Student engineers tutoring children

By Matt Alban
Lantern Staff Writer

Most people think engineering students only like to help themselves, but Randy Thomas and Steve Wilson are two engineering students who are different. They help people who are less fortunate than themselves.

Thomas and Wilson are two 23-year-old graduating seniors who are involved with the Black Undergraduate Engineering Council's tutoring program.

Wilson, majoring in chemical engineering, said he got involved with the program when a friend told him about it, which is affiliated with the Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority and low-income housing projects.

Wilson said he got involved because he wanted to give something back to the community.

He said the idea for the tutoring program came up last year, but nobody followed through until he started it this year.

The majority of the students they help are mainstream, although there are some economically disadvantaged and some handicapped students, Wilson said.

He said the majority of the kids are from 6-8 years old and are from the first to fourth grades.

Wilson said he is one of six tutors this quarter, which is down from the eight there were last quarter when the project began.

Thomas, majoring in computer information science, helped to organize a recently held party for the children which was a reward for how well they were doing.

Wilson said there are 18 students at the Lincoln Park Center, and there are also students who are tutored at Windsor Terrace.

Wilson said the youngsters usually come once a week after school, usually from 4 to 5:30 p.m. or 6 p.m.

Wilson said the day’s homework is covered, especially math.

Wilson said children need role models — people to help them make it through the tough times, and they try to act as ones.

Wilson and Thomas are both members of the Ohio State chapter of the Black Undergraduate Engineering Council, which is part of the National Society of Black Engineers, the largest student-run organization in the country with 6,500 members.

It has other chapters at Ohio University, Cleveland State University and national chapters at universities such as Stanford and Michigan State University.

Wilson said he got involved with the organization when he started attending meetings with his roommate who was involved. Wilson thought he could make a difference in the organization.

He now sponsors programs, such as the tutoring and the party.

“As a freshman at Ohio State, I felt pretty alienated in the engineering program. I didn’t have a whole lot of friends; not a whole lot of people like myself to speak of, and then someone introduced me to BUER,” Thomas said.

Wilson said the group meets every two weeks and gives seminars on such things as resume writing skills and professional developments.

He also said the group has had presentations from companies such as General Electric, Kraft, and Exxon.

Wilson said the reason the BUER was formed was to support black engineers. It does this by promoting academic excellence and to help keep blacks in the engineering department.

Wilson said there is institutionalized racism at Ohio State, adding there are only 2,700 blacks on campus and the percentage is lower in the college of engineering. Thomas said the racism was not obvious.

He said the reason the number of blacks in engineering was low was because nationally, enrollment in technological fields is down, so the shortage of black engineering students is magnified.

Wilson added that some black students who have had experiences at Ohio State, so they turn their friends off to the university.

Both Wilson and Thomas have had problems and know others who have had problems at Ohio State.

Wilson said even though the engineering program might weed out the same number of black and white students, it weeds out a larger percentage of blacks, because they have low numbers to begin with.

Wilson said discrimination was a university-wide problem, but it was even worse in the engineering department. He said, overall, about 30 percent of black students graduate in 4-6 years in engineering; it goes down to 25 percent.

Both Thomas and Wilson agree even though the number of activities for blacks has gone up, attitudes have not changed against blacks or other minority groups since they arrived.

Thomas said racial tension has increased, but it seems to be a national trend and not just isolated to the Ohio State University campus.

He isn’t sure why this is the case. Wilson agreed, adding he sees it every day.