

# ECE Curriculum Committee Meeting Minutes for April 15, 2010

**Members present:** Tanguil Basar, Stephen Bishop, Kent Choquette, Douglas Jones, Erhan Kudeki, Stephen Levinson, Jonathan Makela, Sean Meyn, Michael Oelze, Nitin Vaidya

**Guests:**

Angus Rockett

1. The Minutes of the April 1 and 8, 2010 meetings were approved.
2. Professor Angus Rockett, the Associate Head of the Materials Science and Engineering Department and longtime Chief Undergraduate Advisor for MatSE, joined the meeting to discuss feedback mechanisms for monitoring curricula. As background, Angus told us that MatSE has about 300 undergraduates, 25 faculty, and five concentration areas in their curriculum. He said that every semester the departmental student professional organization hosts a pizza night "gripe session" led by student leaders (faculty are excluded to provide anonymity and more open discussion). The leaders guide the discussion through all courses in the department and discuss student comments, complaints, and positives. The student representatives for each class take notes, discuss it, organize a report, and about a week later they have a one-hour meeting with a small committee consisting of the Department Head, Associate Head, etc. and give a coherent summary of the discussion about each course. Angus said that what makes this procedure so useful, and what distinguishes it from the ICES forms or other written surveys, is that it results in a conversation, thus allowing much more detailed and useful information transfer. For example, the student representatives can convey whether only one or a few students complained, or whether there was a widespread sentiment, or whether problems were associated more with the instruction, instructor, or TA or with the material or course organization. The faculty can ask for clarification and probe for needed detail while still maintaining the anonymity of the respondents. Roughly 30 courses are reviewed, with the lower-level required courses generally receiving more attention. The instructors eventually receive a summary report as well. Professor Rockett strongly expressed his opinion that this system works very well and recovers much unique and valuable information not otherwise available.

Erhan Kudeki noted that the IEEE hosts a similar "gripe session" already, but that the information is not conveyed to the Curriculum Committee or the faculty. Tanguil Basar notes that the course guidebook "Dr. Everitt's Neighborhood" prepared by the HKN Honor Society also contains very useful information. Angus Rockett stated that it is essential that the Head and Associate Head be present to receive the student feedback, because only they have the possible authority to effect changes in reluctant instructors or to reward faculty who do well. (He noted that the feedback is often positive.) It was noted that the feedback could be useful for ABET documentation as well.

Professor Rockett was asked whether he believed the system would work as well for ECE, with almost 100 courses; Angus suggested breaking the students up into cadres representing various areas, each of which review a relevant subset of courses. Others suggested only reviewing the required courses. In response to a query, Angus said that they only review MatSE courses, not other required courses such as Physics. Kent Choquette noted that the Curriculum Committee is particularly concerned with course content; Angus suggested that we'll find out how prepared students feel for the more advanced courses. He suggested we could ask the students to pass out the approved syllabus or course outline and ask the students to comment on what was actually covered and about their confidence in their knowledge of that material. Kent suggested that we should ask about what is the best and worst thing in each course, to identify the most pressing problems or successes.

The Committee agreed that the Curriculum Committee should regularly review student feedback. It was agreed to build on the existing IEEE process as well as utilize the HKN information. The Chair suggested having the student representatives meet with the full Curriculum Committee; others suggested that that might be unwieldy and intimidating, and that a smaller group including at least the Head, Associate Heads, and the Curriculum Committee Chair would be better.

3. The Committee adjourned at 2:55 PM.

These minutes drafted by D.L. Jones, April 22, 2010; Last updated April 22, 2010