

NUCLEAR ENGINEERING, B.S.

Begin Campus: Any Penn State Campus

End Campus: University Park

Program Description

The overall educational objective of the Nuclear Engineering program is to help prepare our graduates to function effectively in the marketplace in a wide range of career paths in Nuclear Engineering. The technical part of the curriculum, emphasizes nuclear power engineering, which refers to complex systems used to generate electricity. Because of our strong educational and research emphasis in nuclear power engineering, and because a shortage for this expertise exists in the industry, generally the industry values our graduates highly. We recognize that nuclear science, including nuclear security and non-proliferation, is an important growth area. We constantly assess and review the needs of our undergraduate students and their most frequent employers and use this feedback to consider revisions to our curriculum so that it is responsive to the needs of our constituents.

The first two years of the program stress fundamentals in mathematics, chemistry, physics, computer programming, and engineering sciences such as mechanics, materials, and thermodynamics. The last two years provide the breadth and depth in nuclear science, behavior of heat and fluids, reactor theory and engineering, and radiation measurement. The laboratory work includes experiments using the University's 1,000-kilowatt research reactor. Engineering design is incorporated in many courses from the freshman year to the senior year, but is particularly emphasized in the senior capstone design course, which integrates the critical elements of reactor theory, reactor engineering, safety considerations and economic optimization into a reactor design.

Many graduates are employed by electric power companies that use nuclear power plants, or by companies that help service and maintain those plants. They use their knowledge of engineering principles, radioactive decay, interactions of radiation with matter, and nuclear reactor behavior to help assure that the power plants meet the demand for reliable, economic electricity while ensuring a safe environment. To do this, graduates must be problem solvers who can develop and use complex computer models and sophisticated monitoring systems, design systems to handle radioactive waste, determine if the materials in the plant are becoming brittle or corroded, or manage the fuel in the reactor to get the maximum energy from it. Other graduates work in industries that use radioactivity or radiation to detect problems or monitor processes. Jobs are also found in branches of the government as designers of the next generation of reactors for submarines, aircraft carriers, or space probes, or to manage and clean up contaminated wastes. They could also be involved with regulation of nuclear power or radiation uses, or in research to develop advanced technologies that will be used in next-generation power plants. Graduates who want to further their education in the fields of health physics, radiation biology, or nuclear medical applications find this degree to be a useful preparation.

What is Nuclear Engineering?

Nuclear Engineering is a multidisciplinary field that goes beyond providing nuclear power for electrical production. Nuclear engineers may apply their knowledge in various fields, including disease treatment, safeguarding food supplies, operate nuclear energy systems, develop regulations to ensure safety, or facilitate space exploration.

You Might Like This Program If...

You are interested in using basic science to make the world a better place for humankind through the production of clean energy, keeping the country safe from nuclear attack, and the application of nuclear science.