

## Issues Confronting Campus Representatives

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### Abstract

A campus representative acts as a direct link between the ASEE and other faculty on campus. His or her role is vital in assisting the ASEE to improve its services and to accomplish its goals. Besides his or her busy profession as a university professor, a campus representative must be willing to commit time and energy to the growth of ASEE and its mission of promoting excellence in engineering education. The first issue confronting the campus representative is his or her willingness to dedicate himself or herself to fulfilling the role of the campus representative. Engineering faculty usually siphon most of their effort toward activities that can lead to their tenure and promotion. Time spent on carrying out service related duties is always minimal. When one is willing to spend time and energy, the next issue is to get the maximum response from all of his or her professional colleagues. Usually, a campus representative who is a senior faculty member can get good response from junior faculty members at the college or department level. In contrast, a campus representative who is a non-tenured junior faculty might get a low response from senior faculty, especially dealing with members who have allowed their membership to lapse. Another issue confronting a campus representative involves getting the support and cooperation from the engineering dean. The dean can facilitate the tasks and activities that a campus representative pursues in the college or department. To be effective in the role of a campus representative, one must have full support and cooperation from the dean.

### Introduction

As the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE) began to take root in 1893 as the Society for the Promotion of Engineering Education, much of the initiative was carried out by engineering educators who were dedicated to promoting quality engineering education. These educators realized the need to promote excellence in engineering education for the younger generations of engineers and the society continued to grow both in membership and assets. In June 1946, the name of the society was officially changed to the American Society for Engineering Education with a vision to promote excellence in all aspects of engineering and engineering education<sup>1</sup>. There were only 70 individual members in 1893<sup>1</sup>. The membership in 1996 totaled more than 10,000<sup>2</sup>. The growth of this society cannot be realized if not for those who are committed in their time and energy to the society. This commitment is necessary from all of its staff and members if the society is to continue to grow.

## Issues Confronting Campus Representatives

As an ASEE policy, the dean of each institutional member is to appoint a campus representative to act as an on-campus liaison between the Society and the faculty. Having representatives at the grass roots level, the Society hopes to provide better service and communication to each individual member, and also establishes its presence on each campus. In the chain of communication, a campus representative directs questions and concerns related to ASEE from each individual member to the ASEE Section officers, Zone officers, and ASEE Headquarters. A campus representative carries many responsibilities<sup>1</sup>. Among them are to :1) publicize ASEE activities; 2) encourage attendance and promote participation among faculty in ASEE section, regional, and national meetings; 3) recruit new faculty members; 4) organize campus activities; 5) relate faculty's constructive comments, concerns, and suggestions and criticisms to the ASEE Headquarters staff.

Since ASEE campus representatives are the liaison for the Society at the grass-roots level, services that they provide to each faculty member and to the ASEE are of ultimate importance. They can turn away any faculty member from joining the Society and can become an obstacle for the Society to accomplish its mission. In contrast, they can create a very positive image of ASEE on campus and increase membership recruitment and retention. Their importance to the Society may be liken to that of foot soldiers to an army platoon. The success of the Society in achieving its goals depends on the loyalty and dedication of the campus representatives.

Since campus representatives are in volunteer positions, their willingness to commit time and energy determines their success in carrying out their responsibilities. In universities, professors are so often swamped by work related to teaching, research, and service that time becomes a very scarce commodity. They are willing to commit only to activities that will lead to their success in tenure and promotion. So, in many universities, campus representative is often a position that nobody hopes to hold because it is not considered as a productive effort or investment. For those who hold this position, time and energy spent on carrying out their campus responsibilities are always minimal and often classified as low priority. Therefore, unless one is willing to commit his time and energy, it is unlikely that a campus representative can execute fully the responsibilities expected of him on his campus.

Getting maximum response from all his or her professional colleagues is another issue facing campus representatives when they try to execute their duties on campus. Often, most of the professors are not very enthusiastic about ASEE activities either at section or national level. They do not perceive ASEE involvement as a worthwhile investment of their time. To them, attending a research proposal meeting or socializing with potential funding officials is a better investment than attending ASEE meetings. Published papers in the ASEE conferences are not highly regarded as compared to refereed publications. Therefore, as long as the participation in ASEE activities is not considered as a scholarly activity, their response to one's call for involvement or participation in ASEE activities is not promising. Besides this, senior faculty members often see no need to get involved with any extra activities. A

campus representative who is a non-tenured junior faculty is most likely to receive poor response from senior tenured faculty. In contrast, sheer respect usually prompts junior faculty to respond to the campus representative who is a senior faculty member, especially someone serving on a tenure or promotion committee of this junior member. In dealing with this type of situation, it would be best if the dean or director of engineering would serve as the campus representative.

As a policy of ASEE, the campus representative is encouraged to work closely with his or her dean or director of engineering in planning and executing campus activities. There are two reasons for this. First, there are no funds for the campus representative to operate except with funds allocated by the dean. Secondly, some of the campus activities need the approval from the dean. The dean can facilitate the tasks and activities that a campus representative pursues in the college. Usually, department chairs are not supportive of such activities unless they are involved in them. The dean has the authority over all professors and chairs in implementing and executing all planned activities. Without the dean's support and cooperation, it is unlikely that one can start anything college-wise. In fact, in dealing with delinquent individual members, many campus representatives feel that a reminder from the dean is more effective than several reminders from a campus representative. The dean can encourage more faculty members to participate in campus activities and to attend the section or national meetings by sponsoring these activities and providing travel assistance for interested faculty. It would be best for the dean to consider the ASEE campus activities as college activities organized by his or her office.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

This paper describes issues confronting campus representatives. Although situations in each institution may vary, these issues may be not as obvious from one campus to another. The role of a campus representative in assisting ASEE to achieve its mission will depend on his or her willingness to commit time and energy. Since the Society was founded by dedicated volunteers, the growth of the Society will also depend on these volunteer campus representatives. Full support and cooperation from the dean or director of engineering is necessary for campus representatives to be effective in carrying out their roles.

## **References**

1. Campus Representative Program Operating Manual, American Society for Engineering Education, Washington, D. C., 1996-1997. 16 pp.
2. Membership Department, American Society for Engineering Education, Washington, D. C.