Editors Note: Dr. Andrew Phillips, professor of computer science and chair of the computer science department, and Dr. Alex Smith, associate professor of mathematics, also are available to be interviewed for this story. Phillips can be reached at (715) 836-2526 or phillipa@uwec.edu, and Smith can be reached at (715) 836-2519 or smithaj@uwec.edu.

UW-Eau Claire Mathematics and Computer Science Programs Receive National Funding

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EAU CLAIRE — The mathematics and computer science departments at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire have received a $400,000 grant from the National Science Foundation to develop the Excellence in Mathematics and Computer Science Scholarship Program.

Beginning with the 2003-04 academic year, the initiative will provide 30 students — new freshmen or currently enrolled students who major in mathematics or computer science, and demonstrate financial need and academic potential — with scholarships and opportunities to enhance their academic programs, said Dr. Michael Howe, associate professor of mathematics.

In addition to scholarships of up to $3,125 per year (renewable for up to four years), EMACS scholars will receive support in the form of faculty and peer mentoring, student/faculty research projects, capstone and independent study opportunities, career counseling that includes preparation for graduate school, and service-learning and internship opportunities.

“Offering outstanding academic opportunities — in addition to substantial scholarships — will help our mathematics and computer science departments recruit talented high school students who might otherwise not consider majoring in mathematics or computer science,” Howe said, noting that UW-Eau Claire is the first UW System school to receive a NSF Computer Science, Engineering and Mathematics Scholarship Program federal grant.

“Increasing the number of graduates in mathematics and computer science will increase the number of highly skilled workers who can enter high-tech fields,” Howe said. “That’s good news for those in high-tech industries who tell us they can’t find enough qualified Americans to fill the high-tech jobs available in this country.”

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The initiative will benefit UW-Eau Claire by helping to increase the number and diversity of students majoring in mathematics or computer science, said Howe, who developed EMACS with Dr. Andrew Phillips, professor of computer science, and Dr. Alex Smith, associate professor of mathematics.

“This grant award is further recognition that UW-Eau Claire’s mathematics and computer science programs are among the best of the best,” Provost Ronald Satz said. “This initiative will allow us to build on our already exceptional programs and provide opportunities to even more high-achieving students.”

When awarding the grant, the NSF reviewers noted UW-Eau Claire’s outstanding faculty and academic programs in mathematics and computer science, as well as the overall excellence of the university, Howe said. The reviewers also cited the importance the university places on student-faculty research, he said.

The EMACS program was funded through the NSF Computer Science, Engineering and Mathematics Scholarship Program, which funds scholarships for academically talented, financially needy students, enabling them to enter the high-technology workforce. The grant’s funding is from a non-tax supported program, Howe said.

In addition to the $400,000 provided by the NSF, the UW-Eau Claire Foundation has committed to raise an additional $100,000 to support students who receive funding from the NSF program, said Carole Halberg, president of the Foundation.

By promoting the NSF support in its fundraising efforts, the Foundation can pursue additional funding from alumni, regional employers and emeriti faculty, Halberg said. “We will take this opportunity to ask that these sources support the EMACS program long after the completion of the initial NSF funding,” she said.

For more information, contact Michael Howe at (715) 836-3366 or hower@uwec.edu.

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