

Mason student wins national honor

By Tory N. Parrish
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"Facing the Challenge: Black Leadership 2000 and Beyond" was the theme of the 12th Annual National Black Graduate Student Conference, where Andrew Ryan, academic advisor for George Mason University's New Century College, received first place recognition with the Math and Science Award.

The 23-year-old systems engineering graduate student received the prestigious award based on the submission of his research paper, "Quantitative Non-functional Requirements: An Introduction to the Hierarchy Approach."

The conference, held March 29-April 1 in Madison, Wisconsin, was hosted by the University of Wisconsin - Madison, in conjunction with the National Black Graduate Student Association, Inc. (NBGSA) and the Black Graduate and Professional Student Organization of UW-Wisconsin. Over 400 students from some of the nation's most respected colleges and universities attended the conference.

"I felt like I had no chance. There were students there from Harvard and Rice. It just lets you know that a Mason education is just as good as any other school's," said Ryan. Ryan was awarded with a plaque, a monetary award and a personalized business card holder. He credits Peggy Brouse, director of the Center for Systems Engineering Technologies, with providing mentorship/criticism in regard to his research paper.

His 57-page, 8-month-long endeavor was based on the use of "discussion science and multi-attribute utility analysis to quantify non-functional requirements of a system." Abstracts and papers were not required to directly address the theme of the conference, but all submitted work should have been substantive and exceptional.

Born in England and raised in Bronx, New York, Ryan is also a graduate assistant in New Century College. He earned his undergraduate degree in Computer Science at Binghamton University in New York and intends to earn his Ph.D. in Information Technology at Mason. A member of the National Society of Black Engineers and Who's Who of Professionals, he advises other students, graduate and undergraduate, to become actively involved in research, stating "It's worth it. It's especially important for minorities to be involved in education." Attendees were offered an opportunity to present their research and participate in workshops and sessions regarding body and spirit, academics, community, professional development and finances as they related to African-Americans.

Attendees were also given the opportunity to contribute to discussions addressing the black graduate experience, as well as attend a Graduate and Career Fair which was host to over 70 top-ranked colleges, universities and employers. Several prominent speakers were in attendance, including renowned poet and activist Nikki Giovanni and best-selling author Dr. Dennis P. Kimbro. The NBGSA, founded in 1989, is a non-profit student-run organization that is committed to enhancing the status of African Americans in higher education by various means, including encouraging students of African descent to pursue graduate and professional degrees, and providing resources that will assist in the obtaining of academic and career success of current graduate and professional students.

NBGSA also strives to develop and maintain a network with the increasing number of African-American scholars who respond to the "needs and concerns of an increasingly diverse academic a community."

For more information, visit the conference web site at <http://info.gradsch.wisc.edu/nbgsc/>.