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## COMMUNITY

Deone Wilhite

### Intellectual Entrepreneurship Consortium



#### **How did you become involved with IE consortium?**

Ever since I had been the Director of Education for Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Central Texas, I had been brainstorming on ways to better connect minority students with colleges since so many colleges are saying they have a big shortage of African American and Hispanic students. I've been working on a way to somehow create a "college pipeline" between talented minority students and college recruiters. Almost three years ago, a friend of mine heard what I was doing and told me that, while we

must work hard to get minority students on campus, we sometimes have to work even harder to keep them there! She told me that there was a fascinating program on the campus of the University of Texas at Austin called the Intellectual Entrepreneurship Consortium (IE) in the Division of Diversity & Community Engagement (DDCE) that was doing some very innovative things with undergraduate students and had a great track record of graduating the minority students that went through the program. So she connected me with Dr. Rick Cherwitz, who was leading the program. We exchanged program ideas and we really got along well. I've never met anyone so passionate about a program like Dr. Cherwitz. Between the uniqueness of the program and his passion for the program and its students, he won me over, and I've been intrigued with IE ever since!

What really caught my attention was the idea of "intellectual entrepreneurship". Coming out of a business education both undergrad and grad, I automatically associated the term "entrepreneurship" with only business. That's why I was so fascinated with the idea that the core concepts of entrepreneurship could be transferred to academics as well. To me, entrepreneurship is creativity, risk-taking, target marketing, working in your passion, and a willingness to be adventuresome! And somehow Dr. Cherwitz and the IE Program have managed to bring those same qualities to undergraduate education! That really clicked with me, because the entrepreneurial element combines my business background with my passion for education. I couldn't help but support a program like this, and I do whatever I can to promote it, whether it is via word-of-mouth, social media, or emails. And if you know Dr. Cherwitz, you'll find out one thing...he'll keep you involved!!! He loves the IE Consortium and its students, and wants all-hands-on-deck to help them out!

## **How have you seen IE work with students especially the first generation students and the under- represented students?**

I'm glad you ask this, because I have a passion for getting more "1<sup>st</sup> Gens" and underrepresented students into our nation's colleges and universities. But getting them there is only the first step. We have to work to make sure they stay and they graduate! And this is what I really like about the IE program: Once students get involved their passion for education seems to increase exponentially, because they have mentors and are exposed to various disciplines. They are given an opportunity to explore their passions academically. I've heard student testimonials in person, read them online, and have seen the progress that IE alums are making in their post-graduate programs and in their careers. It is simply phenomenal. And many of these IE students and alums I'm encountering and reading about are students of color! Given UT's history with African American students and the African American community, it is so good to see a program at UT that actually HELPS guide students through the academic maze and helps these students GRADUATE with an even greater passion for education. And as a UT alum who went through my share of challenges during my undergraduate tenure there (1979-1984), anything that helps African American students at UT prosper and graduate, I will support!

## **What advantages do you feel this program offers to students setting it apart from other opportunities at the University?**

I often joke with Dr. Cherwitz by asking him where he and IE were when I was at the University of Texas. I still remember my time at UT being happy to be in college because it was expected of me but

not really knowing what I wanted to do, choosing a major based on hearing that it was a good major instead of discovering where my true aptitude lay, being lost on a campus of 48,000 students and not having any mentors or direction, and desperately seeking help to succeed in such a harsh racial environment. Many of my African American classmates didn't make it through to graduation for those same reasons. And back then, UT seemed to unofficially endorse the “sink or swim” mentality, and I saw a lot of good people sink.

However, the students who go through the Intellectual Entrepreneurship Consortium are provided graduate mentors, opportunities to attend academic conferences, exposure to graduate schools...in other words, all of the things I didn't experience as an undergraduate! They're working wonders with undergraduate students by helping them discover what they love to do and allowing them to be academically and intellectually creative as they work in their chosen area of study! They are giving the students a larger vision, in other words, they are literally creating "intellectual entrepreneurs"! I love it! I can think of no better solution to raising UT's retention and graduation rate than through the expansion of programs like IE. And not just the retention and graduation rates for minority students...I believe participation in the IE Consortium would raise the retention and graduation rates for everybody!

## **What would you like students and our community to know about this program?**

I would like them to know that while going to a large university like the University of Texas at Austin can be intimidating, there are people on campus like Dr. Richard Cherwitz and programs on campus like the Intellectual Entrepreneurship Consortium that do care about you and will help you have a more fulfilling academic experience at the University of Texas. I would like students and the community to know that there are so many opportunities at UT and many other campuses if you just take advantage of them. There are innovative programs on campus like IE and there are innovative people on campus such as Dr. Cherwitz, his staff, and program mentors who can help you take things to the next level academically. Sometimes you have to step out of your comfort zone, but the rewards can be great. And isn't stepping out of your comfort zone one of the hallmarks of entrepreneurship? Isn't working within your passion one of the marks of an entrepreneur? Yes, UT has historically had a bad reputation within the African American community, but there are initiatives like IE happening on campus that are helping to overcome UT's tainted racial history because they dare to buck current trends within “the academy” and expand your horizons and help you get more bang for your academic buck!

And lastly, I would tell students to take chances socially and academically while in college and pursue a passion, and this is just what the IE program helps you to do. *In other words, don't be afraid to go out on a limb...that's where the fruit is!!!*