CAES kicks off 'Women’s Work' films

By Margaret Brandeau

The Center for Advanced Engineering Studies has recently completed what it hopes to be the first in a series of films dealing with women and work. The film, entitled Women’s Work: Engineering, looks at women who are engineers and women who are studying to be engineers.

The purpose of the film, according to producer Christine Dall and Niti Salloway, is to encourage high school girls to think about engineering as a career. Engineering has been traditionally considered a field for men, but the film shows that more women will become engineers in the future. It also focuses on the social aspects of working in a male-oriented world.

The film shows a woman engineer who designed the Mystic Bridge, standing on the bridge surrounded by construction workers and students talking about why they are interested in engineering. "I like it because it's applied... it's not just a pure science," she says. "A scene shows a woman welding in a machine shop, "You get to use your hands... it's not like you're just dealing with equations and formulas..."

The major thrust of the film deals with the social aspects of fitting into a male-oriented world. "It's a lot easier preparing academically than preparing socially," one woman student says.

The film also focuses on the question of how a woman engineer handles her home life. It shows her and her husband at home with their children. "Since we began sharing work and responsibilities," she says, "things have really worked out." She and her husband describe how they manage to work and take care of their children.

Salloway said that the film was shown to some high school students in Illinois "and there were the sorts of issues they are concerned with."

The film is funded by the School of Engineering, IBM, and the National Science Foundation (NSF). To date, it has cost $50,000 to produce.

According to Dall, the film will soon be distributed to high schools around the country. A recent screening of the film showed a woman engineer who designed the Mystic Bridge. Standing on the bridge surrounded by construction workers, she said, "I have some of the foremen confess to me that they didn't exactly know what to think of a woman boss at first." She says, "Maybe some of the men thought me- that they didn't exactly know about engineering in general job of getting work done."

"A woman getting out will be able to find a high-level job." Although the film was shot at MIT and features MIT women, Dall says it "shouldn't be viewed as recruitment film for MIT. We want it to do the more general job of letting women know about engineering in general." The CAES will be releasing its next film, Women and Work: Management, at the beginning of next year.