

Computer Information Sciences Program Seeks to Resolve the Digital Divide between African-American Women with New Grant

The Florida A&M University (FAMU) Computer Information Sciences (CIS) Program, housed in the College of Arts and Sciences, is the recipient of a National Science Foundation (NSF) grant valued at \$552,000 dedicated to recruiting minority women to computer science and information technology disciplines.

“The numbers are staggering,” said Jason T. Black, Ph. D., assistant professor in CIS. “The latest data shows that out of all U.S. entering freshmen declaring a major in computer science, African-American women made up only 3.3 percent. The fact is that women are not choosing technology, and this is a dangerous predicament. When you couple that with the fact that it is estimated that 75 percent of all jobs by the year 2020 will require a technology background, it becomes a crisis call.”

The program, entitled African-American Women in Computer Science, (AAWCS), is a four-year program that provides scholarships and other assistance to women who express a financial need and an interest in computer science or information technology.

AAWCS, created by Black, also the principal investigator for the program, and Edward L. Jones, Ph. D., chair of the CIS program, will directly address the dismal number of minority women, particularly African-American women that pursue degrees in computer science or information technology.

Women who apply to AAWCS will be accepted based on financial need, and will be awarded a scholarship of between \$3,000 and \$5,000 per semester. In addition to the funding, the women will participate in CIS departmental clubs and organizations, such as the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) Club, the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE), and the CIS Mentoring Organization (CISMO). AAWCS scholars will also be involved in other STEM programs, such as the Florida/Georgia Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (FGLSAMP) scholarship program, and the Students and Technology in Academia, Research and Service (STARS) Alliance, both NSF-funded programs.

An added benefit to the students is the conference participation, where selected AAWCS scholars will be chosen to attend two national conferences, paid for by the grant, each year, such as the Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing and the National Conference of Women in Information Technology (NCWIT).

The AAWCS program begins operation on July 1 and will run until June 30, 2012. Applications for the program can be requested by contacting Black at jblack@cis.famu.edu or (850) 412-7354.