

Press Release

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For Immediate Release
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SURA Receives NSF Grant to Sponsor Minority Physics Conference

Washington, DC – SURA has been awarded nearly \$300,000 from the National Science Foundation to host the Joint Annual Conference of the National Society of Black Physicist and National Society of Hispanic Physicists (NSBP/NSHP) that will be held in Austin, Texas from September 21-24, 2011.

The principal goal of the meeting is to increase the number of minority students that receive degrees in physics and to provide mentoring for physicists at all stages of their careers. SURA signed a “conference support agreement” with the two organizations last year for the purpose of serving as the fiscal and administrative manager of the conference, with NSF funds which provides support for 250 students to attend the event.

“SURA is excited to assist with this important conference which will create mentoring relationships within the minority physics community,” said Jerry P. Draayer, SURA President & CEO. “This is a natural role for SURA to play and a critical part of our mission to support the next generation of scientists.” Ninety-two percent of the nation’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) reside in the SURA member states.

The University of Texas at Austin is a Gold Sponsor of the event and will host an open house of the Department of Physics on September 21. “The University of Texas is pleased to support this conference, and welcome students, faculty and researchers to Austin,” said Juan Sanchez, Vice President for Research at UT Austin and member of the SURA Board of Trustees. “We strongly support the goals of this meeting, which complements our own efforts at stronger diversity in all fields of science.”

The NSF proposal from SURA noted, “As the US becomes even more racially and ethnically diverse, it becomes increasingly important that each field of science becomes more diverse.” The field of physics lags behind other academic fields in its present level of diversity.

A Conference Program Committee, comprised of 27 professional and student representatives from NSBP and NSHP, has been established to organize the agenda for the three-day conference. The committee is largely constituted with members from the 2009 and 2010 Program Committee, when the conference was most recently held. Dave Ernst, a physicist from Vanderbilt University and SURA Board of Trustees Vice Chair, serves on this committee and also serves as the Chair of the Conference Executive Committee.

“This meeting is the largest assembly of minority professionals and students in physics each year,” said Ernst. “It is the premier venue for graduate schools and industries to recruit minorities educated in physics, as well as a great opportunity for students to network with their peers and senior professionals.”

In March 2010, the SURA Board of Trustees authorized Draayer to engage in negotiations with the two organizations to serve as the conference sponsor. The SURA Executive Committee signed off on the Conference Support Agreement the following month.

In addition to NSF funds, faculty and exhibitor registration supports the conference to be held at the Renaissance Austin Hotel.

The conference registration page can be found at: <http://www.cvent.com/d/ddqhdw>

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The Southeastern Universities Research Association (SURA) is a consortium of over 60 leading research institutions in the southern United States and the District of Columbia established in 1980 as a non-stock, nonprofit corporation. SURA serves as an entity through which colleges, universities, and other organizations may cooperate with one another, and with government and industry in acquiring, developing, and using laboratories and other research facilities and in furthering knowledge and the application of that knowledge in the physical, biological, and other natural sciences and engineering. For more information, visit www.sura.org.