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UNH, Elizabeth City State University Form Partnership To Diversify Future Scientific And Technical Workforce

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DURHAM, N.H. – As the American scientific and technical workforce ages and retires, and as minority population growth outpaces the majority white population, efforts by agencies like the National Aeronautic and Space Administration (NASA) and some universities around the country are being developed to help create a more diverse workforce for the future.

To that end, the University of New Hampshire and Elizabeth City State University of Elizabeth City, N.C., have spent three years building a research and education collaborative partnership that will provide a model to expand scientific knowledge and enhance educational opportunities. ECSU is one of the nation's 105 historically black colleges and universities or HBCU's.

That relationship will be formalized with the signing of a memorandum of understanding between ECSU and UNH on Monday, June 20, at the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland. Officials from NASA, the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Navy, and both universities will participate in the ceremony.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, by 2050, the nation's minority population as a whole will become the majority. Since, even today, minorities make up a significantly smaller part of the scientific community, it is critical that significant efforts be made to attract minority students into the sciences.

“If we are going to fill the nation's needs in the future we need to do a better job at recruiting, training, mentoring, and retaining minorities in the sciences, and that's exactly what we're doing with this collaboration,” says Cameron Wake, a climate change researcher at the UNH Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans, and Space (EOS) and one of 15 UNH faculty involved in building the collaborative effort.

Adds Linda Hayden, director of the Center of Excellence in Remote Sensing Education and Research (CERSER) at Elizabeth City State University, “ECSU research faculty and students are excited about this vibrant partnership with UNH, which offers the opportunity for research collaborations and the resulting publications, curriculum enhancements, and outreach.”

According to participants, the model created by the collaboration demonstrates how two demographically diverse institutions in two geographically different coastal regions with specific

disciplinary strengths (earth system science and research in UNH's case, remote sensing technology and teaching for Elizabeth City) can effectively collaborate on grants aimed at expanding scientific knowledge, enhancing educational opportunities, and creating a diverse workforce. To date, the partners have submitted six major proposals to federal agencies, two of which have already been funded.

"We are very proud of the work of our collaborative partnership with Elizabeth City State University and we look forward to a bright future with a number of opportunities to move our research and educational ideas and priorities forward," says Julie Williams, UNH associate vice president for research and outreach scholarship. The collaborative effort will be coordinated through UNH's Joan and James Leitzel Center for Mathematics, Science, and Engineering Education. The center was established in 2002 with the goal of developing educators with a thorough knowledge of science, mathematics, and engineering concepts and of human learning – developing learners who experience the joy of discovery and the challenge of understanding.

"We are excited about the possibilities inherent in this relationship because developing partnerships like this is a key component of the Leitzel Center's strategic plan," says Karen Graham, UNH professor of mathematics and director of the Leitzel Center.

Adds Wake, "This is truly a partnership, based on hard work, communication, mutual respect, and shared leadership."