

AC 2007-666: DIFFICULTIES, FAILURES AND SUCCESSES IN RECRUITING MEMBERS TO ASEE

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Difficulties, Failures, and Successes in Recruiting Members to ASEE

Abstract

With an organization of over 12,000 members, one would imagine that the lure of engineering and education would be an easy sell in the process of bringing new members into the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE). The very title ASEE exudes the importance of the organization's focus on educating engineers for the future of the United States and the World. But, as with many things that appear easy, the task is not as simple as one might imagine. In today's world of research, there is a greater need to sell the importance of education in respect to research than one might think. This also may be extremely important with the number of international graduate students who are becoming faculty in US schools. When they think of education and its relevance to research and an organization that puts education first, it becomes vital to create a cohesive bond between the importance of research and the relevance of education to that research. The many facets of talking about, convincing, and selling the importance of being a member of ASEE will be explored in this paper. Some of the inherent difficulties of trying to convince research faculty will be discussed, along with surveys of faculty and their reasons for continuing to be members of the organization and their reluctance to being members. For the individual taking on the responsibility of being a campus representative, Football Coach Vince Lombardi commented, "The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of strength, not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of will."¹ It does take a certain amount of effort from the volunteer to get the job done.

Introduction

Historian Thomas Fuller gave us a simple road to follow when he said, "One that would have the fruit must climb the tree."² Perhaps that is the beginning rung on the ladder that leads to reaching one's goal of increased membership in any organization. Effort has to be expended in order to gain the reward, and sometimes individuals assume that simply asking people to join with emails and a handout in the mailbox will suffice. If it were that easy, no one would have to devote any time to building a larger membership. It is therefore necessary to take the initiative, talk to people, and be ready for probing questions that, if fielded carefully, can convince others to join.

Human nature also enters at this step, and we are prone to opening our ears to conversations if we can get something for little or nothing. ASEE provides a wonderful mechanism that allows deans to cover the first year of membership with ASEE assuming the cost for the second year. This in itself would seem to be all that is necessary to bring in the members, but that is not always the case; and it will require a longer look later in the paper. But for those who can be convinced because of the spectacular bargain they are receiving, the lack of any expenditure, and the benefits they receive; there is nothing more to do. Faculty are signed up and the job of the campus representative is done until those members have completed the two-year, trial membership and the renewal of their

memberships comes at their own expense. For those who do not choose to partake of the Dean's Program, a quote from historian Thomas Carlyle seems to fit, "Conviction is worthless unless it is converted into conduct."³ The program is a wonderful way to experience membership with no cost, but for those who will not partake, one has to provide a great deal more information to bring them into the fold. The conduct actually takes the form of all those beneficial items that can be explained to the prospective members.

Importance of Membership

There are many incentives to join ASEE. ASEE provides conferences at reasonable cost that hopefully attract almost every facet of the engineering world. We assume that; but later in this paper, one will see that responses from faculty are not always positive about the conference fare. We have to be careful when we say that a conference that offers 1500-1700 presentations will have something for everyone. It may actually have some things that we might not expect.

The publications that ASEE produces also provide valuable information on educating the young engineers of the future, and those documents alone are cited as reasons for belonging to ASEE. Tangible hardcopy of magazines and journals give the campus representative something that can be held and read. Providing current and archived copies of Prism and the Journal of Engineering Education give the campus representative tangible examples of good reading for the engineering community. Being able to look back on articles from the past also allows one to give specific focused articles to prospective members.

So now the campus representative has various tools to use in convincing the non-members within the college to become active members in the society. One goes back to the easy process of simply sending emails and leaving handouts in mailboxes. I have found that asking for faculty to respond to these kinds of requests will get a return rate of less than 5%.

Convincing Colleagues

So what does one do? Some of the possibilities include making sure to attend every departmental faculty meeting that one can to talk about the positive benefits about joining ASEE. This also provides faculty members the chance to ask pertinent questions that others may have wanted to ask but simply failed to do. Discussion and conversation will draw out the current members and support for membership will grow. Meeting attendance is also important at college of engineering faculty meetings where support from the dean's office can help make an impact on those non-members.

ASEE also provides a wonderful checklist for campus representatives showing ways to convince faculty to join the organization. These range from newsletters to having snacks during faculty meetings. These lists can be accessed at the ASEE website www.asee.org. But one way that I believe is vital to any effort made to increase membership comes from

the established membership in the college. Here are just a few of the comments made by faculty members who believe that participating in ASEE is important (See Appendix):

- It's important to interact with world-wide colleagues to see what innovations and implementations they are taking to solve problems. Some of those problems turn out to be problems I have, and have not yet found a solution for. It is not enough to "read" the proceedings, being there to interact informally is the key.
- It's also important to get feedback on approaches I am using or am thinking about using. This is only done face to face in interaction in a conference setting.
- ASEE is the professional organization that represents the educational aspects of our collective responsibilities.
- I am a member of ASEE primarily because I believe everyone in a profession should be affiliated with their professional society. In the case of a university professor, that is both discipline-based (one or more) and education-based (ASEE), to at least get PRISM and keep up with current trends.

