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Computer Science Major Launches IWU Chapter Of National Society of Black Engineers

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.—An Illinois Wesleyan University senior, majoring in computer science, is spearheading an effort to boost minority student participation in science and engineering in high school and college.

Chicagoan John Macon has established an IWU student chapter of the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE). The group, founded during this school year, has a roster of 13 IWU students. "I felt it was important to establish the chapter," Macon explained, "to help minority students come together as a group to try to increase the number of minority students interested in science and engineering at IWU.

"The chapter," Macon added, "is a way to attract high school students to come to Illinois Wesleyan and increase minority enrollment. It also was a leadership opportunity."

NSBE is an organization with 10,000 student, professional, and pre-college members. It offers academic, training, professional development, career placement, and other services.

Membership is encouraged for engineering, computer science, science, and mathematics majors—but membership is open to students in all majors. National dues for students are \$10 a year.

Macon is particularly interested in NSBE's Pre-College Initiative (PCI) program, where NSBE's campus chapters reach out to high school students in an effort to spark an interest in science and engineering.

"We're working on setting up a NSBE 'junior chapter' with Bloomington High School," Macon said. He's also eyeing establishment of NSBE "junior chapters" with other Bloomington-Normal high schools.

"IWU President Minor Myers," Macon said, "asked us to talk to high school students, who might be interested in coming to IWU."

Over the next five years, Macon hopes that IWU can establish successful PCI chapters, develop a strong chapter membership, and become well known on campus.

The IWU NSBE chapter also is planning to invite a guest speaker to campus during spring semester '99.

"We want to invite a guest speaker to campus," Macon explained, "to encourage students to be engineers or go into a science-related field. We want to show how blacks can succeed in these fields."

Macon is planning to share a booth with the Black Student Union (BSU) at IWU's annual Wellness Fair, April 15 in the Shirk Center, to advertise and promote IWU's involvement in NSBE programs.

Macon serves as president of IWU's NSBE chapter. Other chapter officers are: Nevin Harris, a junior majoring in business administration from Chicago, who is vice president; Alva Winfrey, a junior majoring in economics and sociology from Chicago, who is treasurer; and Kim Turner, a sophomore majoring in business administration from Milwaukee, Wis., who is secretary.

Macon is planning to attend NSBE's 25th national meeting, March 24-28, in Kansas City. The meeting—Engineering Pathways into the 21st Century—is expected to attract about 3,000 participants nationally. Among national meeting events are a two-day career fair, more than 70 workshops, a pre-college mini-conference, and a graduate school fair—all of which give participants unlimited professional networking opportunities.

"So many people run from technology, but it's exciting for me to know how a computer works," Macon said, explaining his interest in computer science and a current class project where he is involved in building a computer.

Macon was attracted to Illinois Wesleyan because of its smaller enrollment and a favorable student-teacher ratio of 13 to 1.

A 1995 graduate of Brother Rice High School in Oak Lawn, Ill., Macon said: "I came to Illinois Wesleyan from a private high school and had a lot of one-on-one experience with my high school teachers—and that has carried on in college."

Among Macon's activities are club volleyball and Black Men In Action, a student group that sponsors campus events—such as last month's IWU appearance of Illinois poet laureate Gwendolyn Brooks, the first African-American Pulitzer Prize-winner, and poet-author Maya Angelou's 1996 visit. The group also works with helpless youngsters.

When Macon graduates from IWU in May, he will join Arthur Andersen in Chicago as a business consultant, working on a marketing team dealing with strategic technologies, including computer software designed to enhance clients' businesses.

The Macon family resides at 9940 S. Malta, Chicago.

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 2,000 students in a College of Liberal Arts, and individual schools of Music, Theatre Arts, Art, and Nursing. Since 1994, these facilities have been added to the IWU campus: a \$15 million athletics and recreation center, a \$25 million science center, a \$6.8 million residence hall, and a \$5.1 million Center for Liberal Arts.