in the people who are involved in your work, as well as in the span and fields of science and engineering that you engage with," she said.

"We have looked at the research about the role of diversity in improving science, and there is very strong evidence that science benefits from diversity - that innovation, creativity and new discoveries are actually accelerated when you have a diverse background, diverse experiences and diverse ideas coming to the table."

UAB is consistently recognized in Princeton Review as one of the most diverse campuses in the nation. African-American undergraduate enrollment at UAB is at 26 percent, with total minority enrollment in excess of 30 percent.

In closing, Ferrini-Mundy cited UAB's positive impact.

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"There is plenty of ringing rhetoric that we can use that's wonderful, but I think what you are doing here on the ground, at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and with your partners across the region, is evidence that we do know how to improve diversity. We do know how to broaden participation. What we need to do is bottle what you know in some way ... to make a difference for the nation."

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POSTED BY SHANNON THOMASON AT 10:25 AM 

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