



New Global Program

To Send Engineering Junior Classes Abroad



Every year, approximately only 1 percent of U.S.-born college students—and only 5,000 engineering students—go abroad. Lester Gerhardt has spent the last decade trying to change that. Now, under the leadership of Alan Cramb, his efforts are taking on a whole new dimension.

“We wish the engineering graduate of the future to understand the global nature of engineering and to be successful in the international workplace,” said Cramb (right), the dean of Rensselaer’s School of Engineering, who has made international education a top priority in his first year. “It is our view that our graduates must have a significant international experience during their undergraduate years to prepare them for life after graduation.”



Over the next several years, Cramb, Gerhardt, and colleagues will introduce a new international program at Rensselaer, whereby engineering juniors will spend at least one semester at a partner school overseas. In exchange, students from the partner schools will come to study at Rensselaer.

The program will begin with the incoming class of 2010 and progress in phases. Initial targets call for 25 percent of those students to go abroad under the program during their junior year (the 2008-2009 academic year). Later phases will increase that percentage until every Rensselaer undergraduate engineering student has the opportunity to study outside the United States during the junior year.

Such a program, of course, requires a network of partner schools, and Gerhardt has already reached verbal agreement with the Technical University of Denmark and Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, both universities that have hosted Rensselaer students in the past. Because students will go in groups of approximately 50, more partners will be required as the program grows, and some 12-15 partner universities are anticipated.

“To maintain quality and flexibility, we seek several desirable characteristics in

our partners,” explained Gerhardt, the associate dean of engineering at Rensselaer. “They must teach in English, already have a large international program base, be located in a safe, attractive location, and offer a broad range of engineering disciplines. We believe students from such schools would fit in very well at Rensselaer, and vice versa.”

The program represents a quantum leap forward from the successful Global Engineering Education Exchange (Global E³). Through this voluntary program, students can study abroad for one or two semesters at top technological universities in 17 countries, with the option for an internship. Now with more than 100 universities worldwide, Global E³ counts Rensselaer among its seven founders; Gerhardt himself served as a founding member and president of the U.S. Global E³ contingent.

“Talk to anyone who has had an educational experience abroad, and words like life-changing come up over and over again,” Gerhardt said. “By starting this program, Rensselaer is taking the initiative to change the lives of all its students, ensuring that they are well prepared for success in the global market—and thereby changing the world.”

© Travel photos by Comstock

“Talk to anyone who has had an educational experience abroad, and words like life-changing come up over and over again...”

—Lester Gerhardt, associate dean of engineering at Rensselaer



Every year, approximately 1 percent of U.S.-born college students—and only 5,000 engineering students—go abroad.



Groups of approximately 50 Rensselaer engineers will attend such world-renowned institutions as the Technical University of Denmark and Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. Some 12-15 partner universities are anticipated.



“To maintain quality and flexibility, we seek several desirable characteristics in our partners,” explained Gerhardt (right), the associate dean of engineering at Rensselaer. “They must teach in English, already have a large international program base, be located in a safe, attractive location, and offer a broad range of engineering disciplines.

