

## Shake the Tree

The following paragraphs are excerpts from an **Open Letter to CSME Faculty Advisors** that was circulated in a package mailed to the department heads of mechanical engineering programmes in Canadian universities. To my disappointment, the response has been nonexistent. It is therefore reproduced here.

The current executive of CSME is engaged in an effort to revitalise and refocus the CSME so that it remains a forceful voice for the discipline in these times of change. No society can flourish without membership. The current membership must always ensure there is continuity by encouraging new members. The natural sources for new members are universities and technical colleges. This is why the role of Faculty Advisor is of critical importance to the continuity of the CSME.

While working in Europe I have discovered that there is no national society of mechanical engineers in Austria. Whether this is perceived as a disadvantage for professionals, or not, depends on one's perspective. However, for students of mechanical engineering the disadvantage is clear. In Canada, the competition for membership comes from the ASME. Some argue that the CSME should join the ASME and operate within the larger infrastructure. I am personally opposed to this as the interests of Canadian mechanical engineers, particularly students, could never be served better by a non-Canadian society, regardless of size and wealth.

The benefits of student membership in the CSME should be uniform throughout Canada. Membership should give students the opportunity to meet with others in their community who have similar interests in mechanical engineering. At the local level Student Sections should provide opportunities for informal discussions, guest speakers, plant tours, social functions and mentoring. Students should have the opportunity to meet with mechanical engineering leaders, network with peers, and find help in successfully pursuing their careers as young mechanical engineers. At the national level a portion of the CSME annual general meeting (AGM) is devoted to student affairs ideally giving students a voice in the direction of the society. Moreover, a national student design competition is held during the technical sessions of the *CSME Forum* and *CANCAM*. A student paper competition is also being planned.

Benefits should be uniform throughout Canada, but they are not. Students attending a university in a region where there is an active Student Section stand to benefit more from their membership than those who do not. This not only shuts out some deserving students from benefits at the local level, but can also impede them from those at the national level because of the lack of direct access to the mentoring from more senior students and Faculty Advisors.

As an undergraduate and graduate student, as well as a fledgling professional, my membership in the CSME has served me very well. However, at McGill there was no CSME Student Section and no Faculty Advisor. I was fortunate in that my Ph.D. supervisor was intimately connected as the editor of CSME Transactions. Still, I had never even heard of the CSME student design competition until I attended my first CSME Forum. I learned, first hand, why the role of Faculty Advisor is crucial both to the development of novice mechanical engineering professionals and to the CSME itself!

To correct this imbalance we need to have active Student Sections in more universities. To do this we need a higher profile. To achieve the higher profile we need Faculty Advisors where there are none. In universities where there is a Faculty Advisor, but no Student Section we

need the Faculty Advisor to be more active in generating student awareness and interest in establishing a Student Section.

I personally appeal to you to strengthen the CSME by actively supporting your Student Section. If there is no Section, provide an opportunity for interested students to meet and organise one. You can make a great difference by being involved in planning, organising and participating in Section activities; by recruiting new members and reminding others to renew their memberships. We draw strength from our membership. We need your help to serve them better.

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