IEEE-IAB Student Feedback Session

October 11, 2012

One of the key goals of the Texas Tech ECE Industrial Advisory Board (IAB) is to promote an ongoing, constructive dialog among students, faculty, and staff. For many years, the IAB has hosted an annual students-only, friendly forum to solicit feedback from the ECE student body. The IAB then works with the ECE faculty to address concerns, as well as pass along positive comments.

This past Fall, nine members of the IAB met with approximately 30 students on the Thursday evening of our on-campus visit. Here's what we heard (faculty response comments in blue font):

ISSUES - LABS, COMPUTERS & EQUIPMENT

1. Labs: Getting parts is still a problem. The same parts are used but not available and therefore students often have to buy. There is no stockroom manager and stockroom people don't take it seriously (they are not trained and use time for studying instead of helping). A stockroom manager has been hired and should take over the management responsibilities.
2. Lab access is an issue, particularly Saturdays on game days (why is this only an issue with the College of Engineering?) The Saturday-Game day lockout is a hard position of the dean and absolutely makes sense. It affects students very little. I don't want to fight this. All other times students have just about 24 / 7 access.
3. They want a "GOOD" computer lab printer that works.

ISSUES – CURRICULA & FACULTY

4. Curriculum pre-requisites don't always make sense with class availability. Physics vs. Fields, Physics is often a re-hash of EE. Circuits before Physics 2. Linear Systems before Differential Equations. Dr. Nutter is working on this with the Chair of Physics.
5. Dr. X still has issues. Admittedly, he knows the material and is good in a one-on-one situation but communication in class is still not good. He often stands in front of notes on the board and talks. As a result, students can't see notes while he's talking and he still needs a microphone. Suggest making "ELMO" device available to him. Students didn't get a final (he did not show up to give the final). Homework grades were dropped because the homework solutions were posted too soon. Notes were made available online but were still illegible. Comment was made that a student learned more from Dr. Y in one day than Dr. X over time. Dr. X positives: He does know the course material and is good one-on-one. He does MAPLE presentations very well. In the current semester Dr. X is teaching only one class and he is getting good evaluations on this class.
6. Dr. Z. It seems like he's trying to be funny with nicknames for students but some seem to be condescending and somewhat unprofessional. If he can learn nicknames, why not their actual names? He asks lots of questions to the point of "grilling" students. Dr. Z positives: Required use of LabView; rewards hard work; Questions and feedback prepared students for improving

their presentation skills (even if a little "grilling"). I discussed the issue with Dr. Z and I believe the problem is fixed. Dr. Z was very cooperative in the matter.

7. Students wait to schedule a class until a specific professor is scheduled to teach it but then it's possible that a different professor is actually teaching the course once it starts. Classes should not be so "teacher dependent". There are advantages and disadvantages to fully standardized curriculum. Different faculty styles are unavoidable, even when departmental homework and exams for a course are fully standardized.

8. A graduate student teaching a class is repeatedly late and is also reviewing materials at the last minute before a test. This instructor (post doc) is not teaching anymore based on the comments above and the teaching evaluations. ☺

9. Classroom scheduling. Classes are all over the campus with little time to go between. Student meetings and scheduling are also not easy. They can't schedule meetings in the EE buildings and likewise can't also use facilities in the BA building. There are problems with ASFR, especially during the job fair. There is a financial penalty for last minute reservations of rooms (fines). Students were chastised and chased away for using an empty room by the janitorial staff. Some departments insist on advisor's being present at the student meetings. IAB comments: There should not be a "fine" system at all (where does that money go?). Instead, there should be a "scheduling penalty" for scheduling a room and then not using it, but a fine for scheduling an empty room on that day is just plain wrong. ECE should expand and have priority on reservations associated with the Bullen and Seacat rooms so that student groups have improved operations. Dr. Nutter and Donna Srader are doing everything to schedule classes in ECE. The remaining classes are close by in the engineering key. The class scheduling policy is at the university level, and unfortunately, beyond the control of the department. However I have heard of no fines and rough custodians at least not before about 10:00 pm.

10. Class schedules. Students often need 2 classes but both are scheduled at same time. Their advisor is not always responsive. The situation with Tracy could've been better communicated to the students about what happened and the plans for replacement. An e-mail response might have been better than just word of mouth in that case. The new advisor is in place. Typically if two classes within the department are scheduled at the same time and a student has a conflict, it is because the student failed that course or is otherwise taking it out of sequence.

11. ECE e-mail access for notification is not always timely. We have a new EE-Information email and Donna Srader is using it promptly.

12. Query on how much/whether new faculty were teaching (some indications you see the same older teachers and not the new faculty). Response from Dr. Giesselmann on this topic was that they all must teach but sometimes new ones are starting by teaching a graduate level class in their specialty.

13. Recruiting. Would like a more broad representation of employers, not just local energy companies. COE Job fair is attracting a very diverse group of companies

14. The students would like more detailed design electives. Upper level electives not always useful and in some cases, are too obscure.

15. Summer classes and scheduling. One student mentioned 3 classes, all taught by the same professor. The student worked hard but got a B in one class and wanted feedback on what he could've done better but received no response to his e-mail inquiries.
16. Nobody posts office hours outside their office. Not everyone has a website presence with this information so students don't always know when they can meet with professors. Office hours are always posted on the course syllabus – it is the best place to find office hours.
17. CS Topics should be more in EE. CS and CE don't seem to be able to agree on a single course curriculum.
18. Is Bioengineering under EE or ME? It looks like both and neither. The recommendation is that EE should own it. Bioengineering is managed out of the college of engineering and is not associated with a department. The faculty who supervise bioengineering students typically have their students get advising in their home departments.
19. There were concerns about the new core curriculum and the "2 strikes" rule. It was mentioned that it is difficult to get a Co-op position after the first year if no EE specific classes are taught by then. This Co-op opportunity was deemed very valuable in leading to other longer term opportunities. The "weeding out" process comes naturally in EE and doesn't need external influence. A new 2 strikes rule is mandated by the college.
20. Some electives are being taken because they were simply available versus being useful/interesting/wanted. Students thought the idea of a survey on electives (likes, dislikes, ones needing updating, missing) would be good.
21. They want a digital systems lab, circuits lab, maybe a seminar at least on some topics (Xylinx or Verilog programming). Verilog programming is also taught in Lab I now.
22. TAs. Some are unresponsive. Some posted phone access but were non-responsive. TA's are spread thinner now and some grad students are grading papers even though they are not paid to do so. Due to new college rules on student compensation, we do not have the number of TA's that we had in the past. If a TA is non-responsive to a student, the student should notify their professor and Dr. Nutter, taking care to have specific documentation on emails, etc., that were not returned. ECE is hiring tutors that are not subject to new rules on compensation.
23. Comments on C vs. C++. EE are taking C++ but C is thought to be a better choice.

POSITIVE FEEDBACK

24. Positive comments on professors (they are available and take time to help). TAs/RAs are also good and helpful. That's a good thing ☺
25. Students like and appreciate the labs a lot (being able to use the equipment, the team work involved, preparing and conducting presentations, etc.). Some projects may be outdated (one specifically called out using a cassette tape). The chairman/lab coordinator have requested that the IAB members submit projects that are current and technically relevant for lab projects.
26. Kudos about NI teaming up to teach LabView.

27. Students are glad to be here at TTU, in comparison to other schools. They believe that they have better access to professors. They like the labs and they like the challenge ("sink or swim") in some cases.
28. The curriculum Lab classes (and their value) are recognized outside of TTU by peers.
29. The office staff (Jackie and Janet) are greatly appreciated.