IMPLEMENTATION OF A MASTERS FUNDING PROGRAM - A SOLUTION TO DECLINING NUMBERS OF WATER AND WASTEWATER PROFESSIONALS

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KEY WORDS

Environmental engineering, declining enrollment, master's degree, funding.

FUNDING PROGRAM BACKGROUND

In recent years, professionals in the water and wastewater industry have become increasingly concerned with the future of the industry's workforce. Many industry leaders are retiring while the enrollment in environmental engineering graduate programs is declining. A group of forward thinking public agencies and private engineering firms has joined together to combat this problem though creation of a funding program for students pursuing a higher degree in water or wastewater engineering.

This program provides up to $20,000 for tuition and expenses toward a Masters Degree in Environmental Engineering, in exchange for three years of employment at one of the funding partners. Students receiving this funding attend pre-approved universities and select from a variety of courses. This course list is structured so that the student will be prepared to work in the water and wastewater industry upon graduation.

The 2005-2006 academic year was the first year this funding was available. The program has been greatly expanded since the pilot year, increasing the number of approved universities. This poster focuses on the experience of the pilot year from the perspective of the student participants and selected employers.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

There are many benefits for the students. The most obvious benefit is the monetary aid, however, this poster shows other benefits including notoriety among employers and connections to industry leaders. As a young engineer it can be difficult to discern the best way to pursue your career path. Part of the benefit of receiving this funding is having a direct connection with representatives from each of the sponsoring partners. The firms and public agencies involved in the funding program are among the most prestigious in our industry. During the job search process students can contact company representatives to set up interviews, learn more about the firm or to seek out a mentor relationship. This makes the job search process much more streamlined and with the global locations of several firms the student is free to explore almost limitless options. Furthermore, these connections provide the student with the capabilities to start or

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expand his/her network within the Environmental Engineering industry. The participating firms and public agencies have employees that are actively involved with essential professional organizations such as WEF. By gaining exposure to and developing a mentorship with such individuals, the students' futures in the industry are strengthened.

The presenter is one of the pilot student participants and is providing her experience from the 2005-2006 academic and recruiting year.

EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVE

The companies that participate in this program are making a large monetary investment but they stand to benefit greatly. The funding recipients are among the best students and will be well prepared for a career in water and wastewater. The streamlined interview process benefits the employers as well as the students. By virtue of the funding program selection process, the students have already been pre-screened for academic prowess, experience in the field and drive towards a career in Environmental Engineering. The academic structure ensures that students will have the background necessary for a career in Environmental Engineering. The participating partners have the capability of contacting students during the year to establish relationships and set up interviews.

Additionally, the goal of enhancing interest in Environmental Engineering is also met. All firms benefit from an increased pool of young engineers.

CONCLUSIONS

This funding program has far reaching impacts. The benefits are much more than monetary. This program is lending a hand in developing the next generation of our industry's leaders. Students and employers have benefited greatly in the past year. Further expansion and continued evaluation of the program will help to determine long term success.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

This funding program plans to expand each year. The number of universities has already grown from a handful located in the western United States to over 40 nationwide. In order to increase the number of student participants the number of funding partners must grow. Students planning to apply for funding; firms interested in becoming a sponsoring partner; and universities wishing to be qualified can find further information on the program's website: http://www.engineeringmastersfunding.org

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