Driven by STEM opportunities and salaries, MSU Engineering enrollment rising

Women enrolled at the Michigan State University College of Engineering will set yet another admissions record in 2016-17, approaching 21 percent of enrolled students (freshmen to seniors) to start a new academic year.

MSU Engineering smashed through the barrier of 1,000 female students last fall when women students accounted for about 18 percent enrollment. This year’s upward trend remains consistent with the college’s overall enrollment increase for nearly a decade.

“Once again, we will welcome one of the largest classes of freshman students in more than 25 years, with women students comprising nearly one-quarter of the incoming class,” said MSU Engineering Dean Leo Kempel. “The consistent increase in enrollment is evidence that Michigan State University is among the fastest rising engineering colleges in the entire nation.”

The College of Engineering’s 2016-17 official enrollment figures won’t be available until October, but it is estimated the college will welcome more than 1,450 incoming students at the Freshman Colloquium on Tuesday, Sept. 30, in the Breslin Center. That will bring the college’s current enrollment to about 5,400 undergraduate students and 800 graduate students.

The college’s overall goal is to have an undergraduate population that is 25 percent female by 2020.

Recruitment efforts are shared by the staffs in the college’s Recruitment, Scholarships, and K-12 Outreach; Diversity Programs; and Women in Engineering offices. Teresa Isela VanderSloot, director for women in engineering recruitment and K–12 outreach, and Judy Cordes, director for student success, work on strengthening the number of women students in the college.
Cordes said some of the keys to student success, especially for women, are building a community and a sense of connection to the college and the profession.

“We will continue to develop and expand programs that enhance these areas,” Cordes explained, “while also supporting our student organizations and their important role in the success of our students.”

VanderSloot said she is happy to see the enrollment numbers continue to go up.

“Diversity is valued here at MSU,” she said. “We are lucky to have a supportive dean and excellent team of faculty and staff who are dedicated to recruiting and retaining women in engineering.”

VanderSloot said the college’s strong partnership with the National Center for Women & Information Technology also helps, as does the national attention on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) jobs, now the best paying fields in the country.

According to Michigan State University’s Collegiate Employment Research Institute, which annually publishes data about what degrees earn the highest salaries, STEM fields round out the top five jobs on the highest-paying list: chemical engineers (average starting salary of $63,389); computer engineers ($63,313); electrical engineers ($61,173); software design ($60,104); and mechanical engineers ($59,681).

BestColleges.com—which named MSU in the Top 20 of the 100 largest universities in the U.S. for highest proportion of female students in STEM majors—found that STEM grads earn about 35 percent more than their non-STEM peers just out of college. Additionally, STEM grads are the most able to repay their loans within three years. (See more on this newest ranking at: http://bit.ly/28ZyiZ3.)
Cordes added, however, that ultimately student success is still very personal.

“It comes by fostering personal connections and student achievement. We still work hard to mentor and work on leadership techniques, using formal and informal mentoring sessions and special events—whatever it takes to connect with students.”

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