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Engineering students create collaborative playground

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John Turner had a problem. He had an engineering spirit but no place to exercise it.

Turner, a senior in mechanical engineering, wanted to design wind-up floating ducks for an engineering design course, but some of the tools that the project required were unavailable to students. Unwilling to

sit back and see his design dreams wither away, Turner sought out like-minded students to find a solution.

The fruits of Turner's efforts would become one of the most universally lauded student organizations on campus: Open Hardware Makerspace.

Turner didn't have to look far to find students with similar frustrations — he found plenty of students voicing their frustrations on

Moodle.

"Here at State all I've found are the design shops in Leazar [that] I'm not allowed to use because I'm not in design school," one student said. "I can't use the amazing facilities in the basement of Engineering Building III period until I get to senior design — which seems to be the only time in our degree plan we do any actual hands-on work."

In August 2011, OHM was born

with funding from the Institute of Emerging Issues, help from Open Design Lab and vocal support from many other campus organizations.

This support has enabled OHM to purchase additional equipment including the most recent addition: a 3-D printer.

"It's important to learn skills and have fun," Turner said. "One of the goals we have once we finish our 3-D printer is to try to print with choco-

late. And that's just cool. You don't have to be an engineer to appreciate that. Come Valentine's Day, custom chocolates. C'mon!"

It is this combination of engineering prowess and light-hearted fun that has attracted the interest of parties outside of the Wolfpack community and has allowed the club to

MAKER continued page 3

News

TECHNICIAN

PAGE 3 • WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2012

MAKER

continued from page 1

expand its role and reach out to the Triangle community to spark children's interests in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and design fields.

Within the past year, OHM has grown significantly in number. More than 70 students are registered on the club's website.

The club has also gained status in the Triangle area. Earlier this year, OHM was represented at the STEM expo

at Southeast Raleigh High School and at Maker Faire North Carolina. Representatives from OHM also went to Weatherstone Elementary in Cary where the club helped to teach first-graders measurement techniques.

"If you have a cool project, let's go ahead and show it off at local schools," Turner said. "I'm working on building a plasma speaker right now that uses a spark to produce sound. You take that into a

school a show it to kids, that's pretty cool. It shows what you can do with education. If you show where education can lead, it really motivates."

However, according to Alexandra La Pierre, a freshman in engineering, the club also helps to relax and motivate college students.

"Most of us that go are busy most of the time," La Pierre said. "We do a lot of home-

work and studying, so it's nice to just take a couple hours out of the week and go and meet people that think the way you do and to have creative ideas and be able

to experiment with new technologies while bringing something unique to the table."

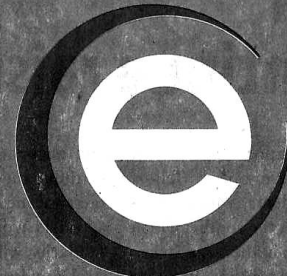
Bridging disciplines to spur on the development of students is something that the club is trying to emphasize this year. Turner said there are a few business majors who expressed interest in the club because they needed to connect with engineers to help realize their project goals.

"Let's go ahead and develop

the skills of those business majors to make them more powerful on their own [and] let's be a place where we can share ideas and work on stuff together," Turner said. "A lot of new technologies are finally reaching the point where they're reasonably affordable. We want to be a space where you can collaborate, experiment, and create with a bunch of other hobbyists ... to prepare our students to be leaders in their jobs as these new technologies start entering the workplace and start entering our lives."

According to David Rieder, associate professor of English, bridging these disciplines will be an essential skill if students hope to succeed in a future that emphasizes collaboration.

"This group gives an opportunity for students to cross the traditional divide between 'the two cultures' of humanities and sciences," Rieder said. "[These are] cultures that have been described as separate and distinct, but especially on campuses like this one they are increasingly collaborating and connecting."



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