African American students encouraged to pursue STEAM fields

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“There is a dearth African American population in the state of New Mexico—about 2 percent,” says Michelle Lee, a health physicist at Los Alamos.

And that percentage is even lower when it comes to African Americans working in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) at the Lab, which is why Lee became the program manager for Research on Science and Engineering Signatures (ROSES), an NNSA-funded consortium of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) with national laboratories.

The purpose of the ROSES consortium is to build research collaborations between Los Alamos and HBCUs within multiple Laboratory organizations and assist the HBCUs with strengthening the pipeline of students with STEM expertise through research, training and internships.

With that in mind, Lee started ROSES-Power with STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math) in March 2016. “I started this program to reach out and inspire New Mexico African American youth to pursue STEM disciplines and to envision themselves working as scientists and professionals at Los Alamos National Laboratory in the future,” she explains. “One objective of this program is to establish a pipeline with the African American children reared in New Mexico hoping to mitigate one of the retention issues for African Americans working at the Lab, which is geographic location.”

Lee plans to host ROSES-Power with STEAM events twice a year in the summer and expand the activities.

For the program’s pilot event, 5^{th}–12^{th}-grade students in the Albuquerque and Rio Rancho school districts were recruited through a community-wide pre-college science and math program that is integrated with the National Society of Black Engineers Pre-College Initiative, of which Lee is a supporter.

On August 1, these students visited Meow Wolf and the Santa Fe Arts Museum in Santa Fe. The following day, the group attended a workshop hosted at the Bradbury Science Museum in Los Alamos. “Students learned about Los Alamos, its history, the Laboratory mission and participated in a panel discussion with ROSES summer interns,” Lee says. “They are interested in working at the Laboratory in the future.”

One goal of Michelle Lee’s program is to encourage young students to think about one day working at Los Alamos National Laboratory.