

August 31, 2015

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

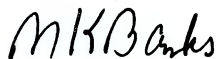
We are excited to participate in **#uifresh (University Innovation Freshmen)**, an initiative spearheaded by the University Innovation Fellows program as a means to expand the participation and retention of incoming first-year STEM students. The initiative will help young students view problems as opportunities that should be approached with fresh eyes and an entrepreneurial mindset. As part of the initiative, University Innovation Fellows and Pathways to Innovation Program teams will work to integrate entrepreneurship, design thinking, creativity and innovation into the freshman experience as part of orientation, a single class, or a series of classes that help students solve real-world problems and connect first-year students to peer communities of makers and innovators in STEM.

The University Innovation Freshmen initiative was developed in response to findings published by the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology in a report titled "Engage to Excel: Producing One Million Additional College Graduates With Degrees in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics." The report indicates that 60% of U.S. freshmen (in aggregate) who arrive to college intending to major in STEM change majors to non-STEM disciplines. The report also cites the importance of a student experience that is both intellectually and personally engaging and fosters "identification with a STEM field." Connecting freshmen with a community of STEM professionals, and fostering meaningful relationships with both peers and instructors can establish these student experiences.

The University Innovation Fellows and Pathways to Innovation Program teams in the Dwight Look College of Engineering will work with our first year faculty to implement engaging experiential learning opportunities that expose all of the incoming engineering freshmen to Texas A&M's community of makers and innovators, with the goal of collectively reducing the national percentage of STEM attrition by half in five years.

We believe that early exposure to entrepreneurship, innovation, creativity and design thinking are powerful tools to engage and retain STEM students, especially engineering students. We are excited to work with the University Innovation Fellows and Pathways to Innovation Program, initiatives of the NSF-funded National Center for Engineering Pathways to Innovation (Epicenter), to enhance STEM attraction and retention to ultimately meet U.S. workforce needs and strengthen our national competitiveness.

Sincerely,



M. Katherine Banks, Ph.D., P.E.
Vice Chancellor and Dean of Engineering
Director, Texas A&M Engineering Experiment Station
Harold J. Haynes Dean's Chair Professor