And lastly, a member of long standing who couldn't resist:

- I see no reason NOT to join ASEE unless you are:
 - a) not interested in professional development, intellectual discourse, or career advancement, or you are
 - b) professionally comatose.

Faculty members can provide endless support in the campus representative's efforts to increase membership. One should never feel alone in the process. But one does have to face obstacles that may take much more effort than expected. One would assume that everyone should feel that an educational society would have people breaking down the doors of the organization to become members. As I alluded to earlier, this is not always the case. It is a reality all campus representatives must face an obstacle that occurs in the old saying, "One can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make him drink!" We have all the tools to make the case for membership, but as in all court cases, someone ends up losing. We have to make the effort, but we must also not become discouraged if we do not achieve 100% membership. Some of the responses from a recent survey on why individuals do not join ASEE include:

- Presentations/publications through ASEE receive very limited rewards in the merit/promotion/tenure system.
- I am already a member of ASME and IEEE. I cannot afford to pay any more membership fees. I pay approx \$300 in combined ASME and IEEE yearly fees.
- The emphasis on research is overwhelming.
- Sessions poorly presented with trivial information so will not go back.

One can see areas of discussion when it comes to membership fees and the reality there is a Dean's Program that can eliminate that complaint, but the money issue may simply mask those feelings of research intensive faculty who fail to look further into the division that ASEE provides. If the campus representative spends a little time educating the individuals into those aspects of membership, there may be more likelihood of a new member on the horizon. The issue of the disgruntled individual who may have

experienced a poor session once in his or her career may require gentle persuasion to make the effort to give the organization another try to make amends for sessions that may not have been as good as they should have been.

For the majority of those individuals who are questioning whether they should join or not join the organization, the above methods of drawing them in may be sufficient. Benefits, dues payments, and discussions on the importance of teaching may suffice. It is that growing number of individuals who feel that research is the only focus of universities and colleges who need to be addressed. The research faculty in most cases still are required to teach courses either at the undergraduate or graduate levels. Being in the classroom is usually not an option they can avoid. With that in mind, ASEE becomes an organization that will make life in the classroom much easier. Between the numbers of papers and the divisions that carry on dialogue about teaching, the research focused faculty can obtain insights into making their classrooms a more welcome place for both their students and themselves. Suggestions for imparting greater knowledge to students, addressing presentation issues, and learning new ways to provide old information may make all the difference in suffering through those courses one has to teach and actually finding that being in the classroom may not be as horrible as one has thought. Contact with students in classes can be made palatable with the insights of other faculty who publish and present in ASEE publications and conferences.

The Research Faculty

Here again, the campus representative is one who can build bridges between research and teaching. Discussions with faculty about their own experiences as students will bring to light the reasons that they pursued their academic careers. The research will be paramount, but the realization that the foundation of their careers was built on the backs of great teachers who provided them with the tools to learn may be enough to shift them to being a part of ASEE.

Research faculty and teaching faculty are two separate entities at the university. They are combined in different percentages to become the individuals who both pursue research and provide the education that young engineers need in order to survive in the real world and in the graduate schools of the future. A good education requires that good teachers impart their knowledge and provide avenues that allow students to learn. A constant commitment to classroom teaching will result in better researchers in the future. Their undergraduate and graduate learning will be reflected in their quality as our future educators.

Campus representatives are volunteers who face challenges in convincing faculty members who focus their existence on research, who see no importance in the organization, or who feel that educating new engineers may not be a priority in their careers; but this is where the real job begins. Convincing those who are already members to continue their memberships is no challenge at all. Leading that horse to water and making him drink is what makes the great campus rep.

Conclusions

ASEE does provide many helps, suggestions, and tangible items to the campus representative to convince individuals to become members of the organization, but in actuality, it is the conversations, discussions, and individual relationships that make faculty want to become members of ASEE. It is with continued effort that every faculty and staff member who deals with students in whatever fashion found be given the opportunity to join with other dedicated individuals within ASEE to increase the potential of our students in the classroom. It is in that way that the future of American education will be strengthened. It is in the activities of the volunteers who take up the challenge to bring the message of ASEE to their colleagues. And when the job seems daunting, one can look at a short poem written by an anonymous poet that speaks to the heart of the campus representative.

"Volunteers"

Many will be shocked to find,
When the day of judgment nears,
That there's a special place in Heaven
Set aside for volunteers.
Furnished with big recliners,
Satin Couches and footstools,
Where there are no committee chairmen,
Nor yard sale or rest area coffee to serve.
No library duty or bulletin assembly,
There will be nothing to print and staple.
Not one thing to fold and mail,
Telephone lists will be outlawed.
But a finger snap will bring
Cool drinks and gourmet dinners
And rare treats fit for a king.
You ask,
"Who'll serve these privileged few
And work for all they're worth?"
Why, all those who reaped the benefits,
And not once volunteered on Earth. ⁴

Bibliography

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- 2 http://www.quoteland.com/author.asp?AUTHOR_ID=315, 2007
- 3 http://www.quoteland.com/author.asp?AUTHOR_ID=478, 2007
- 4 <http://academic.regis.edu/volunteer/songs/poems.htm#Volunteers%20poems>, 2007

Appendix

Survey given to the college of engineering faculty for comments.

