

For new graduates, entering the professional world can be overwhelming. A new job, new coworkers, new responsibilities, and maybe even a new city is a lot to navigate. To add to the chaos, we have all selected to work in a field that is always evolving. Change, for many of us, is difficult. However, the one thing that has always helped me through change is people. Individuals or groups that are going through it with you. That is where I think the Young Member Group comes into play. A group of people to help bridge that gap between college and the workforce. A place where you can ask silly questions, meet familiar faces so you have someone to sit with at general NCSEA meetings, and learn together. Now, why is this description important? Because that is how we should be marketing it to college students and recent graduates. A safe place with other people all just trying to make it in the “real world”.

For myself, I found out about NCSEA from my manager at work. I signed up for the emails and started attending general meetings or site tours when I was able. In my opinion, this seems to be the traditional way that people hear about NCSEA. At work from coworkers who may or may not be very involved in the chapters. While that is great, I believe the more that people hear from individuals that are passionate about NCSEA, the more likely we are to increase participation in the Young Member Group and organization as a whole.

One way we could work to increase the volume of student members is to be more involved on college campuses. I believe a booth at the STEM/Engineering career fairs each fall or speaking in a structural engineering class once a semester then holding a Q&A with members could increase our student participation. The Q&A would be for general career advice or questions about working in the field. We could connect with students and promote our events like the Gingerbread Bridge Competition we have in Colorado. We might also be able to ask academic advisors to send an email communication to the students when we are on campus. If we can have an engaging booth and show our faces at more structural engineering recruiting events, we can hopefully recruit more individuals for our organization. Another idea is to create a mentorship program within our group where we can pair with current students. This would be a benefit to them as they could pick our brains as to what it is like in the workforce, and we could spread the word about NCSEA. The mentees would hopefully go on to participate in activities as students and as graduates.

To recruit more recent graduates, I think it is pertinent to host not only educational activities, but also causal get togethers and happy hours to entice more participants. More people will take time out of the calendars to engage in fun events that are maybe work related, but also a break from the education, as there already is an entirely different committee in NCSEA for that. As the Events Coordinator for my company, I have had the most success planning events that are short in duration, after work hours in the middle of the week (Tuesday or Wednesday) and involve sports. It is a precise recipe, but it works 90% of the time. Putt-Putt golf, games nights, or a happy hour at a new spot seem to be effective for fellow young people.

The other thing I think many chapters lack is social media accounts. Generation Z loves Instagram and Tik Tok. It is how young people today get much of their information. Instead of a “Google Search” for a new restaurant, Generation Z will, “look it up on Instagram”. Without having these accounts, we may be missing potential new members. If we had someone that could run an account for either the chapters as a whole or even just the young member committees, we may be able to gain more traction with young people.

All in all, I think the Young Member Group has the potential to be a great place to bridge the gap between college and the workforce. We can make it a fun place to share experiences and go through this big change together. To gain more students, I think the most effective method involves going to the source. More personal interactions with students at the universities and having members serve as mentors will encourage involvement after graduation. For recent graduates, we need to host events that draw them in and play to their interests outside of the office. We also need to do better to speak their language and have a presence on more social media platforms. We all receive many emails each day, it is easier to overlook those than a bright post on Instagram. There is so much potential in young member groups. I am glad to be part of the one we have in Denver and look forward to all the experiences and lessons I have yet to make.

Thank you.