Min H. Kao Building ready for occupants

After four and a half years of construction, the Min H. Kao Electrical Engineering and Computer Science Building is ready for occupants.

Located on the corner of Cumberland Avenue and Estabrook Road, the impressive $37.5 million structure boasts 150,000 square feet of offices, classrooms, laboratories, conference rooms and a 128-seat auditorium, not to mention a sixth-floor terrace with stunning views of downtown Knoxville.

The Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science’s business office was the first to move into the new building on Dec. 19. Other EECS staff and faculty offices in Ferris Hall and the Claxton Complex continued to move into the building during winter break.

The building will welcome its first students when classes resume for the spring semester on Jan. 11.

EECS’ move into the Min H. Kao Building signifies the physical merger of the department, which was formed from the computer science and electrical and computer engineering departments in 2007. Until now, the offices and classrooms for EECS have been split between Ferris Hall and the Claxton Complex.

Distinguished alumnus and donor Dr. Min Kao and his family will be in Knoxville on March 13-14 to mark the building’s grand opening.

The two-day celebration will include a cocktail reception on the terrace and a ribbon cutting in the building’s six-story atrium.

The ribbon cutting will be open to the public. Approximately 300 to 400 people are expected to attend the event.

For more information on the building, visit www.eecs.utk.edu/minkao.
After 22 years at the University of Tennessee, Dr. Paul Crilly is taking a one-year leave of absence to teach at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in New London, Conn.

Crilly, who earned his Ph.D. in electrical engineering from New Mexico State University in 1987, joined UT in 1989 as an assistant professor of electrical engineering.

In 1992, he received tenure and promotion to associate professor at UT. In 2002, he was given the task of serving as associate head of the former Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering. He served in that post until 2007, when the department was merged with computer science to form the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, or EECS.

Crilly has been a vital part of EECS. He not only has taught courses and conducted research in the areas of communications, digital signal processing and computer engineering, he also has handled undergraduate advising, helped manage the ABET accreditation process and has acquired funding for teaching and laboratories.

Crilly takes leave to teach at Coast Guard Academy

“It’s like beating your head against the wall trying to figure out the solution to a problem, and all the sudden it just clicks into place in your mind and it works,” Cox said.

“That sense of accomplishment when it works is really rewarding.”

Computer science professor Dr. James Plank served as the team’s faculty adviser:

“This year’s performance was far and away the best since I have been here, and I’m happy to see them getting acknowledged for it,” Plank said. “I’m hoping that the knowledge and experience that they have gotten from our programming courses were factors in their success, but that may just be selfish on my part.”

Plank said he was impressed with team captain Armstrong’s enthusiasm and dedication to preparing the team for success.

“I enjoyed teaching at UT, but I also enjoyed the many things that UT had to offer such as a diversity of academic and cultural programs,” Crilly said. “For example, I always enjoyed going to the MARCO series that described the various topics of the Middle Ages.”

In his new role, Crilly said he will be devoting his full attention to teaching and mentoring engineers. He’s also excited to have the opportunity to teach a wide range of courses.

“I will miss the students, especially the diversity of them. They come from all kinds of abilities and backgrounds,” he said.

Crilly began his work at the Coast Guard Academy on Jan. 3. He will return to UT next December.

ACM programming team places 2nd in competition

The University of Tennessee placed second at the Association for Computing Machinery’s 2011 Mid-Central USA Programming Contest held at Middle Tennessee State University on Nov. 5.

This is the highest ranking the university has received in this contest since it started competing more than a decade ago.

UT had two teams of three competing in the contest. Each team was given five hours to solve eight computer programming problems.

Computer science majors Chad Armstrong, Alexander Saites and Shawn Cox were part of the second-place team that was able to solve five problems in the allotted time. Vanderbilt University, the first-place team, solved only five problems as well, but beat UT on time.

Some of the problems from this year’s challenge were Grade School Multiplication, Pizza Pricing, Laser Tag and Refrigerator Magnets. However, don’t be fooled by the simple-sounding names — these problems range in difficulty from easy to nearly impossible.

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UT’s second team, composed of Michael Adams, Evan Downing and Daniel Baldwin, also computer science majors, placed 13th at the competition out of 23 teams.

Adams said he enjoys competing in the programming challenges because of the team work.

“When you put your ideas together you can create something completely new,” he said.

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First dual MSCS/MBA student graduates

On Dec. 8, Jeremy Cowan proudly walked across the commencement stage at Thompson-Boling Arena — twice. Once to receive his MBA degree, and again to receive his master’s in computer science.

Cowan is the first graduate of the dual MSCS/MBA offered through the University of Tennessee’s Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science.

