

# THE CORNER OFFICE

**A Q&A with Interim Dean Alberto Cuitiño**

## A SPECIAL PLACE

“Rutgers School of  
Engineering is a very  
special place that’s full of  
opportunities for our  
students and faculty.  
Rutgers is my home and  
I really love it.”

—ALBERTO CUITIÑO



**A**lberto Cuitiño joined Rutgers School of Engineering in 1993, most recently serving as professor and chair of the Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering. Under his leadership, the department introduced an ABET-accredited degree in Aerospace Engineering, a Master of Engineering degree, and several new graduate certificates and international programs. He assumed the role of School of Engineering interim dean on July 1.

**Congratulations on your new role as interim dean.**

**DEAN CUITIÑO:** Thank you. I'm honored to serve as interim dean and look forward to advancing the many exciting initiatives underway at the school and extending our reach among students, alumni, innovators, and industry.

**What do you love about engineering?**

**DEAN CUITIÑO:** The First National Medal of Science recipient Theodore von Kármán famously said: "Scientists discover the world that exists, engineers create the world that never was."

This simple, yet powerful, view of engineering as a journey of creation for the noble purpose of benefiting mankind is what I love about engineering. And it's a voyage of discovery that's open to everyone who is passionate about building a better world.

**How did you come to find yourself at the School of Engineering?**

**DEAN CUITIÑO:** I was born in Mendoza in Argentina's wine country, and I did my civil engineering degree in Buenos Aires. I went to Brown in 1989, where I earned my master's and doctoral degrees, and joined the MAE faculty in 1993 as an assistant professor. Because Rutgers has been my home for so long — I have a broad view of Rutgers' potential.

**What sets SoE apart from other engineering schools?**

**DEAN CUITIÑO:** SoE has a wonderfully unique profile. Our talented faculty, students, and staff make up one of the most diverse academic communities in the U.S. We also have all the advantages of a large research university, and a location within one of the world's most vibrant and dynamic metro areas for



**MOVE THE NEEDLE**

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career, cultural, and social opportunities. The school also contributes to exciting and innovative research areas, including smart cities, cybersecurity and machine learning, advanced manufacturing, and health science.

**What is your leadership approach?**

**DEAN CUITIÑO:** I value a start to finish approach. By this I mean connecting strategic thinking to identify impactful roles; building consensus and buy-in; creating a detailed implementation plan; and — what is absolutely critical — supporting the plan to completion.

I also believe in fostering a diverse community of students, faculty, and staff that is empowered to work together towards building a community that is positive, engaging, caring, and equitable — and where people rightly feel they have a seat at the table. We're all a part of building our community — and building it requires multi-pronged, long-term, deliberate efforts.

**What is the school's biggest challenge today?**

**DEAN CUITIÑO:** One significant challenge is our infrastructure, which impacts everything from the student experience to our ability to recruit and retain faculty, staff, and students, and to conduct top-notch scholarship.

Being a competitive leading engineering school includes offering students



modern and functional facilities for learning and collaboration. Continuing this trajectory is one of my key goals as interim dean.

Our ambitious, long-term Engineering Precinct Plan includes six new buildings.

Richard Weeks Hall of Engineering was a game changer for the school when it opened in 2018. I'm excited about our second project, which will replace the old Engineering Building's ailing C-wing and enable new interdisciplinary and collaborative research and education.

**What are some other goals you want to tackle?**

**DEAN CUITIÑO:** My main goal is to keep pushing the school forward and not lose momentum — and I'm asking everybody from faculty and students to alumni and Rutgers administration to share that mindset. We need to keep moving forward full force — to implement our Academic Master Plan and redefine our educational strategies, increase faculty and staff engagement and retention, advance our infrastructure plan, establish new cross-university collaborations, establish and nurture productive industry partnerships, reenergize engagement among alumni, and support a fair, inclusive environment for all.

**What is the Academic Master Plan and how does that impact SoE's educational strategies?**

**DEAN CUITIÑO:** The Academic Master Plan is a campus initiative that serves as the roadmap for Rutgers–New Brunswick's commitment to excellence in inclusive research, pedagogy, and service toward the common good. Within that framework ScoE is charting our own path forward. Examples include a first-year signature experience for engineering students; new courses, concentrations, and certificate programs



that help advance professional careers; and steps to ensure our school reflects and engages broader communities. Stay tuned as the plan takes shape!

**Why is inter-university collaboration important?**

**DEAN CUITIÑO:** Big problems require multifaceted approaches. If we're doing things well, we'll be working with people across the board. At the School of Engineering, we have an incredible reservoir of faculty and student talent. In my previous role as mechanical and aerospace engineering chair and now as interim dean, my role is to support these individual "engines," so they can connect and create a fabric of collaboration and synergy. We need teams of strong engineers, with diverse backgrounds, who are prepared to work alongside people in science, art, law, public policy, business, and industry.

**How do school/industry/government partnerships help SoE?**

**DEAN CUITIÑO:** Industry and government

**WORKING TOGETHER**

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are a critical part of what we want to do in terms of innovation and discovery. Both are at the core of an innovation ecosystem. Industry provides drivers for impactful research and means to accelerate technology transfer, while government provides the overall framework, strategic directions, and support. We also support industry as a pipeline for talent.

**How can alumni support SoE?**

**DEAN CUITIÑO:** The Rutgers Engineering Alumni group is undergoing a relaunch, if you will, to energize our alumni base by engaging our graduates across the spectrum of their careers and interests. There is so much to be gained by staying connected with SoE, and I'm so pleased that Ken Johnson ENG'66, Matt Lunemann ENG'06, and Aarushi Govil ENG'22 are teaming up to work with the school to develop programs and events that our alumni will be excited to participate in. There's room for all alumni to be part of the success of a new breed of RU engineers and I encourage everyone to get involved.

**How is the field of engineering changing?**

**DEAN CUITIÑO:** This is an interesting time. Engineering has immense transformational power to move the needle in today's grand challenges. Engineering continues to reinvent our world — and create the world that never was — by providing innovative, workable solutions for a better society.

**And one final question, what makes you most proud as a member of the Rutgers community?**

**DEAN CUITIÑO:** Rutgers Engineering is a very special and exciting community. Rutgers is my home — and my family's as two of my sons are Rutgers graduates — and I really love it. 