Report of Division Name Committee
ASEE Liberal Education Division
Gary Downey (Virginia Tech) and Hillary Hart (U Texas Austin)
June 18, 2010

At the LED business meeting during the ASEE conference in Austin, TX, in June 2009, members discussed again what has come up often during the past few years: numerous members have expressed concerns about the existing name, including confusion about it across the ASEE membership. As Vice-Chair at the 2009 meeting, Gary organized a discussion of issues involving the division's name and possible candidate alternatives. Members unanimously approved using an electronic process to deliberate a name change for the Liberal Education Division (per bylaws).

Gary Downey and Hillary Hart agreed to serve as the Division Name Committee, with responsibility to facilitate the process. The four candidate outcomes discussed at the June 2009 meeting and dinner were:

(1) Liberal Education Division (LED)
(2) Engineering and Society Division (ESD)
(3) Engineering in Context Division (ECD)
(4) Humanities and Social Sciences Division (HSSD)

Gary and Hillary asked for input from members on the 4 existing name-choices and on any possible new choices. Five members submitted responses to the April 15 email (these responses are appended to this report). Four were comments on the process and proposed names. The fifth proposed additional options. Per our procedures, we deliberated the recommendations and ultimately decided not to include those options on the additional ballot. The reasoning follows the recommendations (see appendix).

In April 2010, Brent Jesiek set up a survey tool at Purdue to conduct votes of the membership (thanks Brent Jesiek!). Per the LED by-laws, if two-thirds of those participating vote to rename the Division, the LED could make a request to ASEE (requiring Board approval).

Results of voting (two rounds)

Round 1 voting was completed by May 16. These were the results:

Liberal Education Division	16	29%
Engineering and Society Division	28	50%
Engineering in Context Division	3	5%
Humanities and Social Sciences Division	9	16%

Per our procedures, we dropped ECD and HSSD.

The final round had two options: Liberal Education Division and Engineering and Society Division. Voting was completed by May 31, 2010.

Final tally:

Engineering and Society Division   49 votes (63%)
Liberal Education Division   29 votes (37%)

Decision: LED remains LED (the 2/3 majority required to make a change was not met; 3 votes short).

Because a substantial majority of members advocates changing the Division's name and a substantial minority remains committed to the existing name, the ad hoc Name Committee recommends that members discuss this issue at the annual business meeting. Two possible courses of action include: (1) do nothing: the process is complete; (2) initiate consideration of a combined name, e.g., Liberal Education/Engineering and Society Division. There may be other options.

We offer to collect and share at that meeting any comments or suggestions members would like to convey. Please send to downeyg@vt.edu, hart@mail.utexas.edu.

We want to officially thank Brent Jesiek (Purdue U) for organizing the polling process.

Appendix: Comments by LED members before the name-change vote

Gary Downey (Virginia Tech)

My preference is Engineering and Society. Since the division is within ASEE, its focus is engineering education, by definition. The name Engineering and Society advertises to the ASEE membership that the division's work (a) is central to engineering learning; (b) highlights that engineers are people working with both engineers and non-engineers; (c) calls attention to the multiple normativities of engineering practice; (d) raises issues of engineering communication, language, literature, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, power, politics, culture, identity, responsibility, and, most generally, philosophy; and (e) emphasizes connectedness between the technical and non-technical dimensions of engineering learning and work.

The existing name formalizes marginality. It suggests the division brings engineering students to liberal education rather than contributes in crucial ways to their learning as engineers. It also suggests, unfortunately, that its work builds on a single political agenda, furthering marginality by undermining legitimacy.

The name Humanities and Social Sciences would also formalize marginality. Those labels mark academic units that fall outside of schools and colleges of engineering.

The name Engineering in Context tends to direct attention away from engineers and engineering. It suggests a primary focus on relations between engineers and non-engineers and, hence, does not emphasize the contents of engineering education and practice.

Joe Herkert (Arizona State)

I think there will be "transaction costs" in changing the name and these should be carefully evaluated. While a new name may recruit new members and attendees at our sessions, it might also confuse long-term ASEE members. Properly publicizing any name change will take significant coordination and effort.

Of the proposed alternatives, my preference is Engineering and Society. I think this places us within the realm of engineering, while having the breadth to encompass all of our interest areas. My one concern about this name would be possible confusion between us and the Engineering and Public Policy Division.

John Heywood (Trinity College Dublin)

I do not have comments in support but comments that presumably arise from the fact that I was unable to attend ASEE last year.

1. I do not really undertsand what is meant by engineering in context. I did contribute a commentary in an book called Engineering in Context that included several sections including ones on the engineer in society, engineering design and engineers, workplaces and institutions. This was pretty broad and in some respects this is to be applauded because it brings some of the fragments together. Is there a common understanding in the US about what engineering context means. If I am to vote I would need to see that context.

2. Is engineering and society intended to do the same kind of work as technology and society? If its focus is similar to that which I find in the IEEE journal on Technology and Society then that is something very different to liberal education.

How is it related to technological literacy? ASEE now has a committee in this area.

3. Humanities and Social Sciences Division. Is that meant to be an alternative to Liberal Education and to achieve the same goals? Where does ethics fit into this - also technological literacy? There is a division for ethics. Where conversations about the philosophy engineering fit? Should there be a committee for the philosophy of engineering or is philosophy of engineering part of engineering in context?

I will need to see some definitions if I am to vote for something other than the status quo.

Bruce Seely (Michigan Tech)

My initial reaction is to leave the name unchanged, but perhaps HSSD is a better description of who we are.

Cherrice Traver (Union College)

If I recall correctly, the idea of changing the name was to better define the focus of the division? And the problem with LED was that it did not convey that the group is interested in the relationship between engineering and liberal education?

So if I have this right, then I wonder if you want to consider "Engineering and Liberal Education Division" (ELED) or "Liberal and Engineering Education Division" (LEED)

The others seem to move us away from the focus on education.

Note: reasons for not including one or both of these as new categories in the voting:

The first is the issue of redundancy. Since our division is part of the American Society for Engineering Education, it is by definition dedicated to issues involving engineering education.

The second is the issue of marginality. Formalizing the "and" between "liberal" and "engineering" makes official the position that liberal education falls outside of engineering education. The desire to overcome marginality is what motivated the productive discussion at the 2009 meeting about changing the division's name. Our collective insistence is that the contributions of liberal education within engineering education should be both more prominent and more prominently recognized as such.