Innovation Fellow participated in White House Demo Day

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LAS CRUCES - The wide-ranging talents of innovators from across the country were showcased earlier this week at the first-ever White House Demo Day. Innovators from around the country joined President Barak Obama to demonstrate their individual success stories and show why every American should have the opportunity to pursue bold, game-changing ideas. Among those invited to participate in the event was New Mexico State University electrical engineering Ph.D. candidate Shanta Thoutam, also a University Innovation Fellow.

Thoutam is one of six NMSU University Innovation Fellows who are part of a cohort of 300 students from 115 higher education institutions across the United States under the National Center for Engineering Pathways to Innovation. The program is funded by the National Science Foundation and directed by Stanford University and VentureWell. The University Innovation Fellows program empowers students to become agents of change at their schools.

Thoutam, along with other fellows, was invited to the celebration and were broadcasted from the 1776 DC Co-Working Space while talking about what they are doing on campus to improve their respective university innovative and entrepreneurial ecosystems. A startup hub, 1776 DC offers worldwide access to the powerful Washington, D.C. region.

“My experience of visiting the 1776 global incubator’s co-working space was mind boggling. It housed so many temporary and permanent members who are working on startups to transform industries such as education, energy and sustainability and health all having the potential of impacting millions of people,” said Thoutam.

As part of the celebration, some 30 educational institutions, including NMSU, collectively signed a letter of commitment addressed to President Obama emphasizing their goal to provide all students on campus, regardless of major, with access to innovation and entrepreneurship learning opportunities.

“Our nation’s higher education institutions have long held great economic potential. Higher education spending on research and development in FY2013 totaled $67.2 billion. This resulted in more than 24,500 patent applications and 43,300 licenses, a 20 percent increase in new commercial products from the year prior. While the primary purpose of academic research remains the education of America’s next generation of scientists and engineers, it is vital that our innovations are commercialized so they may benefit society and create economic opportunity,” read the letter.

Accompanying the letter were statements of commitment from the educational institutions, including one from NMSU signed by Garrey Carruthers, chancellor, and University Innovation Fellows Shanta Thoutam, Brendan Sullivan, Jamie Valesquez, Ember Krech, Karl Johannes and Marcio Garcia.

The NMSU letter noted accomplishments on campus that have already supported innovation, including creation of the Aggie Innovation Space, available to students campuswide; support for student business startups at the Studio G Incubator; and participation in the EpicCenter Pathways to Innovation program to deploy innovation education throughout the engineering curriculum.

The University Innovation Fellows are a national community of students in engineering and related fields who work to ensure that their peers gain the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to compete in the economy of the future. To accomplish this, the Fellows advocate for lasting institutional change and create opportunities for students to engage with entrepreneurship, innovation, creativity, design thinking and venture creation at their schools.

Said Thoutam, “Over the summer, I definitely learned a lot about startup and entrepreneurial culture and certainly will bring my first-hand experiences and ideas to enlighten my peers who can join us in building a viable and sustainable innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem on campus of NMSU. I am quite positive about adding value to my UIP project and also to Arrowhead Center’s Launch program by implementing advanced techniques that I learned over summer to promote tech transfer and commercialization mindset of not only the students, but also the faculty members.”

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New Mexico State University electrical engineering Ph.D. candidate Shanta Thoutam, who is a University Innovation Fellow, visited the 1776 DC Co-Working Space as part of the first-ever White House Demo Day to encourage innovation and entrepreneurship.