A History of the VA Gamma Pi Chapter of Eta Kappa Nu

In the late spring of 1955, two professors at the University of Virginia, Dr. Clifford Siegel (HKN Beta-Omicron) and Dr. Hugh Landes (HKN Beta-Lambda), assisted by William Gilpin (HKN Beta-Lambda) and their students organized a local electrical engineering honor society with the expressed purpose of creating a stable foundation for the eventual establishment of a chapter of Eta Kappa Nu. This honor society was first called the "Electrical Engineering Honor Society of UVA." Permission was secured from the Dean of the Engineering School, the head of the Electrical Engineering Department, and the Engineering Council and the honor society was granted a two year charter as a recognized organization. The constitution of Eta Kappa Nu was used as a guide in adopting a constitution for the local honor society.

The first membership consisted of seven students, all of whom met the requirements of the adopted constitution: Henry E. Harris, Jr., William W. Pettus IV, Donald G. Cuddihy, Paul R. Little, David J. Mataca, John J. Mayo, Jr., and John H. Tilley. In the spring of 1956, these men became brothers of Eta Kappa Nu (HKN) in the newly formed University of Virginia branch of Eta Chapter (a precursor to the official HKN chapter of today).

During the school year 1955-1956 efforts were made toward securing an official chapter of Eta Kappa Nu. However, authorization from the National Secretary of Eta Kappa Nu to begin writing a petition was not obtained until the fall of 1956, after the second pledge class was initiated. This second class consisted of Frederick J. Aichelman, Jr., Robert A. Leavenworth, James S. Smith, Jr., and Thomas A. Stansell, Jr., bringing the total membership of the local honor society to eleven.

In January of 1957, the official petition for a chapter was sent to the Eta Kappa Nu National Headquarters. The petitioner consisted of the eleven members mentioned above and Dr. Clifford Siegel. Five of the members had graduated in 1956 (from a EE class of 33), and the other six, along with Dr. Siegel, are shown in the picture (taken from the original petition) on the next page. The petition included information about the University of Virginia, the Electrical Engineering Department and its professors and curriculum, and the petitioners themselves. In addition, letters of recommendation were included from Dr. Joseph L. Vaughan (Provost of UVA), Dr. Lawrence R. Quarles (Dean of the Engineering School), Dr. James S. Miller (Chairman of the Electrical Engineering Department), and Dr. Clifford Siegel and Dr. Robert L. Ramey (Eta Kappa Nu members on the faculty).
PETITIONERS

F. Aichelmann  C. Siegel  J. Smith
D. Matasi  P. Little  T. Stansell  R. Leavenworth
The following excerpt is taken from the first page of the petition:

It is our belief that a chapter [of Eta Kappa Nu] at [the University of] Virginia will benefit our Department, the students, and the electrical engineering profession by spreading the ideals of Eta Kappa Nu. We feel that the activities of a chapter would inspire the electrical engineering students to greater scholastic development and service to society; and, by so doing would cultivate the qualities displayed by the capable engineer and responsible citizen.

In May of 1957, the HKN National Headquarters officially granted chapterhood to UVA, and the Virginia Gamma Pi Chapter of Eta Kappa Nu was officially established. On May 20, 1957, the chapter installation and the first official initiation ceremony were held and thirteen new members were inducted. The chairman of the National Advisory Board, S. Reid Warren, Jr., and the Executive Secretary, Alton B. Zerby, were both present for the official chapter installation and first induction ceremony.

The By-Laws of the Gamma Pi Chapter were written in November of 1957 and were updated in January of 1967. In March of 1968, the By-Laws were again changed to include the Gamma Pi Chapter Eta Kappa Nu Electrical Engineering Award. This award was established to recognize outstanding achievement in, or contributions to the field of electrical engineering at the University of Virginia. Two engraved plaques in the EE Department list the yearly recipients of the award. A nearby display case donated by the EE Department in the Fall of 1991 lists the chapter activities and officers. In the Spring of 1992, the chapter received its greatest honor when our very own Dr. Barry Johnson won the 1992 International Eta Kappa Nu C. Holmes MacDonald Outstanding Teaching Award for Young EE Professors, one of the most prestigious international teaching awards. A ceremony was held in his honor on April 24, 1992, and was attended by Mr. Robert F. Arehart, the immediate past International President of HKN, as well as by many students, professors, and members.

Up to (and including) the Spring semester of 1993, approximately 721 electrical engineering students and faculty members have been inducted into the Gamma Pi Chapter since 1957 (counting the 11 original petitioners), for an average of only 20 students per year. Throughout its history, the Gamma Pi Chapter of Eta Kappa Nu has been a thriving honor society, with various community service programs, social events, and of course, the semesterly pizza bash.

Researched by Eric Dale Cutrright, President, Gamma Pi Chapter of HKN, 1991-1994