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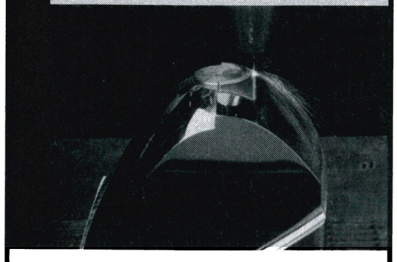

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halftime now, by my department, as well as to have good health and mobility). I surmise that a faculty elder doing one course can exhibit at least as much energy as a younger one doing three or four plus research (a normal load at Humboldt State University).

Unfortunately, under the present administration of the state university system, FERP has continued to degrade, with the allowable time in the program being relentlessly reduced from its original length of up to eight years. In a contract recently presented for a systemwide faculty vote, there was a provision to further reduce the number of years to four, three, and then two over the next three years. After the faculty refused to ratify the contract, the board of trustees made a unilateral decision: Effective immediately, new retirees will be allowed no more than two years in the program.

It is clear that the FERP type of retirement offers advantages to both faculty and students and should be restored to something close to its original form and be more widely adopted. It is also clear that this university system believes otherwise.

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Use of Engineering Options Could Aid and Abet Physics Majors

Your January story on the possible effects of the criteria for engineering education developed by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) (page 59) indicates that the physics community feels threatened. I suggest that one practical way to reduce that concern—and possibly increase undergraduate enrollments in physics—would be for university physics departments to start focusing harder on the potential of offering their students physics majors with engineering options.

The engineering options, such as an electrical engineering option, a mechanical engineering option, or a computer sciences option, would help equip physics majors to successfully go into engineering careers in industry or into graduate study. It should be easy to add such options (consider, for example, that the University of Virginia already offers a pre-med option for physics majors). What is more, some engineering courses, such as signal processing, should be part of the physics major curriculum because of their importance in many areas of physics. And knowledge of data mining has useful application in particle physics.

There's little question, I think, that the science and technology job market of the future will require individuals able to work in interdisciplinary fields. The physics major with an engineering option will be well qualified to succeed in that milieu.

In closing, I suggest that the term "engineering option" be used because it is likely to help get the applicant's résumé past the nontechnical human resources people. I also suggest that we stop worrying about ABET.

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Ex-*PRL* Editor Wonders Whether Solo Authors Are Still Singular

In discussing Robert Laughlin's work on the fractional Hall effect in the early 1980s (Physics Today, December 1998, page 17), Bert Schwarzschild refers in passing to "the *Physical Review Letters* aversion to the first person singular." There was no such aversion on the part of the journal during the 36 years that I was associated with it; in fact, we made it a practice to change the plural to the singular if there was only one author. Some authors objected to this—C. N. Yang, in particular, comes to mind—but most did not. Of course, many authors avoided the issue by using the passive voice. But for those who did not, the first person singular was not only acceptable but preferable. Has the custom changed, perhaps, since I left the staff in 1988?

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Corrections

March, page 15—José Marín Antuña's letter carried his old e-mail address instead of his current one, which is marin@ff.oc.uh.cu.

April, page 61—It was reported incorrectly that David Moncton has left Argonne National Laboratory; in fact, he was detailed from there to Oak Ridge National Laboratory to direct the building of the Spallation Neutron Source. ■