When Cowan began looking for graduate programs to accommodate his interests in business and technology, UT stood out because of the unique pairing of these two degrees.

“I looked everywhere in the nation (at other schools), and no one else had this combination clearly defined,” Cowan said.

Prior to attending graduate school, Cowan, who holds a bachelor’s degree in computer science from Texas Tech University, worked for a grocery retailer in Lubbock, Texas, for 17 years. During his time with the retailer, Cowan worked in both management and the IT department.

“When I finished my undergrad degree I realized I enjoyed management and technology and wanted to manage technology,” Cowan said. “At that point in time I was like, ‘I need an MBA if I want to be a CIO to compete with others, because that’s what they’re going to have.’ “

During his time in UT’s computer science master’s program, Cowan focused his study on applications and databases. He worked closely with Dr. Michael Berry, EECS professor and associate department head.

“Jeremy was instrumental in helping me with the data mining class last spring, which had grad students from EECS and students from the College of Business Administration’s new M.S. program in business analytics,” Berry said. “He did a superb job assisting with the course projects involving Capital One and Link Analytics.”

Cowan said the computer science professors strike a good balance between teaching the theory behind computer science and its real-world applications.

“They give the students real-world understanding; it’s not just academic and something you’re going to throw out after graduation,” Cowan said.

Cowan said his computer science background was advantageous to his MBA coursework.

“On the MBA side, having a technologist and an engineering perspective is a great asset to help learn in the program and to learn from people who think differently than you do,” Cowan said.

Most students in a dual master’s-MBA program earn a general MBA degree, but Cowan completed additional course hours to earn a concentration in logistics and operations. In total, he took two and a half years to complete his degrees.

Cowan said that at times the coursework could be daunting, especially while he was working 20 to 30 hours a week. However, he said the end reward kept him going.

“It’s a long haul, but it’s worth it in the end,” Cowan said. “And if someone wants to manage technology and has a computer science background, this is a fantastic road to go.”

With his MSCS and MBA degrees in tow, Cowan has already received multiple job offers — two from Microsoft and several from local businesses.

“Jeremy will be our model graduate student for the MSCS/MBA degree for years to come,” Berry said. “His motivation and diligence in pursuit of the combined degree was truly amazing.”

Award recipients from the 2011 EECS annual Awards Banquet

Gonzalez Family Faculty Award for Research
Dr. Michael A. Langston

Gonzalez Family Staff Award
Dana L. Bryson

EECS Departmental Awards

Electrical Engineering
Outstanding Senior
Stephen Holland
Outstanding Junior
Aaron Pinto
Outstanding Sophomore
David Basford

Computer Engineering
Outstanding Senior
Taylor Morris
Michael Jugan
Outstanding Junior
Thomas Sydney Swearingen
Outstanding Sophomore
Karsten Solies

Computer Science
Outstanding Senior
David Prenshaw
Outstanding Junior
Chad Armstrong
Outstanding Sophomore
Reese Butler

Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant
Katie Schuman
Melika Roknsharif
Faculty

Mongi A. Abidi - Professor
Itamar Arel - Associate professor
David Banks - Associate professor
Micah Beck - Associate professor
Michael Berry - Assoc. dept. head & professor
J. Douglas Birdwell - Professor
Benjamin J. Blalock - Associate professor
Qing "Charles" Cao - Assistant professor
Paul B. Crilly - Associate professor
Judy Day - Assistant professor
Seddik M. Djouadi - Associate professor
Jack Dongarra - Univ. distinguished professor
Aly Fathy - Professor
Jens Gregor - Professor
Jeremy Holleman - Assistant professor
Jian Huang - Associate professor
Syed Islam - Professor
Michael A. Langston - Professor
Fangxing "Fran" Li - Associate professor
Husheng Li - Assistant professor
Yilu Liu - Governor's chair professor
Bruce MacLennan - Associate professor
Nicole McFarlane - Assistant professor
J. Wallace Mayo - Instructor
Lynne Parker - Assoc. dept. head & professor
Gregory Peterson - Associate professor
James Plank - Professor
Jesse Poore - Harlan D. Mills professor & director of UT/ORNL Science Alliance
Hairong Qi - Professor
Michael J. Roberts - Professor
Jinyuan "Stella" Sun - Assistant professor
Michael G. Thomason - Professor
Leon Tolbert - Min H. Kao professor
Kevin Tomsovic - Dept. head & CTI professor
Bradley Vander Zanden - Professor
Fei "Fred" Wang - Condra chair professor
Dr. Jayne Wu - Assistant professor

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