Quantum Leap for Engineering

Harvard’s division of Engineering and Applied Sciences (DEAS) may soon become a full-fledged school of engineering, under a plan presented in May to the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) by the division dean, Venkatesh Narayananmurti. During his eight-year tenure, Dean Venky, as he is known, has invigorated the division, replacing a raft of retiring faculty members and expanding the ranks of its professoriate by about 50 percent. His plan to retire this year was forestalled by the resignations of William C. Kirby and Lawrence H. Summers. “It was fairly obvious that you couldn’t go recruiting for such an important position without either the dean of the faculty or the president,” he said in an interview.

The task of elevating engineering and applied sciences from a division to a school within FAS, a change recommended by the last two Board of Overseers’ visiting committees, in 2002 and 2005, was one Venky had anticipated leaving to a successor. But when University provost Steven E. Hyman and the Corporation asked him to stay, he agreed to help carry that vision forward. “It’s very exciting,” he said. “I wish I were younger. I’d take it for 20 years.” (He will, however, give up the FAS position of dean of physical sciences as of June 30.)

For now, the proposed change is primarily one of nomenclature. Undergraduates would still be admitted to Harvard College, and could choose an engineering concentration. DEAS has always been fairly autonomous financially, covering all its expenses except student housing through its endowment and decanal fundraising. It maintains its own communications efforts and development personnel. But the new name is important for several reasons, Venky emphasized at a presentation to the FAS faculty in May. It will greatly enhance the visibility of engineering at Harvard, both within and beyond the University, aiding in the recruitment of students and faculty alike. And it presages a second wave of growth—on the order of an additional 50 percent—in the engineering faculty, which now num-

University People

Superior Scientists

The 72 new members of the National Academy of Sciences elected in April included six Harvard faculty members: David E. Clapham, Castaneda professor of cardiovascular research; Peter T. Ellison, Cowles professor of anthropology (and past dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences); Claudia Goldin, Lee professor of economics; Eric J. Heller, professor of chemistry and physics; Charles H. Langmuir, professor of geochemistry; and Robert J. Sampson, Ford professor of the social sciences.

Arts and Sciences Fellows

Eight University affiliates were elected fellows of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences: professor of astronomy Charles R. Alcock (director of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics); Ropes professor of political economy Albert Alesina; Tyler professor in constitutional law Richard H. Fallon Jr.; O’Brien professor of divinity and Albertson professor of Middle Eastern studies William A. Graham (dean of Harvard Divinity School); professor of cell biology Mark T. Keating; the Kennedy School’s Steven E. Miller (director of the International Security Program); professor of economics James H. Stock; and professor of sociology Mary Waters.

Helping Humanities

Winners of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation’s Distinguished Achievement Awards, recognizing “significant contributions to humanistic inquiry,” this year include Conant University Professor Stephen Owen, an authority on Chinese poetry. The awards, of up to $1.5 million each, support each scholar’s work and institution. Past Harvard winners include Cogan University Professor Stephen Greenblatt, Goetl professor of medieval history Michael McCormick, and Porter professor of philosophy Christine Korsgaard.

APS Honorands

Professors elected as members of the American Philosophical Society include Hobbs professor of cognition and education Howard E. Gardner; Conant University Professor Stephen Owen; Thomas professor of government and sociology Theda Skocpol, dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences; and Huntington professor of oncologic medicine emeritus Paul C. Zamecnik.

Women of Achievement

Brigham professor of women’s health JoAnn Manson ’75, D.P.H. ’87, M.D., a principal investigator for several important studies of women’s health, received the College’s Women’s Professional Achievement Award. Graduating senior Lauren A.E. Schuker won the student Women’s Leadership Award; the Crimson president and Marshall Scholar will study at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London this fall.
Reconfiguring the Curriculum

Much work on refashioning the undergraduate curriculum remains for the next academic year, but the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) concluded its spring meetings by adopting several significant changes. Students will have more time to choose their concentrations, and new options for minor fields of study, encouraging them to investigate diverse disciplines; professors will supervise writing and speaking more directly; and new humanities courses and wholesale changes in the core curriculum and strategies for the appropriate mentoring of junior faculty are hammered out; he may hire an external consulting group to further strengthen relationships within DEAS and ties to FAS and other schools. “But I’ll be careful,” he says. “We need to be relatively lean...so that people have access to the people who are making the decisions, and I am always accountable to the faculty whom I serve.”

Harvard Magazine 65

Reprinted from Harvard Magazine. For more information, contact Harvard Magazine, Inc. at 617-495-5746.