Course VI Considers Adopting Five-year Master's of Engineering Program

By Jeremy Nyton

The Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science may replace its current four-year undergraduate program with a five-year Master's of Engineering program. The department first considered the five-year plan in 1999, but reached a critical milestone when a program was discussed at a late November BECS faculty meeting.

At that meeting, Professor Paul L. Fenfield S'81, head of the department, asked each faculty member to write a letter indicating whether they supported the program discussed and noting any problems they had with it. Fenfield and the Ad Hoc Curriculum Committee, headed by Campbell L. Searle SM '71, professor of electrical engineering, discussed the criticisms provided by the letters.

The department hopes to print information about the change in the next MIT Bulletin, according to Fenfield. The information would say the department is considering a five-year program that may become the standard for the Class of 1999. If approved, the program would also be open to a small number of current students.

"The seven people on the committee have all said 84 letters and are giving very good confidence to all of the letter's said," said Searle. He described the letters' suggestions as constructive and useful.

Most of the faculty present at the November meeting supported the move to a five-year program, though many disagreed with the specifics of the program presented, according to Searle. "What I heard were two or three very negative comments. The rest were positive," he said.

"Depth area strings?"

The program, authored by Searle, Ford Professor of Engineering William M. Siebert '76, and John V. Guttag, professor of computer science and engineering, consists of an 18-course area strings that may become the standard for the Class of 1999. The five-year program would also be open to students with undergraduate degrees from other institutions.

The M. Eng. degree would be the principle degree offered by the department, but graduates would also receive bachelor's degrees. Typically, all students in good academic standing are accepted into the M. Eng. program at the end of their junior year. A bachelor's degree will also be awarded for those students who cannot afford the expended program.

Although the program admits nearly all students, students in engineering will have to major in one specific area. The department plans to financially restrict enrollment. Financial support for the fifth year will be limited to about 75 students and be distributed on a merit basis. Students would be accepted into the program for financial support.

The Department of Electrical Engineering recommended that all students complete six months of hearing before the COD sends a letter to students expressing concern over the program. "I think this sort of thing will make a big difference in the long run. If the content of the students doesn't change, we will have missed a great opportunity," he said.

The program was designed to have little impact on the program. Like the V-LA internship, the M. Eng. program would have no rate from the doctoral track. The five-year program would also be open to students with undergraduate degrees from other institutions.

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