After training to be a naval architect, Joe Burns became interested in planetary exploration during graduate study at Cornell during the mid-60s. Except for a post-doctoral year and ten academic/sabbatical leaves, he has spent his career at Cornell, mostly in a small graduate department of Theoretical and Applied Mechanics, which merged into Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering in 2009. Joe is now the Irving P. Church Professor of Engineering and Professor of Astronomy. He has taught engineering, applied math, astronomy and physics courses. He was department chair of T&AM in 1987-1993 and Vice Provost for Engineering and Physical Sciences in 2003-2007. In spring 2012, he was elected Dean of the University Faculty.

Joe has authored 250+ papers, mostly on the dynamics of the solar system. He currently is a member of the imaging team on a mission orbiting Saturn. He organized an ongoing exhibition of these images that has been seen by 2+ million. Joe edited the primary journal in planetary science for nearly twenty years, and two books on planetary satellites; he is now among Science's editors. He has chaired two divisions-- and been Vice President-- of the American Astronomical Society.

Joe considers the faculty to be Cornell's heart and soul: their scholarship broadens and defines the university's excellence; their teaching motivates and matures students; and their research and public engagement can alter the lives of millions, across New York State and around the globe. He believes that Cornell University will achieve more when its various constituencies communicate and collaborate to find solutions during these exciting times. He looks forward to representing the faculty in discussions with the administration and trustees. He encourages all faculty to become more engaged with the governance of their university.