

Council affirms support for additional education requirements

Although it passed as a motion last year, the bachelor's plus 30 requirement remained a hot topic of discussion at the 86th Annual Meeting in Philadelphia.

The requirement, which as written will go into effect in 2015, calls for undergraduate engineering students to complete 30 additional academic credits beyond the bachelor's degree in order to qualify for professional licensure. For many throughout the profession, it represents a step to address concerns that undergraduate engineering programs have grown less stringent in their graduation requirements, particularly in the areas of math, applied science, and engineering design.

The bachelor's plus 30 has its roots in a process that began earlier this decade with the Engineering Licensure Qualifications Task Force and the Licensure Qualifications Oversight Group. The conclusions of these groups, along with the simultaneous publication of white papers by the National Academy of Engineering and American Society of Civil Engineers, led to the passage of the bachelor's plus 30 as a motion from the Committee on Uniform Procedures and Legislative Guidelines in 2006 (see the April 2007 *Licensure Exchange* for more detailed information).

At this year's meeting, delegates had ample opportunity to discuss issues related to the implementation of the requirement. Wednesday featured a workshop devoted to updating delegates on the Council's activities related to the requirement. On Thursday, the topic was discussed in forums for engineers and Member Board administrators.

Throughout the week, some delegates expressed concerns regarding potential logistical and legal difficulties resulting from the implementation of the requirement. Kathy Gustin-Williams, P.E., of Maine gave a presentation in both forums that showed statistics indicating that many recent applicants in Maine would not qualify for licensure under the bachelor's plus 30. Some said the Council was better served by addressing the decline of required academic credits through ABET, the accreditation agency for engineering programs.

Proponents of the bachelor's plus 30 requirement encouraged debate on the issue as a means to gaining a consensus in moving

forward with implementation. "Our goal was to gather as much input as possible from the Member Boards," said Skip Harclerode, P.E., the 2006–07 UPLG chair.

"There were concerns that implementing it could be an administrative nightmare for the boards," he added.

Harclerode said the Council's challenge will be to work out the details of the bachelor's plus 30 requirement, particularly with regard to acceptability of courses and providers. "We need to give the Member Boards something they can implement," he said.

During the forums, Monte Phillips, Ph.D., P.E., of North Dakota pointed to the 2015 implementation date, saying it provided sufficient time for the Council to work out the details of the requirement, including developing standards for identifying acceptable coursework to fulfill the requirement. Past President Jon Nelson, P.E., of Oklahoma expressed a desire to send a message to the profession that NCEES is serious about strengthening the educational requirements for engineering licensure.

During Friday's final business session, delegates voted on a floor motion that proposed removing the bachelor's plus 30 requirement from the NCEES *Model Law*. After a lengthy debate, the motion to repeal the bachelor's plus 30 was defeated by a larger margin than the previous year's margin in favor of adopting the requirement.

"I saw the vote as a signal that more people are saying it is important to raise the bar," said Harclerode.

According to NCEES Executive Director Jerry Carter, Council leadership has decided to create a new task force devoted exclusively to working out the issues cited by Member Boards as potential barriers to implementing the bachelor's plus 30. Carter added that the charges and leadership for the 2007–08 Bachelor's Plus 30 Task Force are currently being finalized under the supervision of President Gene Corley.

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Editor

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