

Editorial | Professional Scholarships to Structures 2012 Congress

By Taka Kimura, P.E., M. ASCE, F. SEI



Sustainability is a buzzword applied to a variety of practices from recycling to smart forestry – but have you ever thought about how the term applies to our profession? Like the *lumber* in smart forestry, *engineering expertise* is a resource that must continually be replenished and nurtured. While a good engineering education provides a solid base of knowledge, an engineer must continually keep abreast of the current state of practice and have a wide network of colleagues to be truly effective. Developing these traits is a daunting task, especially for those who are new to the profession.

To assist young structural engineers in their efforts to continually progress beyond book knowledge, the Structural Engineering Institute's (SEI) Young Professionals Committee has developed a scholarship program for attendance at the annual Structures Congress. Through the scholarship program, SEI granted eight recipients financial assistance – five recipients received complimentary registration and three received partial travel assistance in addition to complimentary registration. The scholarships were awarded based on financial need, professional involvement, and an essay. This was the program's pilot year, with scholarships awarded to Andy Coughlin, Rafael Gomes de Oliveira, Emily Guglielmo, Linda Kaplan, Chad Schrand, Ashley Thrall, Laura Whitehurst, and Frances Yang.

In addition to providing scholarships to the 2012 Structures Congress, the Congress planners placed an emphasis on increasing the involvement of all young professionals and students in attendance by offering the following programs and events directly aimed at engaging them:

- *Welcome and Walking Tour* – After a brief overview of the conference, students participated on a walking tour of two local structural engineering offices.
- *Meet the Leaders Breakfast* – SEI leaders introduced themselves and joined the students and young professionals for breakfast.
- *School to World 101 Session* – Experienced engineers gave real world advice and answered questions for students through an engaging and fun “speed dating” format.
- *Young Professionals Mixer* – A cocktail hour provided the students and young professionals an opportunity to network with SEI leaders.
- *Student Structural Design Competition Presentations* – Winning teams from the annual SEI Student Structural Design Competition presented their award-winning projects.
- Panel discussion on *Creative, Collaborative, and Communicative: Perspectives on Developing a Future Generation of Engineering Leaders* – A panel of young professionals discussed the leadership challenges for the next generation of structural engineers.

The scholarships and the targeted events were a resounding success, with record numbers of students and young professionals attending this year's Congress. I had the pleasure of participating in most of the above Congress activities and was impressed with the insightfulness, ambition, and overall caliber of the young professionals and students with whom I interacted. They wanted to gain knowledge, build their networks, and learn from others; and they wasted no time in making the most of their opportunity. Feedback from the scholarship recipients was overwhelmingly positive, and included the following:

I feel that my participation at Structures Congress was a potentially career altering experience for me. My involvement with other professionals and on ASCE committees would never have evolved without the Young Professional Scholarship.

– Emily Guglielmo, Martin/Martin, Inc.

I hope that this involvement will allow me to continue to attend conferences in the future with the support of my company, but I also plan to petition our leadership to allow other young engineers the chance to experience national conferences early in their careers. I truly believe that this is an important facet of a young engineer's career development.

– Laura Whitehurst, Walter P Moore

The Meet the Leaders Breakfast and Young Professionals Mixer on Thursday made the Congress much more approachable for those new to the profession and will make it more likely for them to return.

– Chad Schrand, CCS Group

With this year's success, SEI intends to continue the Structures Congress Scholarship Program, and to improve it for future Congresses. (If you are a young professional interested in applying for the Structures 2013 Congress scholarship, visit www.asce.org/sei for details.) In fact, I was glad to discover that Linda Kaplan, one of the scholarship recipients and an ambitious bridge designer with Gannett Fleming, will be chairing the committee planning the student and young professional events for the 2013 Structures Congress in Pittsburgh. Her experiences at this year's Congress provided her with good insight toward improving the program for next year.

So the next time you're at the Structures Congress – or any other conference for that matter – do yourself and the profession a favor. If you're just starting out as a structural engineer, do more than just attend sessions and listen to presentations. Gaining technical information is important, but you can always read the conference proceedings when you get home. The real benefit of any conference lies in the industry leaders with their wealth of experience, who are there in the same room. Take the extra step to meet these people. If you enjoyed a presentation, talk to the presenter during one of the breaks. At meals and receptions, sit with people you don't know and get to know them. Attend a committee meeting that deals with a topic of interest. Make the effort to meet people and get actively involved in the host organization.

If you are a seasoned structural engineer, do more than just reconnect with old colleagues. Search out young, talented individuals looking for a foothold in the profession. Make time for those who approach you. If you don't have the time to spare at the moment, give them your contact information or offer to contact them later – and be sure to follow through.

Whether you're a seasoned veteran or new to the profession, the contacts you make will be invaluable. It takes time and effort, but it's well worth it!■



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