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SSU TO ADD COMPUTER DEGREE

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BYLINE: BOB NORBERG

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A new undergraduate **degree** in **computer** engineering, long sought by the North Bay technology industry, has been approved for Sonoma State University.

The new **degree** program will be closely aligned with the existing master's **degree** program, which was funded by \$8.5 million in donations of equipment and financial aid by the North Bay tech community.

SSU will be seeking another \$450,000 in donations from the high-tech community to support the undergraduate program.

“The establishment of the master's program helped us a great deal,” said Saeid Rahimi, dean of the School of Science and Technology. “Without it we could not have had this program approved.”

The news was welcome by Agilent Technologies, which sees **SSU** as a training ground for new engineers and as continuing education for technicians already working in the tech field.

“The introduction of a bachelor of science engineering program will provide many residents of Sonoma County the chance to further their education, and will ultimately benefit the tech industry of the North Bay,” said Agilent spokesman Jeff Weber.

Agilent was a major supporter of **SSU**'s science center, donating \$1 million in equipment, and Weber said he expects it will contribute to the new program as well.

Rahimi said raising the money will determine when the new undergraduate program will begin.

“Our need is \$450,000,” Rahimi said. “The program is in place. However, we would like to raise the money to admit students for fall 2005. The program will start. The question is when.”

The new **degree**, which has been on the drawing board for seven years, is a Bachelor of Science in Engineering.

It is specifically designed to provide education that bridges technology courses now offered by Sonoma County high schools and the junior college and **SSU's** existing masters program.

The undergraduate program will require two new instructors, at a cost of about \$170,000 annually, but otherwise utilize faculty that are already teaching in the university's master's program and adjunct faculty from high-tech companies.

It will also share the Cerent Engineering Science Center in the newly remodeled Salazar Hall.

The science center is equipped with about \$2.5 million in scientific equipment, including laser scanning and atomic force microscopes and telecommunications equipment.

The master's program, entering its fourth year, was created at the request of the tech industry.

The undergraduate **degree** program had been approved by the **SSU** Faculty Senate last August and by the California State University trustees in March. The final step came Friday when **SSU** President Ruben Arminana approved the creation program.

It could begin in September 2005 with 20 students, eventually growing to 160 students. With that many students, it would be among the larger majors on campus. The communications department has about 200 students and business about 300, officials said.

Both engineering **degree** programs will be part of a new Department of Science Engineering, chaired by Jagan Agrawal.

``The master's program has the basic infrastructure program, the labs and faculty," Agrawal said. ``We do plan to hire two new faculty for the program."

Agrawal said the new program also coincides with what he sees as an upturn in the tech industry and renewed demand for engineers.

``We are now receiving inquiries from local industries for graduating students," Agrawal said. ``They are looking for employees, which is a good sign. Within a couple of years there will be a significant turnaround."

You can reach Staff Writer Bob Norberg at 521-5206 or bnorberg@pressdemocrat.com.

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