

What Would Engineering Education Be Like Without the Campus Representative?

K. P. Brannan
The Citadel

Abstract

Campus Representatives often never realize how great an impact they may have on their colleagues or on engineering education. This discussion and fictional narrative portray how important the Campus Representative is by showing what would be lost without the Campus Representative. The paper is intended to not only give Campus Representatives a glimpse of the significance of their job, but to also provide tips on how to be more effective. In addition, the paper provides deans and department heads with a picture of the potential that an effective Campus Representative brings to the college.

Introduction

Without an ASEE Campus Representative (or for that matter, without an *effective* Campus Representative), much more would be lost than simply not having someone on campus to contact new faculty members about becoming members of ASEE. A Campus Representative has the opportunity to influence the entire fabric of engineering education on a college campus; without an effective Campus Representative many opportunities for promoting excellence in engineering education would be lost. To illustrate the potential impact that a Campus Representative can have, the following four-part novelette (Dean Silver's Discovery: More Than Just a Change in Personnel) contrasts an ideal Campus Representative with a much less effective Campus Representative. While it may be difficult to find a person with all the attributes of the ideal Campus Representative depicted in the narrative, many Campus Representatives can enhance their effectiveness, provide more leadership, and find the Campus Representative position to be a much more rewarding experience by incorporating into their program a few ideas such as those presented below.

Dean Silver's Discovery: More Than Just a Change in Personnel

The Choice

Pat Forrest frowned as he glanced at the clock on his office wall. He was running late for the college faculty meeting. He suddenly wondered why his department head had insisted that he attend the meeting - after all, the major business on the agenda seemed to be recognition for Peg Smith's departure from the college to take an administrative position at another college. He knew Peg reasonably well - everyone knew Peg. Peg represented some sort of engineering education

organization and she had probably come up with a dozen different ways over the past three years to encourage him to become an active member. It was likely that she had been responsible for his receiving the Outstanding New Faculty Award last year. Easing in the side door, he attempted to blend in with the surroundings and sit down unnoticed. However, the faculty seemed to have anticipated his arrival! He was stunned by the good-natured applause that broke out as he entered. An explanation was offered immediately: "Congratulations, Dr. Forrest. You have just been selected as the new ASEE Campus Representative. You will take over for Dr. Smith when she leaves this June."

The Response

Although Pat was not especially excited over his new position, neither was he upset. During his annual evaluation and review with the department head, the department head had complimented Pat on his initial success in attracting research funds. Everything seemed to be going well, he had told Pat. If he handled the job wisely, the Campus Representative position would probably not take much time and would add another dimension to his resume. After a few years, the position would probably pass to another junior faculty member. Before dismissing the subject, the department head had suggested that Pat contact Dr. Peg Smith before she left the campus to find out what she had been doing in the position.

Pat was an especially talented young faculty member, but he often procrastinated on things that did not directly relate to his research. Peg Smith left campus a few days earlier than had been anticipated, and Pat never discussed the campus representative position with her. In the middle of the summer, however, he contacted the ASEE office in Washington and they mailed him a *Campus Representative Program Operating Manual*, along with some other information. As he browsed through the manual, he was alarmed at what he found in the section entitled "What is Expected of You as an ASEE Campus Representative." Immediately, he picked up the phone and called his friend Jim, who had served a few years as a Campus Representative for another state university. "Don't be too concerned," Jim said. "The main thing they really want you to do is to contact new faculty and invite them to join. Get a few people to present papers at a regional or national conference - which some people will do whether you ask them or not. If you get a chance, attend an conference."

Placing the phone back on the desk, Pat took a few minutes to pencil in plans for the next few years. He would request funding to attend the next national meeting - that should take care of conferences until the position passed to someone else. He set a date for sending out an e-mail message to all new faculty in September. A short e-mail message should be sufficient - he decided that new faculty members would not want to be badgered by a personal visit anyway. A second e-mail message would be sent to all other engineering faculty telling them who their Campus Rep was - again, that would be much less time-consuming and almost as effective as a personal visit. A third e-mail message later in the year would remind everyone about conferences. Jim said he had never sent in an activity report - there would be no need to bring this to the dean's attention anyway. Pat decided that he would repeat these items for a few years and then tell the next person how to handle the job. Everything was under control!

