

Mississippi's DOT to Hire Ole Miss Students Two Years Before Graduation

OXFORD, Miss. – Students studying civil engineering at the University of Mississippi can earn \$10,000 to \$15,000 a year just for going to class and making good grades, thanks to an agreement with the Mississippi Department of Transportation.

MDOT announced the education assistance program at UM's Oxford campus this month. The program, open to rising juniors or first-year graduate students, essentially hires students to study civil engineering, giving them state health insurance and a healthy stipend to help cover the costs of their education.

The only requirement – besides maintaining a good GPA – is that students go to work for MDOT once they graduate, using the skills they learned at Ole Miss.

“These students know that the minute they walk out the door of this University, they have a secure job with benefits waiting on them,” said Bob Tavlin, MDOT's director for professional development.

Tavlin and other MDOT officials traveled to Oxford just before the fall semester's final exams to announce the program to UM civil engineering students.

“Our part of this is not to pay your tuition,” Tavlin told the students. “Our part is to give you a leg up on the competition, a start in the working world. We want to give you a paycheck, and you earn it by getting a degree and coming to work for us.”

Dr. Alex Cheng, chair of the UM civil engineering department, told students they could expect starting salaries close to \$40,000 as MDOT engineers with a bachelor's degree, and could earn more with a master's degree.

Tavlin said later that MDOT developed the education assistance program three or four years ago, when a booming economy made it hard for the state to compete with high-paying private sector jobs in luring the best engineering graduates.

“Now, when a secure government job is more attractive, this program still allows us to bring in the cream of the crop,” Tavlin said.

That includes students like Michael Thompson of Collins, who lamented that his senior class status made him ineligible for the program. “I would've definitely applied for something like this,” said Thompson, who plans to work for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers after he graduates in May.

Cheng said civil engineering students will recommend students based on their applications and professor's personal knowledge of their scholarship and character.

“With our low student-to-faculty ratio, we know all of our students and their strengths, weaknesses and career goals very well,” Cheng said. “But MDOT will have the final decision based on their staffing needs.”

Undergraduate students who are accepted to the program can expect a summer internship with MDOT, medical insurance, state retirement credit and a \$10,000 stipend per year. Graduate students receive \$12,000, plus an additional \$3,000 for research projects they conduct.

At MDOT, students will put to use their UM classes in structural engineering of bridges, pavement design, transportation and environmental engineering, Cheng said.

“The program is a great opportunity for both our students and the state,” Cheng said. “Our students get help with education expenses, and the state gets some of the South’s best civil engineering graduates.”

For more information, contact the UM department of civil engineering at 662-915-7191 or www.olemiss.edu/depts/civil_eng.



Announcing MDOT Scholarship to students.



Students chatting with Mr. Bob Tavlin, MDOT Director for Professional Development.