

Objection to NOI for closure of GeoE MS Program submitted via email to Dr. Howard Peavy, Associate Dean, College of Engineering, February 5, 2009:

After reviewing the CoE Curriculum Committee report of Feb. 5, 2009, I submit this email as a formal objection to the approved NOI for termination of the GeoE MS Program. Termination of the GeoE MS program will not result in any cost savings to the CE Department or to the College of Engineering, but instead will result in a loss of graduate student enrollments in CE Department courses and in graduate programs, will be counterproductive, and will produce a net negative economic impact on the Department and College.

The GeoE MS program is offered effectively by two faculty members (Miller and Jung) assigned part-time to the program, relying on support courses routinely taught by other CE faculty. During 2008-09, the GeoE MS program will have six graduates, one of whom intends to pursue a Ph.D. degree in the CE Department. GeoE faculty worked on four externally funded research projects in 2007-09, three of which were initiated directly by GeoE faculty in GeoE research areas (including those supported by the Idaho Transportation Department and the Environmental Monitoring Section at the Idaho National Laboratory).

It has taken several years to re-build this MS program after its closure was announced as part of the University's plan to close the College of Mines and Earth Resources in 2003. The Idaho State Board of Education voted in June, 2003, to retain the GeoE MS program at UI, along with authorizing an undergraduate Minor in Geological Engineering offered through the CE Department. However, because of the previously announced closure intent, effectively we were not able to recruit any new graduate students to begin their MS GeoE coursework during 2002-2004; this explains the low graduation numbers in the GeoE MS program in 2005-2007.

Geological engineers deal with rock, soil, and ground water, and pursue careers in many diverse fields that include the mining and petroleum industries, infrastructure construction, waste disposal, clean energy sources such as geothermal options, environmental protection and restoration, mitigation of geologic hazards like landslides and earthquakes, and ground water monitoring and protection. Geological engineering is an engineering profession distinct from civil engineering and mining engineering, and which is licensed professionally as a particular branch of engineering in at least four states, including Idaho. Our GeoE MS program provides an efficient path for geologists to obtain an engineering degree for enhanced career opportunities, and many of our Engineering Outreach students have used this track to help expand their careers and become licensed as professional engineers. All our GeoE MS students have enrolled specifically at the UI to pursue this GeoE MS degree, graduate students that would have gone elsewhere if our College of Engineering did not offer this MS degree. These students add enrollment numbers to related CE courses, especially the graduate geotechnical courses.

In summary, the GeoE MS program generates graduate enrollment numbers and externally funded research projects, and it maintains important professional connections to Idaho's construction, environmental, and mining sectors. Plans underway to consolidate some GeoE and CE courses will further improve the efficiency of this program and its faculty. This program clearly is aligned with University priority areas in water resources, public infrastructure, and environmental restoration/protection. There are no discernible cost-savings to the College with the elimination of this MS program, which instead will result in a loss in graduate student enrollment numbers and an irrevocable loss in regard to University connections to some of Idaho's major industries and operations (including the Idaho National Lab).

Therefore, I respectfully request that the College of Engineering re-consider its position on this NOI.

Thank you, ... Stan Miller

S. M. Miller, Ph.D., P.E.
Professor of Geol. Engineering
Department of Civil Engineering