

The Virgin Islands Consortium

UVI Hosts U.S. DOE Minority Serving Institutions

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The University of the Virgin Islands, a member of the National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA) Minority Serving Institutions, hosted groups representing 22 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and five national labs, at the institution's annual technical meeting this November, a press release UVI issued this morning reveals.

UVI became a member of the MSI Cyber Security consortium after being awarded a five-year \$1.3 million grant earlier this year from the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) NNSA, as part of a White House initiative. The Cyber Security consortium will receive the \$25 million grant award over the next five years.

The NNSA oversees four consortiums including, Cyber Security, Materials and Energy Sciences and Research of Signatures Sciences and Advanced Manufacturing. While focused in four different areas, they are all connected through STEM. Jonathan Jackson, program manager for the National Nuclear Security Administration's Minority Serving Institution, said that the annual meeting aids program officials in understanding the progress that is being made, including how they are meeting their grant objectives and helps them to learn what issues that they may be facing. "It gives them an opportunity to see what the other consortiums are doing and to see where there could be potential overlap for collaborations moving forward," he said of the meeting.

"The University of the Virgin Islands was honored to host this annual meeting and looks forward to future positive interactions with the consortiums," said UVI Associate Professor of computer science Dr. Marc Boumedine, who applied for the Cyber Security Grant and is the principal investigator. "It was truly a wonderful experience to meet with other consortium members and to brainstorm on STEM projects. Partaking in the Cyber Security Consortium provides the University and its students with a wonderful opportunity to be on the cutting edge of research. More than 50 Virgin Islanders have received basic cyber security training during summer 2015."

During the meeting, consortium members presented on work that they have accomplished through their grants over the past fiscal year. Jackson said the consortiums are also able to see first-hand what their colleagues are doing, as they are all connected through STEM – (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics).

"We are looking to bridge the gap between students going to school, getting a degree and becoming gainfully employed in the academic disciplines relative to STEM, which the labs can support," Jackson said. "We are starting to see job opportunities being provided for students, where two or three years ago the labs did not know that these schools existed."

"We are breaking the culture and making some progressive strides," Jackson said. "Students are not only getting groomed coming into college, but they are also being motivated to go get their PH.D, which ultimately just positions them for great success in the long run, at these national labs and in industries relative to their STEM topic or area."

This MSI program is focused on building a pipeline from K through 12 all the way to gainful employment. These consortiums meet annually at different campuses of HBCUs to give each campus exposure and for consortium members to have an opportunity to see projects on each campus. This is the first time UVI has hosted the meeting. By bringing this annual meeting to UVI, Jackson hopes that the University will receive needed exposure that is needed to influence others to buy into and invest in infrastructure capacity in STEM.