



The Value of Interpersonal Skills Training in Engineering Education: An Interactive Panel Discussion with the Tau Beta Pi Engineering Futures Program

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Katy Luchini-Colbry is the Director for Graduate Initiatives at the College of Engineering at Michigan State University, where she completed degrees in political theory and computer science. A recipient of a NSF Graduate Research Fellowship, she earned Ph.D. and M.S.E. in computer science and engineering from the University of Michigan. She has published more than two dozen peer-reviewed works related to her interests in educational technology and enhancing undergraduate education through hands-on learning. Luchini-Colbry is also the Director of the Engineering Futures Program of Tau Beta Pi, the Engineering Honor Society, which provides interactive seminars on interpersonal communications and problem solving skills for engineering students across the U.S.

A note to the reviewers:

The abstract below proposes an interactive panel discussion. We do not intend to submit an accompanying paper for publication in the conference proceedings. However, the ASEE conference submission system requires that a “draft” document be uploaded in order to move forward in the review process. On the advice of the LEES program chairperson for 2016, I am re-submitting the abstract (below) along with this explanatory note.

**The Value of Interpersonal Skills Training in Engineering Education:
An Interactive Panel Discussion with the Tau Beta Pi Engineering Futures Program**

For more than two decades, the Engineering Futures Program of Tau Beta Pi (the Engineering Honor Society) has provided engineering students with training in the “soft skills” necessary for success in the workplace. Engineering Futures (EF) seminars cover interpersonal communications skills; team building and management techniques; creative problem solving; and effective presentation skills. The EF program won the 2007 Excellence in Engineering Education Collaboration Award from ASEE, and is offered free of charge to students across the country by a network of volunteer facilitators.

This interactive panel discussion will feature the Director of the Engineering Futures program, Dr. Katy Luchini Colbry (Michigan State University), and several experienced EF Facilitators, including Dr. Matthew Ohland (Purdue University) and J.P. Blackford (George Washington University). The panel will provide a brief introduction to the EF curriculum and offer specific information for faculty or employers who are interested in integrating communications and “soft skills” training into their own organizations. The goal of this interactive session is for participants to leave with some specific tools that they can use with their own students or employees to improve communications and problem-solving skills within engineering education and practice.

A note for the reviewers: we want to be very clear that we are not selling anything – Tau Beta Pi offers the EF program free of charge to students. The intent of the proposed panel is to provide a unique, interactive session where participants can learn and share information about the “soft skills” that are so essential for professional success, yet are not always taught in traditional engineering curricula. While we do hope to raise awareness of the existence of the EF program, this proposal is for a stand-alone activity that will give participants practical information they can implement in their own classrooms or offices.