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Formula Hybrid vehicle revs up SBA, encourages learning across disciplines

By Kathy Pomaville Pate

A team of students from Oakland University is one of the first in Michigan – and one of a select few in the nation -- to develop a fuel-efficient Formula Hybrid vehicle in a competition that helps promote drive train innovation and the use of alternative energy. Surprisingly, this competition isn't just for aspiring engineers. It's for business students too.

OU engineering students will design, build and race a high-performance, plug-in hybrid vehicle in the Formula Hybrid International Competition at New Hampshire Motor Speedway in winter 2010. OU School of Business Administration (SBA) students are responsible for business planning, accounting, finance, graphic arts and public relations.

"The students are learning how to work across disciplines and gaining real-world business experience," Mohan Tanniru, dean, SBA said. "We are proud to support such an effort of excellence through integrative thinking and hard work. These are the types of leaders needed to transform this region."

Accounting student Steve Manduzzi (SBA'09) first joined the team to earn college credit and to fulfill an internship requirement. It didn't take long for him to recognize the value of being a team member. Although his internship ended last summer, Manduzzi is committed to remaining on the team.

"It's been an eye-opening experience to work with different mindsets in different disciplines," Manduzzi said. "We've had constructive debates to help us better understand each other's positions and, ultimately, further our common goal."

This sentiment is echoed by others on the team. OU electrical engineering student Kirk McGuire, president and CEO of the project, said, "The business guys don't always understand where we're coming from. Fair being fair, we don't always appreciate their concerns."

According to McGuire, a cross-disciplinary approach is vital to learning about working in the real world. It's also essential in turning out a superior product. "Engineers would much rather be designing and building a car than creating a business plan, overseeing legal requirements or securing financing," McGuire said. "Having business students on the team allows the engineers to focus on what they do best, without worrying about the business details."

Manduzzi, who helped craft the business proposal, is meeting with leaders in the business community to market the idea. "We've been meeting with well-accomplished people throughout the metropolitan Detroit area. Our goal is to increase awareness and garner financial support."

The team is working to raise \$100,000 for the project. Donors will receive a company logo on the car, which will appear at various events throughout the year, and recognition on the Web site. Both cash and gift-in-kind donations are tax deductible.

Contact OU students Kirk McGuire (kdmcguir@oakland.edu) or Steve Manduzzi (smanduzz@oakland.edu) to become a team member or to make a contribution.

SUMMARY

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