The Study

Several years later, Sandy Marsh sat across from Dean Silver, whose eyebrows were protruding in that unique way that showed he was searching for the best way to enlist help in launching a new project. "Sandy, do you remember a few years ago when the college was experiencing the first waves of the revival in teaching? Not long after that, a camaraderie among the faculty developed that really made me look forward to my work and enabled me to enjoy my associations here. The idea for a series of teaching/learning workshops sprang up from somewhere and engineering faculty attended them in surprising numbers. Faculty members were not just enthusiastic; faculty members from this institution were winning awards - just about every year, in fact. Even with the state's new push for careful assessment of teaching, we had no reason for concern. We had even begun a Center of Teaching Excellence that was thriving with the new interest."

Dean Silver paused and gazed thoughtfully out the window before continuing. "Something seems to have happened to the momentum we had gained. Over the last couple of years, there have been no requests for funds for workshops from any of the departments or other groups. People seem very interested when the subject comes up, but no one has been taking the initiative lately. The last three seminars arranged by the Center have been poorly attended. There have been no awards in the area of teaching in the last few years. Even worse, student assessment of teaching has taken a nose-dive. The community of engineering education that existed a few short years ago seems to have evaporated. I know you must be aware of these things too, because you were so involved a few years ago in these workshops. Anyway, the state is breathing down our neck over this new assessment initiative, and it would be to our benefit to get back to where we were a few years ago. Would you be willing to head up a study to find out what went wrong and suggest how we can get back on track?"

The Discovery

A few weeks later, Sandy Marsh eased into the chair in front of the dean's desk and took a deep breath. Sandy began cautiously, "You may not believe this when I tell you, but I think I have discovered the key to our little slump over the past few years." After pausing significantly, Sandy simply said, "Peg."

"Peg?" inquired the dean.

"Peg Smith." explained Sandy. "Peg was the ASEE Campus Representative before leaving to take a position at another school. Apparently, when she became the Campus Representative, she was somehow able to energize the college from behind the scenes, so to speak. She began by getting one of the departments to sponsor a workshop on teaching excellence. Someone apparently agreed to sponsor a low-cost luncheon and the turnout surprised everyone. A dynamic speaker stimulated the interest of many of those who attended. In the years that followed she started a newsletter and got a discussion group started. The discussion group often continued the discussion electronically and it was not unusual for new people to get involved."

"Peg really believed that ASEE will benefit every faculty member; and in fact, that ASEE is a gateway to information vital to any faculty member who wants to achieve excellence in his or her job. She had an unusual technique for talking to people personally. She found out a faculty member's interest and showed him or her how ASEE could play a part in expanding that interest. After a visit from Peg, most faculty members were more likely to read a letter or a newsletter or an e-mail message that came from her.

"Peg even got the dean (your predecessor) interested. She constantly kept the dean informed about ASEE activities. As a result, the dean was active. The dean made sure other faculty had opportunities to take part in ASEE activities. She got the dean to appoint a committee every year to nominate someone for this award or that award. There was always a good candidate because she spent time encouraging various faculty members to do this or that to qualify them for a particular award. Several people told me that they would have never been in position to win an award except that Peg persuaded them to try this or that to improve their teaching or research, and later they won an award for their efforts.

"Based on what people have told me over the last few weeks, I could list much more that she did, mostly from behind the scenes. However, the main thing seems to be that she served as a catalyst for enthusiasm and things spiraled outward from there. Until I started asking questions, no one really had identified what a significant part she played in creating that environment. It seems that many of the exciting things that were going on and the high level of participation in ASEE stemmed from the momentum created by this atmosphere of anticipation. It wasn't so much that she asked people to join and participate: once the momentum got started, many faculty members actually wanted to be a part of it.

"The position of ASEE Campus Representative over the past few years since Peg's departure has been held by bright young faculty members who have had pressures from other areas strongly competing for the time they need to spend on the Campus Rep position. They were not sold on what ASEE could do for them, so it was difficult for them to be motivated to talk to other people about becoming members or renewing their membership. No one person really knew what Peg was doing behind the scenes, or how important a role she played, so it was difficult for anyone to continue her work.

"Although I had never thought much about this before, *much was lost without an effective ASEE Campus Representative.*"

Summary

A Campus Representative has the opportunity to occupy a strong leadership role both at the departmental and college levels. Depending on the school and the personal characteristics of the Campus Representative, the Campus Representative can be very visible in this leadership role or may instead work largely behind the scenes. In either case, a Campus Representative can make a strong impact on engineering education. Without an effective Campus Representative, this opportunity would be lost.

