

Personal Statement as Candidate for President of EECS GSA

Stephen M. Hou*

March 15, 2005

It is with honor and enthusiasm that I accept the nomination for the office of President of the EECS Graduate Students Association. I have been active within the organization since its inception in 2004 as part of the Founders Group and served as Secretary for the current 2004-2005 term of office. During the past year, we trailblazed various activities and institutions for graduate students in our department. I would like to continue to participate in the evolution of the GSA and to solidify its presence in the lives of our fellow students.

I have been involved with the MIT EECS department for several years. As an undergraduate, I was an Editor-in-Chief of the Underground Guide to Course VI, which publishes reviews for all subjects offered by our department. This position gave me the opportunity to speak with many students, teaching assistants, and faculty about their experiences and views about EECS education. When I later became a TA, I was able to incorporate the advice I had been given to dedicate myself to making sure our department's education goals were being achieved. My interest in education led me to be appointed as the graduate student member of the EECS Education Committee. This experience helped me to appreciate better the dynamic nature of engineering education and how our department copes with changing trends. I believe my background in MIT EECS would be useful to leading GSA in its endeavors to cultivate our working relationship with the department.

Since 2003, I have served as one of the EECS representatives to the Graduate Student Council (GSC). Meeting other active students around MIT through the GSC enabled me to pass on Institute-level information onto the GSA. I firmly support the GSC's drive in the past year to connect with departmental student groups. Building a closer relationship between the GSC and the EECS GSA can only help our two organizations better serve our respective constituents.

The primary goals of the EECS GSA are to promote the social, professional and academic development of its members; to encourage a sense of common identity; to foster communication within the department; and to facilitate outreach to the community at large. In the past year, the GSA made strong progress in achieving each of these, and I will strive to continue that work. I helped organize the Rights and Responsibilities in Research discussions hosted by Prof. Tayo Akinwande and the TA Workshop, which student participants praised for helping them understand some aspects of being a graduate student in EECS. In conjunction with the new Academic and Social Chairs, I hope to sponsor events that support students at various stages in their graduate career, from passing qualifying exams to deciding what to do after MIT. Collaboration is a hallmark of the MIT experience, and I feel that this concept can extend to students helping each other be successful in life as well as in research.

One of the biggest challenges facing EECS graduate students today is the perceived division between students on the electrical engineering side and those on the computer science side. A top priority of my tenure would be to bridge this gap and to build a sense of community for all students in our department. To achieve this mission, our outreach to students must begin from the day new graduate students arrive on campus. I hope to work with the new GSA Executive Committee and the organizers of the GSC Orientation to run activities that enable students in our department, both new and old, to build relationships outside of their research groups and classes. Encouraging the formation of such contacts early on would strength unity within our department.

*shou@mit.edu

Coupled with the fragmentation of EECS graduate students among the various labs is the lack of communication within our department. Over the past year, the GSA sought to address this issue by encouraging students to share their thoughts about the department and by calling special meetings for students, for example, to speak with our department head, Prof. Raphael Reif, and to gather information for the newly inaugurated MIT President Susan Hockfield. In my term as GSA Secretary, I kept the mailing lists and website up to date with the latest about our group. I believe in maintaining the GSA's high standard of transparency, and I would encourage the rest of the Executive Committee to achieve this. One of my goals as GSA president would be to provide forums where our students can share information about anything that arises in our department. GSA has reached the point in our development where we can hold regular general body meetings for this purpose. Such meetings should also serve as a feedback mechanism for GSA to evaluate itself and to respond effectively to the sentiments of our members. However, there is still much to do in order for this to become an integral feature of EECS. Finally, the Executive Committee should make a conscious effort to ensure that any EECS student who is motivated to contribute to our community through GSA is easily able to do so and feels free to take part in the decision-making process.

This past year was unprecedented in the level of collaboration between all EECS student groups: Eta Kappa Nu (HKN), IEEE/ACM, and the Graduate Women in Course VI (GW6). Active members of all these groups jointly organized several events. I would like to spearhead an effort to further bring these groups closer together while at the same time respecting each group's individuality and service to its members. I believe that regular communication between the groups can help us give feedback to each other and stimulate creativity among the groups' leaders to improve our outreach to the EECS community as a whole.

I am grateful for the opportunities in our department and around MIT for us to develop as professionals and as people. I welcome your support of EECS GSA and my candidacy to expand these opportunities for students in our department. I invite all members of the EECS graduate community to get in touch with me to talk about how we can make EECS a better place. I look forward to meeting you at the election and to making a difference next year.

Sincerely,

Stephen M. Hou