Comments by the Engineering Policy Committee on the Initial Report of the Computing Science Task Force, 
Associated Actions and Discussions, October 7, 1999

We find the Initial Report contains important and timely ideas that can help integrate computing and information science in teaching and research across the campus. We agree with Dean Cooke's written response, which makes a convincing case for a broadly distributed initiative that promotes faculty linkages without centralizing responsibility and control primarily in a single academic department. The proposed Faculty of Computing and Information (FCI) could help address the challenges faced by Cornell in this area. However, we believe that for the FCI to be fully effective, the following will be required:

First, the basis for FCI membership should be a commitment to the goals and activities of the FCI. Computer Science faculty members should be considered for FCI membership on the same basis as every other interested faculty member in the University, including new hires. The creation, or even the appearance, of any membership hierarchy will be counterproductive in an organization whose stated purpose is to promote computing and information science skills, capabilities, and knowledge throughout the entire University.

Second, a broad-based ad-hoc task force should be established, under the leadership of the Dean for Computing and Information Science, to establish goals and an administrative structure for the FCI. The task force should enunciate criteria for the choice of pedagogical thrust areas. Specific goals should be articulated clearly to all in the next few months, and these goals should form the basis for future evaluation. They should include progress towards implementation and use of computing and information science tools, knowledge, and skills throughout Cornell. In the longer term, a standing Executive Committee should fulfill these functions.

Third, the Department of Computer Science should not remain under the oversight of the new Dean for Computing and Information Sciences. As currently proposed, the Dean will control a powerful established department and an important, but new and diffuse program (the FCI). The budgetary needs and pressures arising from administrating the Department of Computer Science almost certainly will be in conflict with those arising from the FCI. Deans regularly allocate resources between competing departments, but here there is overlap of mission and a program whose 'department chair' is the Dean. The Computer Science Department could report directly to the Provost on an interim basis. In the long run we believe it should report to the Dean of Engineering, the Dean of Arts and Sciences, or (as originally) to both.

Fourth, the new deanship and the current appointment should be critically evaluated after a reasonable period (perhaps three years) by a committee with broad representation. The pace of change in this field does not allow a long wait before review. Since the present state has been arrived at without use of established search and review practices, it is especially important that they be followed in the future. This healthy process will allow the academic community to develop consensus on major issues that may arise. Formal review will encourage progress, innovation, building of consensus and accountability, as well as provide a time line for modifying or abandoning this bold experiment should it not function as anticipated.

This statement is the result of extensive discussion among the Policy Committee of the Engineering College, which has representatives from every Department in the College, (including ABEN and Computer Science) and consultation with Faculty across the Engineering College. The Committee voted on this statement on October 4th 1999 and the result was 10 For, 0 Against, with 1 Abstention

David Grubb, Chair, EPC