



Forsyth Tech's team of nanotech students placed first in the National Science Foundation's 2016 Community College Innovation Challenge. Team members include (left to right) Jack Landgra, Philip York, Shannon Coalson, Adam Afifi and nanotechnology instructor Dr. Mehrdad Tajkarimi. *Submitted photo*

Forsyth Tech team takes first place in national innovation competition

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

The National Science Foundation (NSF) has announced that a panel of expert judges selected Forsyth Technical Community College's team of nanotechnology students as first place winners in the 2016 Community College Innovation Challenge (CCIC).

The students' innovative approach to applying nanotechnology to maximize the efficiency of greenhouses through solar energy elevated them to the national championship.

Norman Dale Community College in Minnesota and Virginia Western Community College in Virginia tied for second place.

Forsyth Tech's team included Shannon Coalson, Adam Afifi, Jack Landgra and Philip York. They were selected from among 10 finalist teams across the country that participated in a rigorous multi-month process requiring them to develop innovative, research-based solutions to challenges at the nexus of food, energy and water systems.

The 10 teams spent a week in late June attending a four-day innovation "boot camp" in Arlington, Virginia, during which they received feedback on their presentations and met with experts on subjects including team-based design,

communicating the value of innovation and transitioning research to commercialization.

The boot camp included a visit to the U.S. Capitol, where teams had the chance to present their projects to members of Congress and legislative staff.

The Forsyth Tech team's innovation addressed modernizing today's greenhouses to fit individual customer needs by incorporating the use of renewable, cost-efficient energy sources through the use of nanotechnology.

"This national distinction places a tremendous shining star on our nanotech students' résumés," says Michael Ayers, dean of Math, Science, & Technologies. "It validates the type of innovative programming that Forsyth Tech offers, which few other colleges across the country can match."

"This experience places our students on the bleeding edge of science by encouraging research and innovation that is usually associated with four-year universities. We are so proud of them!"

"The national attention we have received from participation in this Innovation Challenge will open doors to our students and Forsyth Tech," says Dr. Mehrdad Tajkarimi, the students' nanotechnology instructor. "It will make it easier for our students to obtain jobs

and for the college to gain partners who could potentially help bring this and other innovations to market."

The NSF, in partnership with the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), developed the CCIC competition as a way to foster develop-

ment of crucial innovation skills among students in one of the nation's most significant academic sectors. Community colleges play an important role in developing America's technical workforce, in part by involving groups traditionally underrepresented in science, technology, engi-

neering and mathematics (STEM) education and careers.

"The Community College Innovation Challenge presented these students with real-world questions that the scientific community is working to answer," said Joan Ferrini-Mundy, NSF assistant

director for Education and Human Resources. "It has been gratifying to see how enthusiastically all of this year's participants have responded to that challenge. These winning teams are emblematic of the kinds of quality entries we received."

WSSU ranked No. 4 in North Carolina for ROI

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

According to an analysis by PayScale Inc., creator of the largest database of individual compensation profiles in the world, Winston-Salem State University (WSSU) ranks fourth in North Carolina for providing the largest percent return on investment for its in-state students.

WSSU students who pay in-state tuition can expect an annual 9 percent return on their educational investment if they do not receive grants or scholarships and an annual 12.5 percent return if they do receive aid.

"No matter how you look at it, college is an investment - both of time and money," according to a release from PayScale. "The benefit to this particular investment is that there are returns far beyond the obvious monetary ones. However, the financial aspects of evaluating college return on investment cannot be ignored. And, some schools are simply doing a better job of setting their alumni up for success in the job market."

The ranking is one of many that demonstrates the value of a degree from WSSU. According to a study by the North Carolina Department of Commerce released in 2014, WSSU ranks No. 1 in the UNC System for graduates receiving jobs in North Carolina after graduation and No. 1 in the Triad for highest salary after receiving an undergraduate degree. The university recently was named a Washington Monthly's "Best Bang for the Buck" university and is No. 12 on EdSmart's "Top 20 HBCUs by Alumni Starting Average Salary."

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