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JSU's School of Engineering earns accreditation for undergrad programs

(JACKSON, Miss.) – Jackson State University is expecting tremendous growth in the number of engineering students now that all of the engineering programs in the School of Engineering have been accredited.

The Engineering Accreditation Commission of ABET Inc. – the recognized accreditor for college and university programs in applied science, computing, engineering and technology – accredited the school in August.

The School of Engineering evolved from the Ayers higher education desegregation settlement. It opened in fall 2000 and began the accreditation process in January 2006 after graduating its first class of students, as ABET requires.

“We are confident that accreditation of our engineering programs by ABET will result in a dramatic increase in enrollment of engineering students and enable JSU to have the only premiere, accredited, state supported, engineering school in the urban capitol of the state of Mississippi,” said Mark G. Hardy, dean of JSU’s College of Science, Engineering and Technology.

The accreditation applies to the school’s three undergraduate degree programs in civil, computer and telecommunications engineering. Jackson State is one of only two universities in the country offering an undergraduate degree in telecommunications engineering.

Currently, approximately 245 students are enrolled in JSU’s engineering programs – 165 in computer, 65 in civil and 15 in telecommunications.

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Civil engineering student Tom Wallace is among them. Wallace, who will graduate in May 2008, commutes from Scott County, Miss., daily to attend JSU.

“The ABET accreditation is proof that we meet the standard and that we are acceptable not only nationally but worldwide,” he said. “In the scheme of things, JSU is a very small school, but this means we can compete with the largest and best financed out there.”

Robert Whalin, associate dean of CSET and a professor in the School of Engineering, said he expects a substantial increase in applicants and students beginning in fall 2008.

“I expect the number of students to at least double over the next five years,” he said. “Tiger engineering is ready for prime time.”

The accreditation was retroactive to Oct. 1, 2004, meaning 100 percent of JSU engineering graduates earned degrees from an accredited program, Whalin said. Many state, federal and other agencies – such as the Mississippi Department of Transportation and the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality – require students to graduate from an accredited engineering program before they can be hired.

Since May 2005, 39 students have graduated from the school, including 21 in civil, 16 in computer and two in telecommunications engineering.

Michael Gates, a design engineer at CiViL Tech Inc. in Jackson, Miss., earned a bachelor’s degree in civil engineering in May 2006. He said the accreditation puts him one step closer to becoming a professional engineer, because he now gets credit for passing the first of two tests needed to earn his license.

“(The accreditation) says I’m just as competent and have the same ability as engineers who come from all over the nation,” said Gates, of Richland, Miss. “In maybe a couple more years, it’s going to be the premiere engineering school in the state.”

Added Whalin: “The School of Engineering will undoubtedly be the largest growth area for the foreseeable future for the university, especially with the school moving into a new building in fall 2008.”

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The approximately \$20 million, 90,000-square-foot, two-story building is the first phase of the School of Engineering. It will feature amenities such as two-tiered classrooms, a wireless communications laboratory, an environmental laboratory, an auditorium, and lounge and vending areas for students and faculty.

Whalin anticipates that design work will begin next year on the second phase, which needs a six- to 10-story addition to accommodate the computer science department with 300 students, a new electrical engineering program beginning next year, a mechanical engineering program beginning within two years, research laboratories in the J.Y. Woodard Building and dynamic growth of existing programs.

For more information, contact Whalin at (601) 979-4043 or rwhalin@jsums.edu.

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About Jackson State University

Jackson State University, founded in 1877, is a historically black, high research activity university located in Jackson, the capital city of the state of Mississippi. Jackson State's nurturing academic environment challenges individuals to change lives through teaching, research and service. Officially designated as Mississippi's Urban University, Jackson State continues to enhance the state, nation and world through comprehensive economic development, health-care, technological and educational initiatives. The only university in the Jackson metropolitan area, Jackson State is located near downtown, with three satellite campuses throughout the city. For more information, visit www.jsums.edu.