After Nine Years at Helm, Dean Bickart Bids Farewell to MSU College of Engineering

When Theodore Bickart arrived at MSU’s College of Engineering in the fall of 1989, the “new” addition to the engineering building—the often-photographed south side that is home to four of the seven academic departments and the engineering library—had not yet been dedicated. Women comprised a respectable 22 percent of the undergraduate population (the present-day national average is 17 percent), yet only ten percent of the graduate students. Only one in ten undergraduate students belonged to an ethnic minority. And about a dozen students studied in Aachen, Germany that year, the college’s principal study-abroad opportunity.

Now, a 46,000-square-foot addition that includes the Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Institute for Materials Research connects the Engineering Building to Anthony Hall. Nearly 25 percent of the undergraduate student body, and 18 percent of the graduate students, are women. One out of every five undergraduate students belongs to an ethnic minority. And 64 students—over five times that of nine years ago, and nearly double last year’s count—took part in a semester’s study in Belgium, China, Costa Rica, Germany, Mexico, Russia, the Netherlands, Taiwan, and Norway.

As Bickart takes his leave to become the 18th president of the Colorado School of Mines in Golden, Colorado, he does so with a feeling of great accomplishment for the college. Over his tenure at MSU, Bickart, a visionary with a wry wit and gentle demeanor, has fostered a host of programs that have positioned MSU’s College of Engineering superbly for the decades ahead.

It does not take a newcomer long to figure out where Bickart’s priorities lie. He believes in providing students with the best, most comprehensive engineering education possible, not simply preparing them for the jobs that are out there now, but for the ones that are yet to be created. He believes in fostering an environment where students of all ethnic backgrounds work together with appreciation and respect. He believes that a student can grow immeasurably when he or she lives and studies in another country. He believes that alumni and industry have a lot to add to the educational process. He believes in a strong and diverse faculty who have access to top-notch resources for teaching and research.

“Ted has empathy for and understanding of the individual, which sets him apart as a very humane and nurturing administrator,” says Daina Briedis, associate professor of chemical engineering. “He has been proactive in establishing an environment in which women—really, all faculty—may succeed, both personally and professionally.” Since Bickart became dean, the college has enjoyed boundless success in the areas of research, teaching, and outreach. With his guidance, research activities have been focused in six areas, promoting the cross-disciplinary collaboration of faculty in materials, environment and energy, information and computation, transportation and automotive, biotechnology, and manufacturing and processing. Research expenditures for the college have nearly doubled from the $13 million in external support received in 1989 to the nearly $25 million received in 1997. The college has become a model program in the country for the new objective- and outcome-based accreditation procedures of the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET). Also, the college’s technology transfer office facilitates the licensing and start-up of new technologies, streamlining the process for technological innovations to move from the laboratory into industry.

Other programs that have evolved under his leadership include the college’s newly restructured Diversity Programs Office, which, through its Guided Learning Center, provides supplemental instruction to all engineering students who request assistance; the increasingly popular Cooperative Engineering Education Program, which enables students to gain industry experience as they pursue their undergraduate degree; and the Institute for Global Engineering Education, a new program that is continuously expanding opportunities for students to study for a semester at universities throughout the world.

“For his extraordinary foresight and sensitivity to the issues that impact engineering, the global profession, we thank him and wish him well.”

Dean Bickart and his wife Frani, a sociologist and educational program coordinator for the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research at Michigan State, will be moving from East Lansing later this summer. Bickart is scheduled to begin his post at Colorado School of Mines on August 1, 1998.