Master of Engineering Committee Meeting Minutes  
October 10, 2001     8:00 – 9:00am  
240 Carpenter Hall Conference Room


Absent:  B. Cady, J. Jenkins

Meeting was called to order at 8:00am

September MEC Minutes:
Michel Louge requested a change to the September 12, 2001 MEC minutes. The third paragraph of the “Ad Hoc Report Discussion/Prioritizing” section has been changed to read:

"Michel Louge commented that there seems to be a lack of understanding from the faculty members of the M.Eng. Program’s incentives. He recommended that the benefits of the M.Eng. Program be made clear to the faculty members."

Fred Kulhawy requested the inclusion of his request for authorship information on the Ad Hoc Report. The following paragraph has been added to the September 12, 2001 MEC minutes after the 5th paragraph in the “Ad Hoc Report Discussion/Prioritizing” section:

"Fred Kulhawy requested information on the authorship of the Ad Hoc Report."

These changes were noted and the revised September 2001 MEC minutes will be redistributed to the members.

Based on the indicated changes, a motion was made to approve the September 2001 MEC minutes and was unanimously approved.

Howard University Partnership Discussion:

Associate Dean Michael Isaacson reminded the MEC members of the proposal between Howard University and Cornell University with regard to the 4+1 Program presented at the September 2001 MEC meeting. Since the September meeting, Dean Isaacson has met with representatives from Howard University and learned more about their Engineering programs. Howard graduates 100-120 Engineering students a year with 60% going on to graduate professional school. Howard isn’t interested in creating a Master of Engineering Program – they want to improve their Ph.D. program. Many of the students who pursue their professional graduate programs go into terminal Masters programs in Master of Science or Master of Engineering programs at other institutions. Howard’s biggest competitor is George Washington University who offers programs at night. Howard doesn’t want to become a night school to compete w/ GW. Howard wants to send their best students to first-rate institutions with professional Masters programs in the hope that the students will return to Howard to pursue their Ph.D.

The proposal suggests that Howard’s best students could come into Cornell’s M.Eng. Program via the 4+1 Program and then enter industry or pursue their Ph.D. Howard would like to use this 4+1 program as a recruiting tool at the undergraduate level. Undergraduate students would need to pass a certain set of hurdles before enrolling at Cornell for their Master of Engineering degree. Howard is amenable to all different types of educational solutions, including distance learning. Jim Johnson, Howard University’s President, feels strongly that the Program be self-supporting with the students receiving full corporate funding. The number of students that would be considered for admission into the 4+1 Program is in the area
area of 12-15. Many of the Howard University board members are affiliated with companies that Cornell currently works closely with.

Dean Isaacson indicated that Howard University would like to identify 2-5 students in their Electrical Engineering Department now who could be selected to come to Cornell for Fall ’02. Howard is interested in working with other departments in the future, but with Professor Spencer’s Howard/Cornell connection it seems logical for the Program to begin in Electrical and Computer Engineering. A suggestion was made to allow the Howard University 4+1 students to enroll in several engineering departments, but Dean Isaacson indicated that Howard is most comfortable linking with our EE department initially and once the first semester is complete we will make assessments overall. Mark Eisner indicated that there is a premise that the undergraduate and graduate discipline must be the same, but Dean Isaacson corrected that misinformation.

Dean Isaacson has created a committee who will meet to compare the two curriculums and to see where the gaps are, and they will make a first attempt at setting the criteria for admission. The committee will be comprised of John Belina, Cliff Pollack, Mike Hayes, Mike Spencer and Mike Isaacson.

