$1 million NSF grant will help second- and third-year students persist to graduation

Attracting talented students into Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields does little good if financial strains derail a student’s plans mid-way to graduation.

A new $1 million grant to the Michigan State University Colleges of Engineering and Education will help students persist through the financial and academic challenges facing them. Funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF), eligible MSU engineering students will receive $8,000 per year in tuition and targeted support services during their second and third years of college.

A team consisting of S. Patrick Walton, associate professor of chemical engineering and materials science and director of the Engineering CoRe Experience first-year program; Daina Briedis, assistant dean for Student Advancement and Program Assessment and associate professor of chemical engineering and materials science; Theo Caldwell, director of the Engineering Diversity Programs Office; Lisa Linnenbrink-Garcia, associate professor in the Department of Counseling, Educational Psychology, and Special Education; and Mark Urban-Lurain, associate professor and associate director for Engineering Education Research, CREATE for STEM Institute, created Supporting Excellent Engineers (SEE) for mid-year engineering scholars.

“Unfortunately, we lose many talented students each year, students who have the potential to be great engineers, simply due to their lack of funds to pay tuition,” Walton said. “This grant will allow us to help some of these students stay in school and provide support structures that will, among other things, connect them with internship and co-op opportunities, with salaries that will further support their academic progress.”

Walton said the SEE Team will select participants based on their first-year academic performance and their financial need, then provide targeted academic and professional development support.
As directors of first-year engineering programs, Walton and Caldwell are leading recruitment efforts to identify candidates for SEE support. The first stipends will be awarded in the 2017-18 academic year. In total, SEE will support four cohorts of nine students each.

Caldwell said the SEE selection process will give talented but underprepared students an opportunity to compete on a more even footing with peers who had stronger K-12 support structures.

“Our focus is to provide activities that enhance retention and graduation rates,” Caldwell added. “This program will allow us to collect data, form strategies, and help our college and other colleges of engineering.”

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