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ESTABLISHMENT AND INVOLVEMENT  
OF STUDENT CHAPTERS IN CERTIFICATION  
by Richard C. Jaffeson

In addition to utilization and encouragement of regional chapters and technical divisions to support certification, as mentioned in recent articles (see list below), student entities may also engage in forms of beneficial involvement. This frequently occurs at the college level where the terminal degree for practice is obtained, and represents one department where there are sufficient numbers, or alternatively student chapters could be arranged through similar educational institutions collectively within a city or state.

Such student chapters could be created with guidance and assistance from the national office by member faculty, interested students, or elected officers from the surrounding regional chapter. Structure and functions should parallel those typically found in any chapter with officers, meetings, newsletters, papers, awards, and websites.

As mentioned in an article on chapter involvement November 12, 2009,

"The national office should issue guidelines on chapter formation with specifications for number of members/designates, location, bylaws, and ability to offer services."

"The association annual conference would afford opportunities for national staff to interact with and instruct representatives from chapters and divisions regarding certification issues."

Note: Substitute "student chapter" for "chapter" above.

Of additional importance, this may be the first time at the start of their careers when individuals become aware of and exposed to associations in general, and positive experiences could result in commencing a life-time of involvement.

Obviously, students do not obtain certification, but through the student chapters they become aware of its existence and benefits, and should be instilled with an interest to advance and obtain recognition when it is possible. As students, they understand how important it is to earn a degree (diploma, certificate, or license), and similarly that same desire should transfer to certification as yet another accomplishment and the next step in professional recognition, often highly desired especially at the beginning of a career when credentials are in demand and sparsely available.

Many associations frequently offer general or special membership at reduce rates or free when enrolled as a full-time student to encourage current participation and future involvement. There also could be entry-level designations at reduced rates compared to regular certification and specializations. Upon graduation and evidence of obtaining permanent career-related employment, sometimes an entry-level category is "automatically" awarded. Often exams are not given with entry-level categories because students recently completed degree requirements and proceeded through extensive testing in many formats over several years.

Unlike chapters and divisions which have seasoned practitioners with designations who can assist with the certification process, students are generally for the first time being exposed to the association and certification. It is not expected for students to engage directly in numerous certification support activities since they lack a designation, but rather they should achieve a greater appreciation of available recognition and attributes of professionalism gained through chapter participation.

However, in general at national meetings, student representatives could be invited to assist in monitoring exams, present papers at student sessions, prepare poster exhibits, assemble registration materials, distribute items to participants, and form and attend a national student council.

Such activities, even as students, may eventually contribute to professional development point systems which some designations include as part of documentation requirements for certification.

Students represent the future of any association, and they are easily identified early at the beginning of the profession and recruitment streams. Clearly, they are an important source of new members and designates, and it is beneficial to establish a positive first impression of the association and certification to create a life-time of career involvement and participation.