

NPS Receives President's Partnership Award from Hartnell College

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Story and photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Kellie Arakawa

What began as an informal mentorship by Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) faculty to foster an interest in science among community college students has now evolved into an award-winning, campus-wide internship program.

NPS was honored at the 2008 Hartnell College Foundation Party in the Library with the President's Partnership of Excellence Award, which recognizes an organization that has made significant contributions and impacts to the school's program and institutional advancement. NPS received the award for its "exemplary partnership and support of the Hartnell College science program."

Phoebe Helm, President of Hartnell College, commended NPS for offering community college students the opportunity to work on world-class research projects. "Giving this kind of high level exposure to sophisticated, rigorous study through mentoring relationships is turning Hartnell's math and science students into serious high-achieving, engineers, mathematicians, computer scientists and rocket scientists," she explained. "Largely because of your [NPS] support, Hartnell is becoming known as a magnet college for math and sciences."

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Joe Welch, an NPS Lecturer for Information Sciences and a Computer Science Instructor at Hartnell College, first began meeting with students from neighboring Salinas, Calif., to encourage greater awareness of educational paths involved with math and science. In 2006, he and NPS Prof. Craig Martell partnered with Hartnell Instructors Pimol Moth and Shannon McCann to provide four students with summer internships at the NPS robotics lab. The following summer, NPS Prof. Chris Brophy also joined the partnership to provide Hartnell students an opportunity to intern at the school's rocket lab.

Building upon the strong relationships Welch and Martell have developed with Hartnell, the NPS Cebrowski Institute for Innovation and Information Superiority recently began formalizing the internship process to help provide students greater access to faculty across the entire campus. Sue Higgins, Deputy Director for the Cebrowski Institute, and Programs

Manager Alison Kerr organized a pilot program they described as academic "speed-dating," a match-making event where more than a dozen Hartnell students and NPS faculty met to discuss possible internship opportunities and shared academic interests.

"What we're trying to do is find the right fit, whether a student is most interested in computer science, in one of the engineering fields, space systems or operations research. We're trying to broaden their experience but also give our faculty an opportunity to have some very talented undergraduate students work with them across the summers as interns," said Higgins.

Moth believes the internship program will help Hartnell students succeed when they transfer to a 4-year university and place them ahead of their classmates, most of whom haven't had graduate-level research experience.

Hartnell students don't normally get this sort of opportunity, and they normally don't think about going to graduate school, Moth said. "We're hoping through this experience some of them will like research and want to pursue it," she added.

Angelica Meza, a former Hartnell student who is now an aerospace engineering major at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, spoke about her experience as an intern at NPS. "The opportunity the Naval Postgraduate School has given me has been one of the most fascinating and amazing experiences I've ever had, and it's opened so many doors for me," she said.

When Meza first began attending school at Hartnell she was undecided about her field of study, but after successfully completing automotive courses to learn how to fix her car, Meza realized she had an aptitude for mechanics. She thought, "Why stop at cars? Now that I've proven to myself and to others that I can do this, let's take it one step higher."

Welch, Meza's programming instructor at the time, recognized her potential and helped place her in research internships with Martell and Brophy. After completing the internships, Meza said it reaffirmed her decision to pursue a career in engineering, and she hopes to return to NPS in the future to complete a graduate degree.

In an acceptance note for the Partnership Award, Martell discussed his experiences with some of Hartnell's students. "Working with the wonderful Hartnell interns is, to put it simply, a joy," he wrote. "Over the past three years, it has been our privilege to work with students whom I consider to be among the very best in the nation. They work hard, are goal-driven, have a passion for learning, and have math and engineering skills that match those of interns we have had from places like Boston University, MIT and Harvard."

Similar to the way the Navy builds a highly-skilled military force by encouraging its Sailors to advance their education and career goals, NPS is helping Hartnell develop future engineers and researchers by recognizing talented students and pushing them to advance their academic careers, said Higgins, a retired Navy commander.

"NPS is a part of the fabric of this community, and it's an important part of the Monterey County. We have a lot to offer, and the county is a gracious host to the Navy," she added. "This is a way for us to give back to the community as well as help in this role of creating the next generation's science and technology workforce, which is a vital contribution we have at NPS to the nation."



(From left) Phoebe Helm, Hartnell College President, Angelica Meza, a former Hartnell student now an aerospace engineering student at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, Sue Higgins, Deputy Director of the NPS Cebrowski Institute, and Eleanor Uhlinger, NPS University Librarian, pose for a picture with the President's Partnership of Excellence Award at the 2008 Hartnell College Foundation Party in the Library. NPS received the award for the development and support of a summer internship program for Hartnell science and engineering students.