

AUCC "cannot endorse" joint accreditation board proposal

by Sharon Van Ihinger

Disagreement by stakeholders means no joint engineering/computer science accreditation board for undergraduate software engineering programs at Canadian universities. At least that's the way it stands for now, until the engineering and the computer science communities can agree on their draft accreditation criteria and procedures for a proposed joint Software Engineering Accreditation Board (SEAB).

The board of directors of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) has responded officially to the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers (CCPE) that it cannot endorse the proposed accreditation criteria and procedures as modified by the Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board (CEAB) and endorsed by the CCPE board. The creation of a "single entity [joint board] with full rights and responsibilities for providing accreditation for software engineering programs," had been proposed by a joint engineering/computer science Software Engineering Panel as the basis

for a long-term solution to the dispute over the use of the term "software engineer" in the titles of undergraduate university programs.

In its response to the CCPE, the AUCC said that the computer science community was not consulted about revisions made by the engineering community to the draft SEAB accreditation criteria and procedures, and had made clear that a broad consensus was an essential pre-condition for possible recommendations leading to an agreement of the draft. "If at some future point, the engineering and computer science communities reach agreement in a spirit of genuine cooperation on a voluntary joint accreditation process that is widely accepted in both communities, the AUCC Board is prepared to re-visit the issue," the AUCC letter concluded.

Writing to its board and constituent associations, CCPE president Pierre Boucher, ing., noted that the engineering profession had spent hours and used its best efforts to reach a consensus on the technical and operational basis of a potential agreement with the AUCC. Although no agreement was reached, he said: "We

can be proud of our achievement. Through the efforts and time put into this process we have, I believe, unified the profession on a very important issue." By clearly stating the importance of maintaining high standards in engineering programs, he continued, "we have identified the changes possible as well as those that were not." Boucher said representatives from the engineering profession would be willing to start discussions again should the computer science community also be willing to do so.

Gordon McCalla, president, Canadian Association of Computer Science/ Association Informatique Canadienne (CACS/AIC), says that the failure to reach consensus among AUCC, CACS/AIC and the engineering profession on the current draft accreditation criteria and procedures shows, "there needs to be a much better mutual understanding of bottom-line issues on all sides." CACS/AIC opposed the draft accreditation criteria and procedures when it was asked for its response by AUCC. Although McCalla says he is willing to continue to engage in discussions about the joint accreditation issue, he will wait until the various groups directly involved can take stock to see what is next.

George Comrie, P.Eng., chair, Ontario Software Engineering Task Force (OSWET), says the task force would prefer to see CEAB accredit software engineering programs as it does existing engineering disciplines, but include non-P.Eng. specific scientific experts on the accreditation teams. OSWET believes the experts would play an important role in gathering data as visiting team members, for CEAB to analyze in making accreditation decisions (for a look at the CEAB accreditation process, see Formation, pp. 29-31). CEAB accredited the first three software engineering programs in engineering faculties at Ontario universities this past June (see "CEAB accredits first software programs," *Engineering Dimensions*, July/August 2001, pp. 8-9). It is anticipated that several more software engineering programs in Canadian engineering faculties will seek CEAB accreditation in the next three years.

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