Meeting Minutes

Minutes from the October 14, 2009 and November 11, 2009 meetings were approved.

New MS Degree

Background:

With the Provost’s approval the College of Engineering introduced in Fall 2009 a new 2-year MS degree that uses the MEng revenue sharing model. The intent of the new MS degree is to extend the benefit of MEng tuition revenue sharing to departments that find the MEng degree difficult to implement because they cannot easily use the team teaching approach at the masters level.

The new MS program is a 2-year course and research degree with expectation of an MS thesis. It does not have the rigor nor the time expectations of the PhD degree. Nevertheless, all participants are expected to take at least 4 graduate courses and carry out research of a publishable quality. Students will be self-funded, and are not expected to serve as teaching assistants and cannot be supported on faculty research grants. The new MS is not intended to be route to pass into MS/PhD.

Each graduate field that wants to offer a new MS will be expected to develop course and graduation expectations and communicate them to both the Graduate School and the College of Engineering. Approval by the Dean of College of Engineering is required.

Discussion:

MSE is the first field to introduce the new MS degree and has six students enrolled. Each student is expected to take at least two approved courses and to conduct intensive research. It was questioned by some MEC members whether the special MS exceeds regular research masters requirements by requiring courses. The rationale offered was that the new MS students have to demonstrate proficiency in core subject areas, which most will do by taking classes. MEng members warned that there will be students who will contest the course requirements in their individual cases.

The new MS program in EAS was developed to meet a need for a research degree with a thesis that takes two years or less and prepares engineers for a career with oil and gas companies who need expertise in subsurface energy systems. The companies did not like the MEng degree. EAS plans to market the new MS in the Middle East and China.

Several MEng members questioned whether combining a revenue making scheme with an education scheme would prove to be a good fit. They anticipated some resourceful new MS students will try to graduate early to save money, not unlike MEng students who use Early Admit and pro-rated tuition. What can a graduate field do if the MS student’s special committee says he earned the required two RUs
and is ready to graduate after a year and a half? There will be pressure on a student who experiences financial difficulties in his second year to try to find RA, and if the student is really good, faculty may want to have them on an RA. Should Cornell be denying promising students an opportunity to pursue a PhD because they chose to start in the new MS program? Several MEC members predicted that students will be financially stretched after one and one-half years and faculty will be under pressure to graduate them or find financial support. Should ability to pay be part of the admissions criteria?

There were many unanswered questions for further discussion. What will be the role of the MEC in this revenue sharing program that impacts MEng degree?

**MEng Enrollment Data**

The number of offers of admission increased significantly, from 42%*** in 2008 to 60% in 2009, and acceptances declined significantly from 60%*** in 2008 to 46% in 2009. ***PLEASE SEE NOTE BELOW. Admission rate should be going up and acceptance rate should be going down. Admitted/applied ratio (selectivity) is a key metric for the US News survey, and the MEng program data for 2009 will negatively impact our ranking.

MEC members speculated that the 2009 economy was the reason more students were admitted. Fewer students could afford to pay for an MEng education and they were trying to expand the pool of admittees to assure they met enrollment targets. There was no drop in the quality of applicants, and although some fields experienced a decline in numbers (e.g. fewer applicants from India in Financial Engineering) other fields reported an increase in applications.

In 2009 the MEng student enrollment significantly exceeded university projections. Because of the financial implications for planning (both tuition revenue sharing and impact of MEng students on Cornell services), in early 2010 the university will be asking for the most accurate projections possible for MEng student head count and FTEs for 2010-11. MEng directors should sit down with their Administrative Directors to get the best possible numbers, even if it is an educated guess.

**Miscellaneous**

Reminder that MEC Fellowship Nominations will be coming up early in February.

Adobe Connect is available for web chats with admitted students!

The next MEC meeting will be on Wednesday, February 10.

*** MEC Chair Note: Upon the MEC Chair request subsequent to the December 9th meeting, RGS is verifying the F07 and F08 admissions counts. Especially for F07, there are discrepancies between the Grad School's and some large fields’ admissions counts that require a careful second look. A revised report with comments will be distributed to the MEC before the meeting in March.

**Bottom line (remains to be validated):** The initially reported figures indicated that, overall, F07 and F08 had comparable selectivity and yield metrics, with a substantial decline in these performance metrics for F09. However, it appears that the F09 selectivity and yield figures are actually comparable to those of F07, with F08 remaining an anomalously good year (although not quite as good as reported).