

Open Letter from the Chair of Student Affairs

Greetings to one-and-all from the mountains of Sud-Oststeiermark, Austria. Austria?? Life for mechanical engineers in Canada at the end of the second millenium can be complicated. Let me explain.

I was born and raised in Montreal, engineered at McGill University. That is, I went through three iterations in the McGill design cycle: B.Eng., 1995; M.Eng., 1996; Ph.D. 1999. My research interests are kinematics and dynamics of robotic mechanical systems and mechatronics. My initial connection with Austria in 1994 was purely academic. Over the years, contacts turned to friendships (that is not to say I don't have contacts and friends in Canada, I'm just setting things up for my pitch). Near the end of my Ph.D. studies I was presented with two tantalizing job offers. One possibility was a tenure-track position as an assistant professor in the mechanical engineering department of a famous Canadian university. The other possibility was to be a research scientist, on a contractual basis, at a famous Austrian university. The job in Austria offered substantial opportunities for professional development as well as more flexibility, while the one in Canada offered stability and permanence. Which would you choose? I hope that at the end of my work in Austria there will be opportunities for me in Canada. I surely miss my home, friends and family.

Each year many new Canadian mechanical engineers are presented with similar choices. What can be done to stop Canada from bleeding mechanical engineers. Well, I don't know for sure. Certainly, one pro-active step is to associate with like-minded mechanical engineers and work towards more and better opportunities in Canada. We already have such a formal society, the CSME (which, of course, stands for the Canadian Society for Mechanical Engineering, note the subtle difference from the American Society of Mechanical Engineers...what a remarkable allegory!).

Until I came to Austria I was prepared to take organizations, such as the CSME, for granted. Here I made some interesting observations. Strong analogies can be made between the dynamics of Austrian-German and Canadian-American relations. For example, the one-way flow of Austrian mechanical engineers to Germany. This in itself is perhaps unimportant, but in the larger context, it can only have a negative impact on the development of the profession in Austria. The big difference is that Austria has no national association of professional mechanical engineers. None.

One evening a short while ago a colleague and I went to meet a group of about ten mechanical engineering students at a local pub. They were organizing an association of mechanical engineering students at the Mining University of Leoben (Montanuniversität Leoben). They are doing this without any assistance, whatsoever. There's no faculty advisors, no national student association, no financial support, no infrastructure, nothing. All they have is their own tenacity and the knowledge that the long term benefits for the profession that come from organizing are well worth the hard work. Being witness to their efforts dramatically elevated my level of commitment to the CSME.

Having a high level of commitment to a society and actually accomplishing something worthwhile for it are, sadly, very different things. I propose to fan the flames of student interest in the CSME in regions of the country where it has faded

and to provide a stronger support system for existing thriving student sections. The idea is that if the CSME has a large, motivated and involved student membership then a strong and healthy CSME will be the legacy for the next generation. How am I going to do this? Well, I'm not. At least, not by myself. I need your help! For starters, I'm the sole member of the Standing Committee for Student Affairs. Any volunteers?

What can be done to encourage growth in the student sections? The most obvious thing student members can do is to renew memberships annually and convince colleagues to become members and do likewise. The regular student membership involves annual dues of \$15.00. The *CSME Bulletin* is sent to all members. It contains Society news and articles of a general technical nature as well as historical articles, essays and discussions, like this. Student members may additionally want to subscribe to the *CSME Transactions* with a corresponding increase in annual dues. How much? We'll talk. The *Transactions of the CSME* is an internationally recognized scholarly journal of articles related to all aspects of mechanical engineering.

But, there's got be more in the way of tangible benefits other than reading material. Those students lucky enough to be in a school with an active student section already know what some of those benefits are. They have the opportunity, on a regular basis, to meet with others in their community with similar interests, and are able to keep pace with developments in mechanical engineering. In addition to regular section meetings, the CSME provides financial assistance to arrange for guest speakers from industry, industry tours, films, free BEvERages, etc. Along with various activities at a local level, regional and national functions are encouraged for CSME students. A part of the CSME Annual General Meeting is devoted to student affairs. Moreover, a national Student Design Competition is held during the Annual Meeting as part of the technical sessions. With our new web page, <http://www.members.home.net/csme/>, we are hoping to offer additional benefits. Some page proposals currently on the table focus on job hunting: job opportunity listings, sample CV's, sample cover letters, interview techniques, etc..

What turns turn your crank? How should I know? I just recently made the transition from school to work, but I have a pretty good idea of what students nearing the end of their studies have on their minds. Still, your input is needed. The CSME is, after all, your society. If it isn't yet, then join. Learn things about engineering, life, the universe and everything that otherwise you would probably miss out on. I invite any dialogue on the CSME. Get in touch, let's talk!

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