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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

'The 4-Percent Problem' in Engineering Education

From the issue dated November 21, 2008

To the Editor:

I was pleased to see that your article "Community College Seen as Source of Engineers" focused on community colleges (*The Chronicle*, October 10). But a key part of the overall story was ignored. It is what we at the National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering call "the 4-percent problem." Our research shows that just four out of every 100 underrepresented minorities graduating from American high schools have taken the math and science courses they need to be prepared to study engineering in college.

The premise of the article is true — community colleges are where underrepresented minorities can acquire the prerequisites they need to transfer to engineering programs at four-year institutions. With that in mind, the National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering has set aside scholarship dollars to support community-college students who transfer to one of our 50 partner universities — higher-education institutions that offer underrepresented minorities scholarships and other help toward undergraduate engineering degrees.

As the economy grows more global and competitive, where will the United States get the young talent it needs to keep our lead in science and technology innovation? The answer, in part, is next door, around the block, or across town — wherever there are talented underrepresented minorities. To tap this resource, we must not only ensure that more minority members take challenging science and math classes in high school, but also insist that community colleges become part of the pathway to engineering careers.

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