Clarification on the 4+1 Program admission criteria was requested, and Dean Isaacson indicated that we could establish any admission criteria that are felt necessary to guarantee the success of the program and the students. The admission criteria for the first group of students would be the same as our ordinary student applicants, but the criteria for future students could include a higher bar (because they will be full-paid fellowship recipients), or possibly a research experience requirement. Once the criteria for admission have been established, a proposal will be submitted to the Graduate School. Concern was voiced that it is better to have competitive admission policies without “sweetheart deals”, but Dean Isaacson indicated that this wouldn’t be a sweetheart deal if the bar is set high enough. John Belina confirmed that ECE and Howard University have had a working relationship for years and this proposed 4+1 Program would formalize the connection. John also indicated that the quality of the Howard University students who will qualify to participate in the proposed 4+1 Program is high and we would have been recruiting them in either case. He feels that a special relationship exists that should be capitalized on. Several questions were voiced concerning the admission criteria that would be established for this program. It was suggested that the students be required to perform a summer research project prior to their M.Eng. semester with the condition that if the research project is done well admission to the M.Eng. Program would be automatic.

Mark Eisner raised concern regarding the guaranteed funding if the actual number of students who qualify for the program was exceeded. Dean Isaacson indicated that Howard University has strong corporate funding resources.

Jim Bartsch asked for and received confirmation from Dean Isaacson that the MEC would be involved in the establishment of a special admission policy for the 4+1 Program. Cornell’s participation in this partnership program will result in increased visibility with the companies that have a joint interest in both Howard and Cornell with the M.Eng. program receiving further support as a result.

Dean Isaacson closed his discussion by inviting the MEC members to send him comments regarding the 4+1 admission criteria and potential pitfalls.

Prioritization of MEC Ad Hoc Report by M.Eng. Fields:

Jim Bartsch led the discussion regarding the Ad Hoc Prioritization findings. A spreadsheet was distributed to the MEC reflecting the individual field priorities. The spreadsheet calculates the top priority needs of the fields, but it doesn’t rank the secondary issues. The Committee members agreed that the MEC Ad Hoc Subcommittee should convene to further clarify the prioritization findings before submitting a list to Dean Craighead. Claude Cohen suggested creating a coversheet for the Dean summarizing the prioritization findings attaching the spreadsheet as an
appendix. Fred Kulhawy suggested that the Ad Hoc Subcommittee submit a Primary Priority Actions list to include secondary priority action items as well as recommendations not requiring further initial action beyond the status quo.

Jim Bartsch thanked the MEC members for their assistance with this process, and the MEC Ad Hoc Subcommittee members arranged to meet on October 17th at 7:30am to clarify the summary of findings.

New Business:

Mike Hayes opened this agenda item by informing the MEC members that the departmental information found in the 2000-2002 Graduate School Catalog is extremely outdated in most cases. Joe Shultz mailed copies of the individual descriptions to the MS/PhD GFAs and DGS's for revision. Mike indicated that ORGSPE would provide copies of the catalog descriptions to the MEC members for their review.

In addition to Mike’s overview of the ORGSPE recruiting season, he informed them that our office is seeing a higher number of students at the graduate and professional fairs thanks to the efforts of our Graduate Assistant Becky Walden. Becky emails students seen at previous Graduate Fairs to inform them of our attendance at their school’s upcoming graduate/professional fair and she invites them to come speak with our representatives about Cornell’s graduate Engineering programs. Information Request Forms are completed by the prospective students, and in many cases Mike and Joe make notations on the forms to indicate exceptional students. Mike suggested that the MEC members contact the earmarked students by telephone to encourage their application or visit to the campus.

In addition to attending the Graduate and Professional Fairs, ORGSPE contacts the student organizations (SWE, NSBE and SHPE) at each university to request their assistance in hosting a more intimate Graduate Information Session. As a result of our attempt to recruit women and underrepresented minorities (URMs), there is a larger proportion of URM students in the pool.

Mark Eisner informed the MEC that he attended the Cornell Career Fair to speak with the corporate recruiters. He asked Mike Hayes if ORGSPE could create a brochure that describes the M.Eng. Program to employers to inform them of the Program’s benefits. Mike indicated that ORGSPE has a tri-fold brochure describing the M.Eng. Program and we will supply the Field Coordinators with them.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00am.