



PennState

AGRICULTURAL AND BIOLOGICAL ENGINEERING

Department Head Update

Paul Heinemann, Head of the Department
March, 2017

Dear Alums and Friends of the ABE department:

Spring break 2017 has wrapped up, and although we had one of the warmest Februaries ever, mid-March is looking like Winter again. This has not slowed down the department though, as we approach the midway point in our temporary space. This past six months has seen the department progress in ways we've never seen before.

Building project

The Winter weather has been very cooperative this year. Several milestones have been reached, including demolition completed and foundations being laid. At the end of February, the steel structure began to take shape. The inside of the original building has been completely gutted and new stud walls began to appear in early March, giving us an early sense of how this will all look when we move back in December.



Please check out our [building project website](#) for updates, as well as space naming opportunities.

Retirements

We will have five long-serving department members retiring this year, including three staff and two faculty. Dorcas Holt, administrative assistant, will end her service on April 4. Davis Hill, senior extension associate, and Barbara Hill, administrative support assistant, both working on the Ag Safety & Health program, will retire June 30. Robin Brandt, senior lecturer, and Dennis Murphy, Nationwide Insurance Professor of Agricultural Safety and Health, will be retiring on June 30. We will definitely miss all of these folks and the many contributions they made to our department and the university. By the way, Dennis Murphy is by far the person with the most seniority in our department, leaving us after 41 years on the faculty.

New faculty and staff

We are very pleased to be bringing a new faculty member into the department. Deaun "Dana" Choi, who is completing her doctoral work at the University of Florida, will begin her assistant professor appointment in August. She will be working in the area of

mechatronics. An offer will also be extended for the second joint hire with Civil and Environmental Engineering (position based in CEE). Hopefully I will be able to write about that person next time.

We have been able to replace the position opened by Dorcas Holt's retirement, and Amy Miller will join us late in March. Amy has been working with University Development.

Faculty searches underway

We are fortunate that we have been able to advertise for a replacement for Dennis Murphy's position (although we could never replace Dennis). That search just began, and we hope to wrap it up over the next two months. We also have approval to move forward with a tenure-track mechanization agricultural engineer who will be located at the Fruit Research and Extension Center in Biglerville, PA, but whose tenure home will be ABE.

Student enrollments continue to grow

Our undergraduate numbers in both Biological Engineering and BioRenewable Systems continue to be very healthy. We have been experiencing class sizes of 50-60 BE students and 30 BRS students in the past couple of years. This stretches our resources, especially in our temporary space, but we are very pleased that the new facilities will be able to accommodate our class labs much better than in the old space. And while our graduate student numbers dipped this past year (to 26), we have one of the biggest incoming classes of grad students that any of us can remember. At this time, we have many offers out so it is a bit early to tell, but we could see close to a 50% increase!

Other highlights

Several students and alums have been highlighted in news articles at Penn State.



[BE Graduate Swetha Pillai: Helping improve operations at Anheuser-Busch](#)



[Biological engineering senior turns manufacturing internship into full-time job](#)



[2016 Ag Sciences Outstanding Alumni](#)



[BE student, Tyrel Kling, uses farm know-how to excel at Penn State, beyond](#)

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