

2021 NCSEA Young Member Summit Scholarship

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Essay Question #1: You are given the responsibility to recruit students and recent graduates to participate with the Structural Engineers Association, how do you do it? Describe how you got involved with your YMG, state's SEA, and/or NCSEA and what strategies you would employ to encourage others to get involved.

Answer:

To recruit members into any organization one must advertise and push public relation (PR) measures intensely. Networking and meeting with local professionals, of all ages is key to building a solid foundation of professional support in your local community. Once a team of professional colleagues has been established, reaching out to the leading local educational institution that provides students the accreditation they need to become a licensed Professional Engineer or Structural Engineer is the next key step.

Every educational institution has PR resources to take advantage of (The Office of Student Involvement, Student Council, etc.). I would take advantage of every resource a college and/or university offered to produce, post and distribute physical and electronic flyers, brochures, pamphlets, etc. with information on an upcoming meeting or event, professional or student focused. I would get with a facility advisor in my local college/university who is generally committed to promoting and supporting my organization is vital to recruiting students and recent graduates that the advisor may be in contact with. I would have a representative from my local SEA come to the university to speak to a group of students in a structural engineering related class to explain there are such discipline specific organizations as your local SEA, the NCSEA and SEI.

If the university/college already has some form of a SEA student chapter established, starting the first meeting and/or event will be easier, however if there is not a student chapter established, then the first meeting may not be as productive as intended. Therefore, working with the committed facility advisor to find a strong set of student leaders is key to establishing a good student base who will later become the anticipated leaders of an SEA or other professional engineering organizations in the Architecture Engineering Construction (AEC) industry. It may take up to a year to establish a good solid student chapter presence that will be self-sustaining with election and due process. In the meantime, I would focus on getting with my professional base on the local level to ensure a strong professional community.

Once a strong local community SEA team has been established, finding ways to connect the professionals (again of all ages) with the students would be the next step. Hosting a mixer event between the professionals and students, such as a lunch and learn or dinner presentation at the university/college or a local corporate office of a vendor/supplier in the AEC industry would likely be a productive event. The local vendor/supplier would be able to advertise its products as the venue host while the students and professionals can connect in a calm, informal friendly

atmosphere. Reducing the price for students or completely waiving any student registration fees would be an important measure to consider as students would be more likely to attend for a reduced meal rate.

A reoccurring event that my SEA, SEAO (Ohio) has hosted over the past several years is entitled “Mentoring Night”, that connects students in the AEC field with a series of speakers/presenters that comprise of young and older professionals. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, each of the 5 active SEAO student chapters would host a 2.5-3hr mentoring night session with a mixture of students and professionals roughly 20-35 in attendance. Mentoring Night was by far the most productive and beneficial social event for our students and young members and I highly recommend any SEA to work with its engineering universities to host similar networking events that bring students, young & older more seasoned professionals together.

It has been my experience that students and other young professionals want the true experience of engineering beyond the highly theoretical classroom setting. Myself and my other peers have discovered that working with a client base composed of real people and real-world problems is much more satisfying/rewarding than the work involved to attempt in solving any set of complex theoretical equations/problems that students and young professionals freshly out of college are accustomed to. I have learned over my short career that the real world engineering problems stem from human influences such as: miscommunication, improper workmanship and lack of proper leadership.

I became involved with SEAO during the last year of my undergraduate studies at the University of Toledo (UT), 2013-2014, when the UT-SEAO organization was formed by a group of Civil Engineering Graduate students from UT. Through various leadership roles in UT-SEAO, I progressed professionally and academically into the M.S. Civil Structural Engineering program while keeping a strong committed student base of active members that have self-sustained the organization for a few years now, with myself and Dr. Douglas Nims, P.E. acting as professional and academic advisors, respectfully. In 2019 I stepped into two leadership roles as a Director and Communications Chair for SEAO; as a liaison for my delegate role with NCSEA. I have kept in contact and stayed active in my professional career with acting as an advisor for UT-SEAO while also helping to form the first UT American Concrete Institute (UT-ACI) student chapter in 2018.

To get involved with your local SEA, take on a leadership role and own! The role will only be as satisfying as the effort you put into that role. Understand the requirements and needs of the role while reaching out to your fellow SEA colleagues/peers for assistance as needed. Everyone understands this leadership role is voluntary outside of our professional employment and works around our personal lives, therefore if you are feeling behind or overwhelmed with tasks, please communicate up-front with your fellow SEA leaders on your limitations and intended commitment level. Being resourceful, organized, diligent and punctual in your completed tasks and actions will secure your confidence to take on an SEA leadership role and

will help others understand your capabilities and limitations in what you are comfortable with. Always ask for help! I cannot stress this enough, as I fall short on this as well, often overwhelming myself with too much. No-one is alone in this, as productive SEA's are vital to the AEC community and its ability to thrive in the ever changing industry.