The Department of Mining Engineering of the University of Pretoria has gone through a major revamping exercise in terms of our teaching, research, and community service. The development of our students as future managers and technical specialists remains a priority, and the development of life skills and responsible leadership through participation in student activities is continuously encouraged.

The Department is already actively involved with the community through the participation of staff in the activities of professional societies, expert consultation, and community projects within the Faculty. The Department is also offering short courses, in co-operation with industry and the professional societies, but there is a huge potential for further development of such courses. The greatest involvement and contribution over the last few years was the Safety Risk Management Programme for Anglo American, recently being followed up with a Global Industry Risk Management (GIRM) Programme for Sasol Mining and with many more mining companies, I believe, to follow. Our students are very much aware of the challenges related to the mining industry and are educated and informed as such on a continuous basis.

The teaching staff is the prime resource of the Department. They are encouraged to improve their teaching and research skills, to be active in teaching in industry to remain current, and to contribute to departmental administration and community service. The participation of contracted-in industry experts as part-time lecturers forms a very important part of our education strategy. The involvement of several guest lecturers on an ongoing basis keeps us in touch with industry needs. The quest remains to develop each staff member into an internationally recognized engineer and scholar.

The Department of Mining Engineering of the University of Pretoria has gone through a major revamping exercise in terms of our professional image, which was well received by all in the Department and the industry as a whole. We have also embarked on a new innovative teaching and learning strategy for our third- and fourth-year students.

It was also in 2010 that all our final-year students, through sponsored support by the Department, started doing psychometric tests such as the Hermann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI), Shadow Match, DISC, and Myers Briggs evaluation as part of the process of understanding their own learning and thinking preferences. This is a major contribution to all our final-year students’ lives and we envisage that this will remain part and parcel of our curriculum. Mentorship and coaching now form a very large part of the fourth-year academic programme. The introduction of clickers (a radio frequency-based interactive answering tool) for students has also added a new dimension in terms of lecturers proactively knowing what students know or don’t know on a real-time basis.
Spotlight (continued)

The introduction of discussion rooms has created a real multimedia interactive academic environment for our students. We are also the only engineering department with an employee doing instructional design of all our mining lecture material on a full-time basis, sponsored annually by SACMA. The main goal is to have all the mining modules instructionally designed and ready for the ECSA accreditation visit in September 2012. We will be the only mining department in the world that I am aware of that will offer instructionally designed material for all our mining-related subjects, including non-technical skills (soft skills) as part and parcel of every mining module in the fourth year of studies. In this way we enhance the learning experience for all our students.

We upgraded our computer facilities and now have our own mining IT Lab for use by our students. We are one of only a few engineering departments that have an active bulk SMS system available to communicate with our students. We have one of the most active student societies, the Tuks Mining Society which has its own developed student website on campus.

I want to congratulate and thank all who have helped in developing this Department to the next level of academic excellence. We do, however, have some challenges which we are dealing with, but with the quality of staff that we now have on board, I believe we can take care of any challenge. Key issues in developing good-quality mining engineers are discipline (including time management guidelines), passion and enthusiasm for the discipline, and coachability. Primarily, we have to ensure that the standard (quality) of the programme that we offer is not compromised in any way. This is what Tuks Mining stands for! We owe it to our alumni and the future generation of mining engineers that will be educated in this Department.

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