



Union's EDGE program provides a taste of engineering for high school women and adapted toys for children with special needs

SCHENECTADY, N.Y. (July 17, 2007) -- Engineering is not a typical career choice for most women graduating high school. Union College hopes to change that through their annual two-week summer camp, "Educating Girls for Engineering" (EDGE), which runs through July 27.

"The percentage of U.S. women entering the engineering field is very low which causes a problem for the profession and the nation," said Cherrice A. Traver Union's dean of engineering and computer science. "The EDGE program was developed to introduce young women to the exciting opportunities and career options that engineering offers and to plant seeds at a time when students are considering paths for their future."

During the two week residential program, 20 students will design, build and adapt toys for children with disabilities who are patients at Northwoods Health System in Niskayuna. After meeting the patients and talking with nurses and therapists at Northwoods, students will take existing toys and employ engineering skills to adapt them to suit the patients' various disabilities and special needs.

The toys will be presented to the children at Northwoods July 27 at 10 a.m.

"Northwoods Health System's medical professionals will share their expertise to help young women understand and value the ways in which the field of engineering can enhance the lives of children with various medical complexities," said Michelle Durling, RN, pediatric unit nurse manager at Northwoods.

Teaching the robotics course will be Linda G. Almstead, computer science lecturer, and James N. Hedrick, lecturer in electrical and computer engineering. A course on effective communication and presentation skills will be taught by Gale H. Keraga, academic counselor and dean for undergraduate education. Union student volunteers will also assist with the camp, along with teachers from Shenendehowa, Burnt Hills and South Colonie High School.

Additional activities include two field trips to Foster Miller Technologies and Plug Power, and a networking dinner with local women engineers.

"EDGE does more than introduce young women to the variety of disciplines engineering offers," said Jenny L. Moon '03, design engineer at John M. McDonald Engineering and coordinator of EDGE. "The activities and networking opportunities demonstrate the impact students can have on society and in people's daily lives."

EDGE, which began in 2002, is supported by a grant from the Northrop Grumman Foundation since 2004.