



Materials & Manufacturing Take Center Stage in Latest Workshop

Advanced materials and manufacturing was the featured topic for the fifth installation of the EPSCoR industry-academia workshop series. The workshop was hosted in New Orleans by the University of New Orleans (UNO) under the leadership of Dr. Kenneth Sewell, Vice President for Research and Economic Development.

“Developing new materials and tools with applications in the manufacturing sector represents a key nexus point between the manufacturing industry in Louisiana and our research universities - LSU, UNO, Tulane, ULL, and LaTech,” said Dr. Sewell. “By inviting our industry partners to deliver presentations about their greatest research and development needs—and having our research experts on-hand for discussion both during and between the sessions—the workshop sparked dialogue and promoted the development of new and more ambitious partnerships.”

Over 100 representatives from 18 companies and 11 universities and community colleges attended the workshop in the heart of the New Orleans central business district.



Dr. Kenneth Sewell delivers the introductory remarks.

The keynote speaker, Mr. Michael Hecht, President and CEO of Greater New Orleans, Inc., highlighted the excellent business environment and dramatic economic growth that is occurring in the greater New Orleans area and across Louisiana since Hurricane Katrina.

“One of the most exciting trends that we’re seeing out here in Louisiana, particularly the greater New Orleans region, is the active engagement of the business community with institutions of higher education,” said Hecht.

According to Hecht, the most important changes to the economy have been the diversification of the economy and the huge increase in the retention and production of a highly educated and skilled workforce. In fact, Forbes magazine recently ranked New Orleans as the top “Brainpower City in the U.S.A.”

The lineup of speakers featured executives from Textron Systems, Schlumberger, Thermo Fisher Scientific, Frank’s International, Intralox, Noble Plastics, and Geocent. Mr. Jorge Ledo, the Director of LSU’s National Center for Advanced Manufacturing (NCAM), capped off the presentations.

Laitram, a global manufacturing and machining company based in Louisiana, hosted a networking re-



In 2014, Forbes ranked New Orleans as “America’s New Brainpower City.” According to Forbes, the New Orleans metro area’s population of college graduates grew by 44,000 from 2007 to 2012, a 25% increase, double the national average of 12.2%.

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ception for participants immediately following the workshop. Laitram maintains a partnership with the University of New Orleans that offers year-round internships for students in UNO's College of Engineering.

Speakers from industry were very enthusiastic about the relationships being fostered with academia. Industry representatives have noticed that Louisiana engineering graduates are very capable, exhibiting a combination of relevant academic expertise, strong curriculum and hands-on experience with specialized equipment.

Mr. Mike Webre, Vice President of Engineering at Frank's Interna-

tional, a global oil & gas services company, suggested that a statewide collaborative center would be beneficial for fostering collaborations among industry and academia. A centralized location would provide efficiencies and a single point of contact, with staff continuity maintained as students come and go.

Mrs. Missy Rogers, Owner of Lafayette-based Noble Plastics, encouraged both industry and academia to build opportunities for informal collaborations with students of all ages - our future employees. "By involving your people and your youth in what you do as a company, it will help to keep our graduates in Louisiana," said Rogers.

Noble Plastics has had tremendous success with internships and design competition sponsorships. "Employees enjoy these interactions with youth. It is a fun way to be creative and it helps bring innovation into your field."

"Louisiana is benefitting greatly from forging industry-academia partnerships like these," said Dr. Michael Khonsari, Associate Commissioner for Sponsored Programs Research and Development at the Louisiana Board of Regents. "Science and commercialization in Louisiana is expanding quickly, and the fresh ideas shared today will develop in years to come with the continued enhancement of this kind of collaborative environment."



Networking opportunities abound during a scheduled break.