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For more information, please call

Ansley Abraham at (404) 875-9211, Ext. 273.

E-mail: ansley.abraham@sreb.org

SREB to expand faculty diversity program with grant from National Science Foundation

Atlanta — Using a grant from the National Science Foundation, the Southern Regional Education Board will help several hundred additional minority graduate students nationwide earn doctoral degrees.

The five-year, \$1.6 million grant is to provide services from the SREB-State Doctoral Scholars Program to 240 minority graduate students in the NSF Alliance for Graduate Education and the Professoriate (AGEP) program. The grant will support an initiative between the AGEP program and the Compact for Faculty Diversity, a nationwide partnership that includes the SREB-States Doctoral Scholars Program and other regional, federal and foundation programs that stress strengthening minority graduate education.

Mississippi Governor Ronnie Musgrove, chairman of SREB, said that the grant recognized the success of the SREB-State Doctoral Scholars Program. Begun in 1993 with support from states, institutions and foundations, the program is designed to achieve a simple goal: to increase the number of minority scholars who earn doctoral degrees and become faculty members at colleges and universities. The NSF program has a similar goal.

“The SREB-State Doctoral Scholars Program, which has served more than 500 scholars, is an important part of SREB’s mission and a wonderful story,” said Governor Musgrove. “It helps minority students who have already graduated from college and are willing to undertake the rigors of graduate study to earn their Ph.D. degrees. In 2001, we celebrated the 100th graduate from the program, and she was at Mississippi State University. With this NSF grant, hundreds more students will be earning their Ph.D.s.”

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The SREB program currently serves some 250 scholars. It has a retention/graduation rate of 90 percent; in contrast, only about 37 percent of minority scholars nationwide eventually earn their doctoral degrees. Almost 70 percent of SREB program graduates — 150 thus far — are on campuses as faculty, administrators or postdoctoral researchers.

The grant support from the National Science Foundation will achieve two broad goals for scholars: 1) increase the likelihood of completing a Ph.D. in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, and 2) encourage and prepare scholars for a career as a successful college faculty member. The SREB-State Doctoral Scholars Program, as part of the Compact for Faculty Diversity, will provide services that include:

- Regular contact by staff to review scholar progress and provide academic counseling,
- Communications with faculty and staff mentors;
- Support for professional development;
- Training of students in skills and techniques for succeeding in doctoral programs in science, technology, engineering and mathematics;
- Seminars to promote and encourage good mentoring techniques and practices; and
- Guidance for the successful transition from graduate school to a faculty position.

In addition, the AGEP scholars served by the five-year grant will participate in the annual Compact for Faculty Diversity Institute on Teaching and Mentoring, which is the centerpiece of compact activity. Based on the philosophy that “strong support equals staying power,” this three-day meeting of about 700 participants provides a forum for scholars and faculty mentors to discuss issues critical to earning a Ph.D. With the majority of Institute scholars representing science, technology, engineering and mathematics disciplines, particular attention is paid to issues specific to scholars and faculty in those areas.

The Southern Regional Education Board, America’s first interstate compact for education, is headquartered in Atlanta. It has 16 member states: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia.