

# A Bridge to the Doctorate

By Kevin Hale

Dr. Ashanti Pyrtle, professor of chemical oceanography in the Colleges of Marine Science and Engineering at the University of South Florida, announced a new interdisciplinary graduate program called "Bridge to the Doctorate."

The program, in partnership with the Florida-Georgia Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation and the National Science Foundation, aims to recruit and provide funding for underrepresented minority students. The project will help USF continue to serve and promote the participation of a diverse student body, including participation in science and technology research.

Pyrtle, who serves as the program's director, says the project will help to "provide research and professional development experiences for under-represented U.S. minority students--African-Americans, Native-Americans, Native-Alaskans, Pacific Islanders and Hispanic-Americans--committed to careers in science."

The program will sponsor 20 minority students in its first year, and they will work toward their graduate degrees in engineering and marine science. At the same time, they will explore "cutting-edge design and applications of marine, environmental, biological, and biomedical sensor technologies."

In its first year, the program has accepted minority graduate students who will be funded at \$30,000 per year for up to two years. Doctoral students may receive an additional two years of support at a minimum of \$15,000 annually. The program pays a stipend, full tuition and fees, supports research experiences, conference and travel opportunities and workshops.

Dr. Shekhar Bhansali, a professor of electrical engineering, is the co-director of the *Bridge to the Doctorate* program. He says that USF "has been able to provide very competitive packages to the students, making it a viable option to go to graduate school."

Pyrtle also works with the *Earth System Science Initiative* to provide minority undergraduate and graduate students with opportunities for increased exposure to, interaction with and participation in the Earth System Science community. The 2004 Professional Development Program was carefully crafted utilizing community input and insight gained from the 2003 Ocean Sciences Program.

The *Bridge to the Doctorate* program aims not only to provide students with graduate opportunities. According to Pyrtle, it is also "designed to foster cross-disciplinary exchanges among students and faculty in the Colleges of Marine Science and Engineering." Bhansali agrees, stating that the program could help to enable additional bridges and collaborations between faculty researchers.



Graduate student, Joziah Powell, (right), with her mentor Dr. Ashanti Pyrtle (left)

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was established with a goal in mind for providing professional development experiences to facilitate the advancement of minorities committed to achieving outstanding Earth System Science careers. In order to accomplish this goal, the MS PHD'S® initiative sponsors programs that provide minorities with:

- **Increased exposure to Earth System Science community**, via participation in scientific conferences, mentoring relationships and virtual community activities

- **Professional skills** (e.g., grantsmanship, research, communication, teaching, etc.) development opportunities
- **Information** regarding future funding, education and career opportunities and resources
- **Networking opportunities** with established Earth system science researchers and educators
- **Membership within a virtual community** that facilitates networking with and collaboration among peers, junior- and senior-level researchers and educators