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NCSEA Summit Essay

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.

As a student, usually hungry and in need of a break from studying, I found my way into many lunch and learn events in the civil engineering building. Enticed by the free food, it turns out the content I learned and connections I made would be long-lasting in many facets. I came for the food, but I ended up staying for the foundation to build my career in structural engineering.

Just a short time later, I find myself given the opportunity to not only join as a member, but become the Student Liaison and eventual Vice President of the Minnesota Structural Engineers Association Young Member Group (MNSEA YMG). It's the ultimate role reversal, as I now get to be in a position of engaging and encouraging students to get involved in the ways I did as a student. I've set myself up with goals that coincide with the YMG, MNSEA, and NCSEA's mission statement that directly aim at deepening my own engagement as well as the involvement and inclusion of other structural engineers- both current and future. In my mind, the pillars to success in this regard are to deepen local connections, become involved in student chapters, and play key roles in the MNSEA Young Member Group board.

As the current student liaison of the MNSEA YMG, I get to spend a lot of meaningful time collaborating and creating ways for students and recent graduates to become and remain involved in our local chapter. I never take for granted the opportunities that my alma mater gave me, and now on a regular basis, I get to recruit students and recent graduates that I have so much in common with. That common ground gives way to a comfortable environment where they both see the opportunity and feel more compelled to get involved.

All it takes is showing up. However, being less than three years into my career, the nerves of showing up an event not knowing anyone are not far from my memory. Very few look forward to going to an event where they don't know anyone- the anticipation of social engagement is an unknown that may prevent some from showing up in the first place. Fostering opportunities for a group of like-minded individuals to partake in activities is crucial to get people in the door. Just one round of mini golf or a site visit may be all it takes to form relationships with other young professionals in the area, and keep people coming back.

We rely greatly on those who are established in the younger member community to encourage and engage others in future group activities and events. Inviting coworkers, fellow students, mentees, and even a friend has been proven to encourage growth in the group and eventual membership.

Responsibility breeds desire and ultimately action. I knew quickly that just being a member of the MNSEA would be something that could easily fade away on my list of things to do and places to be. Just two weeks after starting my very first job, a co-worker approached me and mentioned an opening on MNSEA YMG's board. Did I think it was crazy to join a board of an organization where I had only attended a few meetings? Frankly, yes. Am I glad I took the leap? Absolutely.

Beyond the obvious advantages that come from membership and the various educational opportunities, I knew this position would open a door to further my career. Two and half years later, I remain incredibly grateful and proud of my decision to become a board member with MNSEA YMG. Since then, I have held multiple positions, all with the same foundational goal of increasing breadth and depth of our membership reach.

Beginning as the Community Outreach Coordinator, planning events and volunteer opportunities to give back to the community was in my mentality as a recent graduate. Since then, I have transitioned to a passion of mine as Student Liaison of the YMG. I now have the opportunity to connect with students that were in the same position I was in a few years ago. Most recently, I have been elected Vice President of the YMG. I am honored to have been appointed to this role to work with our great team to develop our mission to grow the structural engineering industry.

One of the best things I did for my professional career was get involved with NCSEA and MNSEA, specifically our local YMG. Getting the chance to connect with other structural engineers in similar positions to me has made the commitment fulfilling and has proven to be very worthwhile. I look forward to making connections to other structural engineers, ranging from new in their career or seasoned professionals- we all have something to gain from one another.