

Resolution for the Retirement of Denis Fermental

May 19, 2010

Professor Fermental dedicated his academic career to teaching. He was awarded the Lillian & Joseph Liebner Award in 1977 and an Outstanding Faculty Award in 1997. In the Spring of 2009, he was invited by the senior class to give the “Last Lecture” and received the Seymour Simches award in the Fall of that year.

He entered Tufts as a freshman in 1951, a commuter of modest means like most engineering students of the time. He left to join the Army in 1953 with the aim of completing his education on the GI Bill. The Army sent him to the Signal School at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, and then transferred him to Ansbach, Germany, where he taught radar for two years. He returned to Tufts in 1956 and graduated in 1958.

Upon graduation, Professor Fermental joined the Electrical Engineering Department as an Instructor and Research Assistant assigned on a project led by Dr. Alvin Howell, the Department Chair. The project involved creating a balloon-borne telescope designed to obtain spectral data from the moon in preparation for the moon flights at the end of the 1960's. The effort, which continued until 1970, provided Fermental the opportunity to do independent design work.

In 1963, Fermental was promoted to Assistant Professor, and after receiving his Ph.D. degree from Northeastern, he became an Associate Professor in 1967. During the 60's and 70's, the department faculty never exceeded seven full-time members and Fermental was assigned a wide variety of teaching assignments. He introduced the department's first course in computer circuitry in 1961, and the first department course in microprocessors in 1979. The 1980 catalog lists him as being in charge of eight courses. Consolidation of course material and an increase in faculty size reduced the list considerably during the 80's.

Dr. Fermental's main research area is automatic control theory. Because of this interest, he became a consultant with the United Electric Controls Company, designing electronic temperature controllers. He consulted with the company from 1965 to 1989. The association, along with offering various design problems, gave him special insights into the methods of industrial design. He consulted with the C. S. Draper Laboratory from 1980 to 1999, spending his summers there from 1983 to 1999. This work, dedicated to the control of missile inertial measurement units, provided him with practical lessons in the application of control theory to complex systems. Professor Fermental became Department Chair in 1988 and served until 1996, one year after Electrical Engineering merged with Computer Science. In 2001, at the behest of Dr. Howell, he joined the board of Doble Engineering, an instrumentation company for the power industry, serving until 2006.

After 59 years on the Tufts campus, 48 of them as a Professor of Electrical Engineering, he is not quite sure what he will do in retirement, but is satisfied his wife will think of something.