FRIENDS OF ENGINEERING - A POSITIVE CONNECTION WITH INDUSTRY

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Abstract - Links between schools of Engineering and local industry are increasingly important as we move toward outcomes assessment in the CEAB accreditation process. Typically these links have relied on personal relationships between individuals and their breadth of impact has been limited.

When the first University of Manitoba NSERC Chair in Design Engineering was launched in 2001, support was strong, but relationships tended to be project focussed. In 2005, the Manitoba Aerospace Engineering Liaison Group (MAELG) was established as a means of elevating the relationship with the Design Chair and to an industry level.

Based on the values realized by both the Faculty and the MAELG members, representatives from all employers of engineering graduates were invited to a series of meetings to discuss means of working together. By 2008, an industry owed and financed body known as the Friends of Engineering had been formed with the objective of providing support to the Faculty. This paper will define the developmental process, the range of activities and future directions of the organization.

Keywords: industry relations, information exchange, student industry interaction, industry understanding, outcomes assessment.

1. INTRODUCTION.

The Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board has determined that, beginning in 2014, program evaluations will be based, for the most part, on outcomes assessment. This has heightened the need for better understanding between the academic community and those who employ engineering graduates. In Manitoba, the Friends of Engineering has evolved to provide this necessary communications link in support of the Faculty.

Following the successful fund raising campaign for the new Engineering and Industrial Technology Complex, some of the individuals who had been actively involved

in that campaign raised the question of how they could provide further support. These individuals looked at the Manitoba Aerospace Engineering Liaison Group that had been established in conjunction with the NSERC Design Engineering Chair as a model that could be expanded beyond a single industry. Driven by the desire of these industry leaders, and the support of the Dean of Engineering, the Friends of Engineering came into existence.

2. THE ORGANIZATION.

The Friends of Engineering are a unique group of industry leaders in the province of Manitoba.. They are primarily made up of engineering professionals, many of whom graduated from the program at the University of Manitoba. They have made themselves available to mentor students, host events, and provide valuable curriculum input.

Made up primarily of presidents and CEO's of major engineering firms, the Friends of Engineering recognizes that the Faculty of Engineering provides Manitoba industry with a vital stream of highly qualified graduates that make a huge contribution to both our economy and our quality of life. They believe that is critical that this level of excellence and relevance in engineering education be continued and hopefully even expanded.

The Friends of Engineering is an external organization, independent of the university, with the goal of advancing the Faculty and enhancing its graduates beyond what can be accomplished with public funds. They are registered as a not-for-profit corporation with their administrative offices located at, and supported by, the Faculty of Engineering. The annual membership fee is \$1,000 and the lion's share of the funds received are used to directly improve communications with, and programs in, Engineering.

Friends comprises senior-level executives from industry, government and the consulting sector who understand the importance of having a strong, mutually beneficial relationship between all sectors of the engineering profession in Manitoba and the engineering school at the U

of M. They intend to assist the Faculty in its efforts to serve education and research needs, and produce the engineering graduates that are essential to the vitality of Manitoba businesses.

“We want to help the engineering student better integrate into the business environment,” says John Bockstael, P.Eng., Chair of the Friends. “Friends is an avenue for students to connect with engineering industry.”

In spite of being a relatively new organization, from a functional perspective, the Friends of Engineering has

already dramatically strengthened the essential linkage between the Engineering Faculty and students with the engineering profession in industry, government and the consulting sector in Manitoba. Networking events, support of student competitions and conferences, and the enabling of the Faculty to increase its recruitment efforts have all benefited the Faculty of Engineering and our students. In addition, the engineering curriculum, career development opportunities, co-op education, internship programs and focussed research are areas of joint discussion between Friends and the Faculty.