Life

NSBE hosts Dr. Sir Cato T. Laurencin – Father of Regenerative Engineering

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Photo of Dr. Sir Cato Laurencin. NSBE hosted Dr. Sir Laurencin as a guest speaker at UConn.

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This Tuesday, Oct. 20th, The University of Connecticut chapter of the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) hosted guest speaker Dr. Sir Cato T. Laurencin, M.D., Ph.D. and the father of regenerative engineering. The event started with light music and pizza, then moved on to announcements for upcoming NSBE events. The meeting officially started with the reading of the NSBE mission statement: "to increase the number of culturally responsible Black Engineers who excel academically, succeed professionally, and positively impact the community."

Founded in 1975, the NSBE is one of the largest student-led organizations in the U.S. with over 700 chapters. The UConn NSBE chapter empowers Black STEM students through academic support, professional development and community building. They offer tutoring, exam preparation, study sessions and time-management workshops, and host numerous career development events like corporate networking nights and guest speakers. NSBE is dedicated to increasing Black representation, retention and leadership in STEM, where Black professionals make up only about 5% to 9% of the workforce.

Dr. Sir Cato T. Laurencin arrived and gave a lively introduction. Born and raised in Philadelphia, Dr. Laurencin is a university professor and the Albert and Wilda Van Dusen Distinguished Endowed Professor of Orthopedic Surgery. He is a professor of Chemical Engineering, Materials Science and Engineering, and Biomedical Engineering at UConn, and serves as the Chief Executive Officer of the Cato T. Laurencin Institute for Regenerative Engineering. Dr. Laurencin earned a B.S.E. in Chemical Engineering from Princeton University and his M.D., Magna Cum Laude, from the Harvard Medical School. He earned his Ph.D. in Biochemical Engineering/Biotechnology from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

After his introduction, Dr. Laurencin explained the field he pioneered: regenerative engineering, which is an advanced field that converges material science, stem cell science, physics, developmental biology and medical translation to repair, replace or regenerate complex tissues and entire organ systems. Dr. Laurencin created the first bio-induced implant that regenerates on its own from inside the body. A self-proclaimed "knees and shoulders guy" and orthopedic surgeon, he and Dr. James Cooper created the L-C ligament, designed for tissue regeneration of the ACL in the knee. By 2030, he hopes to be providing limb regeneration to the world and is currently working on joint regeneration using synthetic stem cells. He emphasized the following values: strength, courage, intelligence, hard work, loyalty and resilience, and attributes his success to "looking for the right people," crediting his colleagues Lakshmi Nair, Yusuf Kahn and Kevin Lo.

Dr. Laurencin is world-renowned with numerous accolades, but the award he holds closest to his heart is the Spingarn Medal. The medal is awarded annually by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for an outstanding achievement by a Black American. He is the first engineer to win this award. He went on to explain the reason why it was so important to start this field and work so hard to push it forward, saying, "A lot of achievements of black people go unnoticed."

He cited the fact that many people remember Thomas Edison, but not Lewis Howard Latimer, who invented and patented the first commercially viable light bulb, making it practical, durable and affordable for everyday use. Dr. Laurencin explained that part of the reason why he worked so hard in furthering this field was to provide representation for black people in STEM and push for the acknowledgment of Black scientists' achievements in the world of science.

Dr. Laurencin then detailed some of what he called his "less achievements, more cool experiences," which were still incredible accomplishments. In March 2025, he was granted knighthood under the authority of King Charles III on the recommendation of the Prime Minister and the Government of St. Lucia, hence the Sir before his name. Both Pope Leo XIV and Pope Francis reached out and invited him to meet them. At both meetings, he gave them the Cato T. Laurencin Regenerative Engineering Society Founder's Award medal and his autobiography. He ended his presentation with some words that the Pope said to him: "This regenerative engineering represents a hope for humankind."

Dr. Laurecin has been named the recipient of the 2026 Jensen Tissue Engineering Award by TERMIS Global, recognizing his seminal work on polymer nanofibers and regenerative engineering. He is expected to receive the award this November.

After the presentation, I spoke with a few executive board members about their experience with UConn's NSBE and what they took away from the event. When Christina Smith, the president of NSBE and a seventh-semester computer science major with a concentration in software design and development, was asked about her biggest takeaway, she said, "there is no ceiling. When people say there is a ceiling of whatever space they're in — engineering, whatever — it's nothing, because you can make your own ceiling."

Vice President and seventh-semester environmental engineering major Michael Chung, Finance Chair and fifth-semester multidisciplinary engineering major Kelsey Brownell and Michael Charles, a seventh-semester civil engineering major and a member of the Freshmen Leadership Initiative (FLY), all cited numerous programs such as career fairs, ScHOLA²RS House, BRIDGE and FLY as helping their STEM journeys and leading them to NSBE. They emphasize how seeing programs that represented them and their area of study was important for them as students.

Amogee Uwaoma, parliamentarian and fifth-semester biomedical engineering and French & francophone studies major, was asked what she plans to do with her engineering degree after graduation and how NSBE is helping towards this goal. She answered, "I am trying to figure out if I want to be a doctor, go further education, maybe get a Ph.D., get an M.D. Ph.D., or go into industry, but NSBE is helping me do that by leading me towards mentors, getting career fair internships for experience, and introducing me to different people, [like] Dr. Laurencin."

CT NSBE
The National Society of Black Engineers at The University of Connecticut

Logo for UConn's chapter of the National Society of Black Engineers. NSBE hosted Dr. Sir Laurencin as a guest speaker at UConn.

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SUBOG Weekly Events:

October 19th – November 8th

November 4th – GTA VI Trivia @ 7:00 pm in the Student Union Theatre

November 5th - Coffee House @ 4:30 pm at the Benton Museum

November 6th – Jersey Day @ 6:00 pm in SU 325

November 7th – Harvest Fest @ 12:00 pm on the Student Union Mall

November 8th – Amazing Race @ 11:00 am across campus

Any questions? Email subog@uconn.edu and check out @subogatuconn on Instagram for updates on our events!



A student member of the NSBE graduates with a stole from them. The organization gives young Black engineers opportunites to meet people like them and learn from each other.

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