Ideally, a Campus Representative should be a person who is personally motivated to promote engineering education. It is important that he or she understand and believe in the benefits offered by ASEE such as publications (*Prism*, *Journal of Engineering Education*, *Directory of Engineering and Engineering Technology Undergraduate Programs*, and *Directory of Engineering Graduate Studies and Research*), meetings and conferences (Section meetings, National conferences, technical sessions offered by various professional interest divisions), projects such as Summer Faculty Fellowships, and national and sectional awards. Through a vision of how these can positively impact the activities of faculty members and the education of their students, a Campus Representative can more effectively communicate this vision to fellow faculty members. Finally, it should be realized that effectiveness in promoting engineering education depends on a wisely managed time commitment.

In the above narrative, phrases like "community of engineering education," "catalyst of enthusiasm," and "atmosphere of anticipation" indicate that generating enthusiasm about engineering education can be especially beneficial to the overall objectives of a Campus Representative. An atmosphere of enthusiasm is a key ingredient for increasing *and sustaining* faculty involvement and a Campus Representative can play a significant role in creating this atmosphere.

As an example of what can be done to generate interest in engineering education, consider some of the initiatives implemented at The Citadel, beginning in 1990. These include an Excellence in Engineering Education Luncheon Series, a newsletter, annual faculty retreats, Communication across the Curriculum (CAC) seminars, and a stronger institutional commitment to participation in ASEE conferences. The luncheon series has been a significant mechanism for promoting faculty interest in topics such as effective teaching, teaching learning disabled students, cooperative learning, using Mathcad in engineering classes, and other subjects. A free meal (cost of \$5 - \$7 per person), funded by the Dean of Graduate and Professional Studies, serves as excellent "bait" to attract faculty to the meeting. A newsletter edited by the Campus Representative serves as an opportunity to highlight some of the outstanding articles appearing in the *Prism* and the *Journal of Engineering Education* and to encourage engineering faculty to attend conferences or renew their membership. Interaction among faculty in a casual setting is provided at the breakfast. Involvement in ASEE is formally planned during departmental faculty retreats. A flow of ideas between engineering faculty and non-engineering faculty takes place at CAC seminars. Some of the initiatives are directed to all engineering faculty; others are limited to a subset of the engineering faculty (such as a department), but all are designed to stimulate interest in some area of engineering education. The Campus Representative may be either directly or indirectly involved in organizing and/or promoting the event, but interest in engineering education is achieved in either case. It appears that a higher level of involvement in ASEE has been achieved in conjunction with the interest created through these initiatives. For example, since beginning to implement these type of initiatives in 1990, attendance at the annual Section meeting has improved dramatically: attendance was generally less than 10 percent prior to 1990 but in the last seven years attendance of engineering faculty at Section meetings has ranged from 30 to 100 percent.

One of the advantages of creating the proper environment is that faculty members may be more inclined to become ASEE members or remain active in ASEE as they more closely observe or experience the type of activity from which they can benefit. Nonetheless, contacting faculty members is crucial to increasing the number of active faculty members in ASEE. Personal contact may be very valuable, particularly for new faculty. However, letters, e-mail, newsletters and other methods may also be helpful.

Finally, it is always worthwhile for a Campus Representative to develop a positive relationship with the dean (and department heads, etc.). Keeping the dean well-informed and interested may help gain support for participation in ASEE activities. The dean's support is also valuable for promoting awards for deserving faculty members.

Concluding Comments

Without an effective Campus Representative, much would be lost. The type of environment that leads to a strong, healthy community of engineering educators may not flourish without an active, interested person to energize it. Interest in engineering education and participation in ASEE can decline. The overall effectiveness of engineering educators may be adversely impacted. In contrast, a Campus Representative can be a "catalyst for enthusiasm" to encourage engineering educators to become more actively involved. Further, a Campus Representative can make a significant and lasting contribution to the college's response to pressures from state and national accreditation organizations (e.g., ABET 2000) to more thoroughly assess teaching effectiveness. While this paper presents only relatively few of the many ideas and tips for becoming a more effective Campus Representative, it is hoped that it will help Campus Representatives develop additional ideas that will positively impact engineering education.

Bibliographical Information

KENNETH P. BRANNAN is an associate professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering at The Citadel. An active member of ASEE, Dr. Brannan is Secretary-Treasurer for the Southeastern Section and the ASEE Campus Representative at The Citadel. He was co-recipient of the Thomas C. Evans Instructional Paper Award for 1990. He holds B.C.E. and M.S. degrees from Auburn University and a Ph.D. degree from Virginia Tech. Dr. Brannan is a registered professional engineer in Alabama and South Carolina.