

BING CHEN TESTIMONY TO THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA BOARD OF REGENTS ON 1-24-2014

Good morning. I want to provide the Board of Regents with additional information to guide decisions facing you regarding the Peter Kiewit Institute and the UNL administration's intention to merge the last free standing Omaha engineering department and to request that you separate the issue of the CEEN merger from the Peter Kiewit restructuring. The questions I would like to explore with you today are:

1. Will the diversity of engineering programs delivered by NU be enhanced by CEEN's merger into EE or not?
2. Has the cancellation of departments and programs been proven successful in meeting Nebraska's engineering industry needs?; and
3. What is the real underlying cause for the restructuring of the PKI?

Diversity is a precious attribute to have particularly in a university of a state such as Nebraska. Not all engineering programs are identical. This is why California has multiple modes of delivering engineering education. Like the California Polytechnics, the 1960's era UNO Engineering was industry oriented. The 1972 forced merger UNO's College of Engineering into UNL, the 1981 elimination of all engineering departments including Civil Engineering, and the 2003 elimination of the Industrial Systems programs in Omaha indicate a profound shift away from diversity into a single minded UNL research focus.

A recent NPR program decried the lack of engineers for manufacturing in this country. An Omaha World Herald article on January 2nd quoted a survey of 400 Nebraska business owners. One of them, Nebraska Chamber of Commerce's Richard Baier, claimed that there was a lack of skilled labor in manufacturing across the state of Nebraska. UNL administrators eliminated Industrial Systems in 2003 and then Industrial Engineering in 2009. Had there been two schools of engineering within Nebraska, manufacturing engineering would still exist. Instead, the state of Iowa is well positioned to take advantage of our lapse in judgment.

Promises that programs in CEEN will not be affected after a proposed merger into Electrical Engineering occurs begs the question. Ultimately CEEN will look more like EE. New CEEN faculty will be obliged to follow the Big Ten research one model or risk their own professional futures. A 2009 UNL Academic Planning Review study of the Civil engineering department headquartered in Lincoln concluded the two-campus operation has not worked well and recommended compaction onto a single campus (which of course would be Lincoln). Should you approve the merger of CEEN into EE wouldn't we be repeating the CE failure?

I have attached a letter from Andrew Langford, a lead engineer from Kansas City's Garmin International. In contrasting his own traditional EE degree from the University of Missouri with CEEN graduates, he states, *"The foundation provided by the CEEN program is top-notch. I sit on a board at the University of Missouri where I provide feedback about their undergraduate curriculum and generally my feedback is along the lines of, "do whatever the CEEN program does." I'd hate to see the CEEN program move more towards the curriculum I went through instead of other colleges following your example."*

Finally, I have included the observations of two former NU leaders for you to consider: Ronald Roskens and Del Weber. Their March 2013 Op Ed piece in the World Herald stated, *“The Engineering Education in Nebraska study (the Langenberg report), defined the process for a long-term plan designed to eventually create an independent College of Engineering in Omaha.”* Their recommendation was that *“the Board of Regents, at the very least, should commit itself to an audit of UNL’s stewardship with which it has been charged over the past four decades.”*

The PKI restructuring is a smokescreen for the real issue: the right of Omaha to choose and control its own technical destiny. You, as the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska, have a golden opportunity to set things right or to risk having this issue of Lincoln controlling Omaha's destiny simmer indefinitely before it explodes again in the future. I ask you to set aside the merger of CEEN into EE as not being germane to the PKI restructuring because it has not been presented to or approved by the UNL Academic Planning Committee and second, another possible alignment of merging CEEN with PKI’s IS&T group would be better suited to making PKI the success we all wish it to be and frankly makes more sense if improving PKI is the real goal.