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Jerrie Fiala, Editor: jerrie.fiala@wmich.edu

Engineering students told to get internships, advanced degrees, mentors

Last fall the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) offered Corporate Series Week (CSW), five days of events that focused on professionalism in the workplace. A highpoint of the event was a panel discussion titled *A Day in the Life of an Engineer* that featured three area engineers, two of whom are WMU engineering alums.



WMU alums **Damond Timmerman** (left), a senior controls engineer at Hi Tech Systems Engineering, and **Carl Roberts**, a retired director of engineering at Borg-Warner Thermal Systems, and **Justine McKenzie**, the manager of Project Management at Pfizer, Inc., share secrets to their success in their engineering careers with students in last fall's *A Day in the Life of an Engineer* panel discussion

WMU CEAS alumni **Damond Timmerman**, a senior controls engineer at Hi Tech Systems Engineering; **Carl Roberts**, a retired director of engineering at Borg-Warner Thermal Systems; and **Justine McKenzie**, the Project Management manager at Pfizer, Inc., described their lives as engineers. They also answered questions from about a dozen students who queried them about the secrets of their successes and the value of networking, lifelong learning, and internships.

All three panelists encouraged internships. McKenzie, who has degrees from Yale and Case Western Reserve in African-American studies and in chemical engineering, said she discovered her career focus by taking an internship. "A bad internship is better than none at all," she said.

Timmerman told students that they need an internship to get comfortable with industry, "I got a good education here at WMU, but there are some things you don't get in the classroom," he said. "Without an internship, you'll spend a year getting comfortable in your job."

Getting additional education and advanced degrees was also encouraged. "I combined engineering with my arts degree in African studies," McKenzie said. "I use the skill sets from both my degrees to do my job."

Timmerman said that the demands of today's workplace mean that an engineer must continually keep up-to-date. "Project requirements change and an engineer has to be ready to change," he said.

Roberts also encouraged advanced degrees. He said that with the rapid changes taking place in the work place, engineers have to continue learning new systems and processes.

The speakers all encouraged the students to get mentors. "Every job is new and you can learn the job more quickly and be more comfortable when you have a mentor, so find one or ask management for one," McKenzie said.

The panel also responded to questions from students about owning their own businesses, surviving in a global economy, balancing work and family life, and job satisfaction. As the only retiree on the panel, Roberts said that he has enjoyed his entire career. "It's been 38 years of fun," he said.

The CSW week began with "Communications in the Workplace," a presentation on the proper ways to communicate in a corporate setting, and ended with an indoor carnival social event to provide networking opportunities. Other events included "Becoming an Entrepreneur" a presentation by Delano White, a chemical engineer who owns an internet café. A fashion show entitled "The Career Fair Fashion Show," pinpointed proper attire for an interview and the meaning of business casual dressing.

Shedrick Harrell, mechanical engineering major and NSBE member, was pleased with the weeklong events. "I've gained a lot of insight into what it's like to be an engineer," he said.