

ECETDHA Comes of Age

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Since to our knowledge this is the first submission to *The Interface* from the Electrical and Computer Engineering Technology Department Heads' Association (ECETDHA), a brief background on our group is in order. The Association began in California in the early 1980's when a small group of department heads got together for an informal meeting in a hotel room at the ASEE Annual Conference to discuss issues facing the electrical engineering technology community. A slightly larger group assembled again the next year at the ASEE conference and began at that time to consider formalizing their activities. Taking some cues from the Mechanical Engineering Technology Department Heads, they identified some goals and objectives for the group and drafted some by-laws.

From that start, the Association functioned for nearly twenty years on a relatively informal basis. The group typically met twice a year, once at the ASEE Annual Conference, and again at the Conference for Industry and Education Collaboration (CIEC). At the meetings, the group would discuss the important issues of the day related to electrical and electronic engineering technology. However, the group had no official resources to support actions, so they generally relied on individual members to follow up on key issues by promoting action through personal contacts and informal interventions within other organizations.

By the turn of the century, the group was looking for ways to increase its influence. So, in June of 2002, the group entertained a motion to "go formal." At that time, there were no accurate records of membership, nor were any dues being collected. There were just lists and email addresses of attendees at previous meetings. These were used to contact past attendees with a plan to formalize the group and establish a formal, dues-paying membership. This group of 'initial members' endorsed the idea and voted to begin collecting dues of \$25 per year. That first year, 29 administrators joined the group as paid members, which was encouraging because there had not been 29 people at a single meeting in quite some time. By the next year, the membership nearly doubled to 54, and then expanded again to 84 members by 2005. This year the membership stands at 91. While the growth rate certainly will not continue, the Association has developed into a viable force in the engineering technology community, and funds provided by membership dues provide the group with some real resources to tackle important issues. (Note: The above is based on recollections of several 'old-timers' with the Association. We are currently searching for records that will let us develop a more complete history. If you have historical information on the Association that would help in this effort, please contact Tom Hall <hallt@nsula.edu> or call him at (318) 357-3459.)

So what are these activities? Most recently, the ECETDHA has undertaken several significant initiatives that should benefit the electrical and computer engineering technology community. Primary among these is an effort to investigate the potential of developing nationally-normed assessment tests for electrical/electronics engineering technology graduates. This effort was kicked off by the Past Chair of the Association, Dr. Tom Hall of Northwestern State University in Louisiana, and is being done in collaboration with the Society of Manufacturing Engineers (SME) and with strong support from IEEE's Committee on Technology Accreditation Activities (CTAA). At this point, the Association's efforts have concentrated on determining the interest and potential participation in nationally-based testing, if such testing were available. Many of you in the Engineering Technology community have seen and

responded to these surveys via the Engineering Technology listserv. To date, the information from the surveys has provided a basis for working with the SME to assess the viability and potential success of a development effort to create, validate and evaluate a prototype electrical/electronics assessment test. The Association is relying on the SME in this activity because of their many years of experience managing certification testing in manufacturing, and more important, because they have developed procedures and staffing that can be offered to others to support standardized test development. A report on the results of this effort should be available by the time of the next meeting of the Association in February 2007 at the CIEC.

The Association is also working on another perennial problem faced by ET department heads, and that is the job of identifying qualified external reviewers to evaluate faculty seeking promotion and/or tenure. Historically, external reviewers have been identified through personal networking, private recommendations, and personal experiences, and as a result, the job of performing external reviews has typically fallen on the shoulders of a limited group of well-known and highly regarded leaders of the ET community. Members of the ECETDHA are convinced that there is a much larger group of ET faculty and administrators who are both qualified to perform these reviews and who are also willing to provide their service to the ET community. Thus, the Association has undertaken an effort to create a database, to be shared by the Association membership, identifying qualified reviewers who are available to review P&T dossiers. Clearly, users of such a database will require assurances that listed reviewers are thoroughly vetted and possess requisite credentials. Thus, the members working on this task have focused their efforts to date on developing a set of qualifications for listed reviewers and drafting policies for nominating, choosing, and retaining reviewers in the database. They are also assessing the content and extent of background information that will be needed in the database and investigating questions related to security and sharing of database information. A progress report is expected from this group at the CIEC as well.

Finally, the recent growth of the Association, and more important, the financial underpinning provided by that growth, has permitted the Association to become much more involved with the IEEE's CTAA. The Chair of the ECETDHA has been an invited member to CTAA meetings for some time; however, prior to a few years ago, there were no funds to support the Chair to travel to CTAA meeting. Thus, actual attendance was, at best, sporadic. That is no longer the case. The ECETDHA now funds the Chair to travel to CTAA meetings each year. The immediate result of that has been a much greater involvement of the Chair in accreditation-related initiatives of the CTAA and a much stronger voice of the Association with both the CTAA and its parent group in IEEE, the Educational Activities Board. The CTAA is the key actor influencing accreditation issues related to electrical and computer engineering technology programs, and clearly more active involvement and representation from the ECETDHA can be nothing but positive. Further, the Association is frequently called upon to support CTAA actions and to act as a conduit of information to and from the field.

There you have it -- a brief recap of what the Electrical and Computer Engineering Technology Department Heads Association is, what it is up to, and where it is headed. I hope it makes clear that the group is working hard to carve out a dynamic and important role for itself within the electrical and computer engineering technology community. Further, for those of you who are not as yet members of the Association, I hope it encourages you to consider joining us. There is plenty to do, and there is always room for anyone who is willing to help and who has good ideas about where the community should be heading. All of you are welcome; we hope to see you at our next meeting. Finally, though this is our first time to appear in the *Interface*, we do not intend it to be the last. We will plan to make this a routine, so you should expect to hear from us again in future issues.