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COE, Mechanical and Aerospace

Eminent Aerospace Engineering Professor Joins College as Chair of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering Department

Victoria Coverstone joined the College of Engineering (CoE) as the new chair of the Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering (MAE) on Aug. 1. The first woman to chair any department in the College, Coverstone takes over from Weiyong Gu, who will continue to teach and conduct research as a full-time professor in the MAE department.

Coverstone has more than 20 years of experience as an engineering educator, student advisor, researcher and administrator. She has led faculty groups in various capacities, worked with top university administrators and been involved with all aspects of staff development – from creating new positions to setting salaries. She has advised nearly 50 master’s and PhD students in their graduate thesis research. In addition, Coverstone has worked with industry as an academic and co-founded a small aerospace company, CU Aerospace, which identifies and commercially develops novel aerospace technologies.

“As chair of the Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, I look forward to making an impact on the College of Engineering and the field of engineering,” Coverstone says. “I’m passionately committed to students, research and teaching in the field. This is an energizing opportunity.”

Jean-Pierre Bardet, dean of the College of Engineering, notes that Coverstone will chair a department that includes 13 faculty members, more than 35 PhD and master’s students, and more than 220 undergraduate students majoring in mechanical and aerospace engineering. “We look forward to the new ideas, innovative educational methods and research expertise that Dr. Coverstone will bring to the College,” he says. “And thank you to Dr. Gu for his six years of service as chair of the Department of Mechanical and Aerospace engineering.”

Coverstone was a professor of aerospace engineering at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for 20 years, including two years as associate head of aerospace engineering. She also was the associate dean for graduate and professional programs at University of Illinois. During her time there, she developed several graduate courses – including cross-disciplinary research courses. Undergraduate students under her supervision won the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics space design project competition six times.

Immediately prior to joining the CoE, Coverstone was associate dean for undergraduate studies and a professor in the Department of Mechanical Engineering at the Whitacre College of Engineering at Texas Tech University (TTU) in Lubbock, Texas. She also led Whitacre’s Engineering Opportunities Center, which handles recruitment, retention, placement and academic support services for students.

Coverstone also has experience working across institutions. In June, she led an international group of students from three universities (TTU, RMIT University of Australia and KAIST of Korea), which won the NASA Revolutionary Aerospace Systems Concepts Academic Linkage (RASC-AL) competition in the area of Logistic Delivery System. She is also a former chair of the Council of Institutions of the Universities Space Research Association – a federally funded nonprofit that advances space-related science through collaboration with educational and other institutions.

“As educators, we have the opportunity to introduce new generations of engineers to the excitement of acquiring fundamental and practical knowledge,” Coverstone says. “We are able to give students the fundamental skillset required for successful engineering careers, while sparking within them a fire for lifelong learning. It’s an honor to help train the best and brightest.”

A fellow in the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, Coverstone was awarded NASA’s Summer Faculty Fellowship at the Marshall Space Flight Center for 2015. Her research interests include space mission analysis and design, optimization and low-thrust trajectory modeling for advanced propulsion concepts, such as solar sail, solar electric propulsion and nuclear electric propulsion.

Coverstone earned her Bachelor of Science, Master of Science and PhD in aeronautical and astronautical engineering from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She is also a senior member of the American Astronautical Society, and a member of the American Society for Engineering Education, The Planetary Society, Phi Kappa Phi academic honor society, Tau Beta Pi engineering honor society, The Order of the Engineer and the Illinois State Academy of Science.

Coverstone’s husband, Mark Krueger, also joined the College – as a part-time lecturer in the Department of Civil, Architectural and Environmental Engineering. Formerly a professor of finance at Texas Tech’s Rawls School of Business, he is associate director of commodity planning and procurement for Prairieland Energy, a Champaign, Illinois-based natural gas and electricity supplier. He earned his Bachelor of Arts and PhD in finance from the University of Illinois.

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