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Successful Minority PhD Producing Programs – Bell Laboratories and the Meyerhoff Scholarship Program at UMBC
ANTHONY JOHNSON, University of Maryland Baltimore County

The Bell Labs Cooperative Research Fellowship Program for Minorities (CRFP), founded in 1972 was one of the first programs of its kind in the US to address the issue of under-representation of minorities in the fields of engineering, mathematics and science. As of 2000, well over 100 PhDs graduated with CRFP sponsorship and a significant fraction joined the research ranks of Bell Labs. In the early days of the program as much as 50% of African American PhDs in Physics in the US were granted to students supported by CRFP. Another unique program initiated by Bell Labs in 1974 that introduced undergraduate students to cutting edge research was the Summer Research Program for Minorities and Women (SRP). The SRP served as a natural feeder to the CRFP. Personally, my career in Optical Physics owes its foundation to these programs and I will give my perspective on participation and impact of the Bell Labs SRP (1974) and CRFP (1975) programs. The Meyerhoff Scholars Program at UMBC was developed in 1988. At that time, UMBC was graduating fewer than 18 African-American STEM majors per year. In 1996 the program was opened to all students with an interest in the advancement of minorities in STEM fields. The program enjoys an overall 18-year retention rate of greater than 95% and has over 500 graduates since 1993. As of May 2006, 75% of these graduates are enrolled in graduate and/or professional programs, with 49 PhDs and 20 MD/PhDs completed as of August 2006. The program challenges notions about minority achievement. Meyerhoff Scholars have changed the perceptions of those around them – the expectations of faculty who instruct them, the attitudes of students who learn beside them, and the perspectives of scientists who engage them in research.