E3 Summer Bridge Scholars Program Celebrates 25th Anniversary

By: Desiré Bennett and Ashley Duvelius

An Oct. 17 program and dinner honored E3 students for their academic success while highlighting E3’s commitment to minority retention in engineering.

The University of Cincinnati’s Emerging Ethnic Engineers (E3) Summer Bridge Scholars Program celebrated its silver anniversary of the program’s tradition of building academic excellence for underrepresented students. The Oct. 17 event took place in the Great Hall of Tangeman University Center (TUC) as faculty, students, staff, alumni and friends gathered for a night of celebration and recognition.

Several scholars from E3’s past and present were in attendance honoring the program’s 25 year tradition of elevating underrepresented students to high levels of academic achievement.

UC Provost Beverly Davenport said, “As a social psychologist, I was so impressed with this program. CEAS is already a treasure, with its engineering
programs teaching talented students everything from how to build mobile devices to how to create biomedical implants to save one’s life. The E3 Summer Bridge Program only increases CEAS’ return on investment as it teaches students how to succeed in education and life. I hope we come back in 25 years, at the E3 Summer Bridge Program’s 50th anniversary, to say we are the leader in not just engineering but also in the representation of minority students.”

The E3 Summer Bridge Program’s founder Edward N. Prather, EdD and retired assistant dean, was given a bronze plated plaque, imprinted with his original business card, to honor him for his dedication of service to E3.

Cheryll Dunn, Academic Director and associate professor emerita for CEAS, helped Dr. Prather start the E3 Summer Bridge Program. “My father always used to say that goodness comes from good people. Ed is much more than that—he is great. It is his vision, how he always put students first, and his constant striving for excellence that made this anniversary possible.

I first met Ed at Alec’s restaurant in Clifton to discuss his idea for this program and from that day forward, we shared this vision, we just had different paths to achieve it. The program’s success is evident in the 30 to 40% of students who participate in our summer bridge competitions and end up enrolling at UC. It’s evident in the teams who leave their region to compete with our university. Ed’s selfless dedication and efforts changed the university—all of the hype we experience today spurred from his vision.”

CEAS Interim Dean Teik C. Lim greeted the crowd, “It is my pleasure to welcome all of you to this celebration of excellence—the silver anniversary of the E3 Summer Bridge Program.

When I arrived in Cincinnati eleven years ago, and prior to that I was teaching at the University of Alabama, I discovered the crown jewel of the college: the E3 Summer Bridge Scholars Program. It’s an absolute honor for me to talk about such a successful and inspiring program.

This program has served more than 500 outstanding students over the past 25 years and I want to help them make this number over 1,000. The college continues its support of the Summer Bridge Program and E3 and looks forward to working with the university and our donors to find ways to expand this model program. I hope that 25 years from now, this room will be filled with not just engineering majors but majors from all across UC.”
The program honored three E3 students, each at various levels of their academic careers. Chemical engineering senior Robert Golsby, biomedical engineering PhD candidate Whitney Gaskins, and civil engineering freshman Julie Harris were recognized for their continued success in the E3 program.

One alumnus, Rob Richardson, graduated with both his BSE in Electrical Engineering and his J.D. from UC. He is now proudly giving back to his alma mater as a member on the UC Board of Trustees.

“I can state with absolute certainty that if it hadn’t been for the E3 Summer Bridge Scholars Program, I would not have graduated with a degree in engineering,” Richardson affirmed. “The program made sure that I was successful at the University of Cincinnati.”

Richardson added, “The program emphasizes two key points: one, that this field is hard, and two, that students can achieve their potential if they make the right choices. Students also get a leg up by meeting professors before classes begin, so they don’t get lost in the shuffle.”

Another E3 alumnus, Whitney Gaskins, earned her biomedical engineering BS degree, went on to receive her MBA, and is now pursuing her biomedical engineering PhD at UC.

Gaskins fought back tears as she explained, “E3 wasn’t just an education program to me, it was a strong support system that provided me with lifelong friends who continue to encourage me as I pursue my dreams. The program helped me not only with school but also with life. My father died when I was in undergrad and it was my support system of fellow E3 members and mentors that got me through that tough time in my life. I wouldn’t be standing where I am today if it weren’t for the E3 Program.”

Chemical engineering senior Robert Golsby also addressed the crowd, “I was a senior in high school by the time I actually started thinking about college. Finally, I decided that I wanted to earn my chemical engineering degree at CEAS but I was faced with one major problem: a requirement of the chemical engineering program was that students had to have taken physics in high school but my high school, Western Hills University, didn’t offer any physics classes.

Then I spoke to Director Simonson, and he took the initiative to work with my high school to create a physics class there. I may have awkwardly been the only student in this brand new physics class but without this class and the help of Director Simonson, my dreams would have ended with my high school diploma.”
Also in attendance were special honorees who are the “Pioneers of Engineering,” the first eight African-American graduates of UC’s College of Engineering. These honorees included Clark Beck, ME ’55; Henry Brown, ChE ’55; Robert Crosby, EE ’57; Benjamin Moore, ME ’58; and Leo Wilcox, ME ’58.

For a quarter of a century, the E3 Summer Bridge Scholars Program has been dedicated to increasing the number of underrepresented students who enroll and graduate from the College of Engineering and Applied Science. Over the past four years, the program has expanded to include underrepresented students exploring science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) disciplines in the College of Allied Health Sciences and the McMicken College of Arts and Sciences (A&S).

“The bridge program is an academic excellence program – it is not a remedial program,” says program director Ken Simonson. “I’m pleased to report that over the last four years, more than 50 percent of the program’s graduates earned dean’s list honors after completing their first fall courses at UC. The 2012 freshman fall semester GPA for students in the program was 3.35. The overall graduation rate for these students is 23 percent higher than the national average of their peers.

I’m deeply honored to be a part of these phenomenal students’ lives and I hope to continue to support them for many years to come.”

**About Ed Prather**

Ed Prather came to the College of Engineering in 1988, recruited from the Stevens Institute of Technology by former College of Engineering Dean Constantine Papadakis. Prather built the Minority Engineering Program into a coordinated group of experiences that propelled students toward science and engineering careers, beginning with programs for children in grade school.

Ed Prather earned his Doctor of Education degree at UC in 1996, writing his dissertation on the E3 Bridge program. Largely because of his efforts, UC has been ranked in the top 25 engineering schools that graduate African American baccalaureate degrees two of the last three years, and has been ranked in the top 50 consistently even before that. It is also a model minority retention program for other programs on campus.