1. It is important to be a member of ASEE for the following reasons:

Professional Benefits

- It's important to interact with world wide colleagues to see what innovations and implementations they are taking to solve problems. Some of those problems turn out to be problems I have, and have not yet found a solution for. It's not enough to "read" the proceedings.. being there to interact informally is the key.
- It's important to get feedback on approaches I am using or am thinking about using. This is only done face to face in interaction in a conference setting.
- There are issues about NOT being isolated, but understanding that a scholarly community exists that focuses on pedagogy for engineering.
- It's important to interact within my home division - freshman systems - to keep both up to date, and to get inspiration for our projects/directions.
To financially support research/interest in Engineering Education.
- It gives me an opportunity to learn about best practices in other institutions
It offers a forum for me to fraternize with people who share my passion for education and learning
- Networking with like-minded faculty colleagues
- To be informed about the current trends in engineering curriculum development.
To learn about the new effective teaching techniques in engineering. To remain updated about the awards, fellowships, summer internships etc. available to students and faculty.

General Benefits

- To receive copies of PRISM to allow me to keep (somewhat) abreast of developments in Eng.
- ASEE is the professional organization that represents the educational aspects of our collective responsibilities.
- Membership, if not active participation, allows it to represent these aspects and to serve as the vehicle for their improvement.
- An opportunity to present scholarly papers on pedagogical work
- It is important to be a member of ASEE for the following reasons:
 - Become part of a community sharing the same value of enhancing education
 - Keep updated with latest changes in policy in education
 - Keep updated with revised teaching techniques and trends
 - Keep updated with latest information regarding education, funding etc. which could benefit current students.
- It is the longest standing professional organization dedicated to advancing academicians and professionals within the field of engineering, from discovering interactive teaching/learning activities that motivate interest and curiosity about engineering, to examining the critical pedagogy required in imparting more complex, abstract engineering concepts.

- Membership in ASEE puts educators, practitioners, career professionals, and advocates in touch with each other through informative articles, scholarly journals and venues that are conducive for energetic collaboration.
- Interesting articles on teaching, but I have made very little use of them
- I am a member of ASEE primarily because I believe everyone in a profession should be affiliated with their professional society. In the case of a university professor, that is both discipline-based (one or more) and education-based (ASEE), to at least get PRISM and keep up with current trends.
- Prism Magazine / ASEE News letter / Annual Conference (I have yet to attend, but would like to)
- I am "active" in ASEE based on my administrative appointment, where I find the Associate Dean's group a source of collegial support.
- I see no reason NOT to join ASEE unless you are:
 - a) not interested in professional development, intellectual discourse, or career advancement, or you are
 - b) professionally comatose.

2. I see no reason to join ASEE:

Difficulties

- In my case, I have belonged to over 10 professional societies during my career, including ASEE, IEEE, ASME, SAE, SME, ACM, ISGEC, ESD, SETAC, and others. I can't possibly read all of the journals they send automatically, in addition to the ones I specifically subscribe to, and I don't want to spend several thousand dollars from my pocket each year, either, to maintain those memberships. So I pay ACM and SME, right now, and that's about it. I don't read 10% of what they send me, as it is... Thank God for the web! I find it to be a much more valuable way of finding out about new things I'm interested in.
- I think ASEE is worthwhile, but didn't find the ASEE meetings I attended to be as valuable, on a return-per-hour invested basis, as other meetings I attended. While I enjoy spending time working on instructional innovation, I don't particularly enjoy spending time writing about it, so I don't need that sort of publication outlet, either.
- No funds to attend meetings/conferences/etc
- Not a technology based society
- Only can join a couple and ASEE may be third
- Presentations/publications through ASEE receive very limited rewards in the ME merit/promotion/tenure system.
- I am already a member of ASME and IEEE. I cannot afford to pay any more membership fees. I pay approx \$300 in combined ASME and IEEE yearly fees.
- The emphasis on research is overwhelming.
- There is no money for going to conferences except for what comes from research grants and that cannot be used for an ASEE conference. I'd love to be able to go

to conferences dealing with education, but I'd probably go to SIGCSE first since it is more relevant to CS.

Other Issues

- For me it is a matter of balancing all of my activities. I haven't had the time or motivation to fully explore the ASEE and to look into what opportunities it offers (despite your efforts to advertise the society). At this point, it is not advantageous for me to participate in ASEE conferences, even though I consider my teaching activities and curriculum development a very important part of my career. For many of us that are heavily involved in both teaching and research, we must make a choice about where to put our efforts. There is no doubt that my research efforts will be rewarded, but the same cannot be said for significant, time-consuming efforts related to instruction.
- Sessions poorly presented with trivial information so will not go back
- I don't know any compelling reason