

## The History of S-PACs — A Professional Path for Students

The Student Professional Awareness Conference (S-PAC) Program exists as a result of mavericks who persevered in a mission on behalf of student career needs. It was developed for students who aspired to make engineering a life-long career in a period when engineering was changing drastically and employment environments deviated from professionalism.

In the 1960's, engineers became engulfed in serious economic and career problems. Members of IEEE voted to revise their constitution to include non-technical professional activities within its predominantly technical focus.

The idea for S-PACs was initiated at a Student Activities Committee Meeting in 1976. Student member S. J. Malysko asked a simple question, "What is IEEE doing for students in its new Professional Activities Program — PAP?" The answer was, "Not very much."

As an industrial representative of SAC, Larry Dwon proposed that a SAC sub-committee be established to develop an effective student activity within IEEE PAP. A sub-committee of Larry Dwon, B. Prasad, S. J. Malysko, and E. Tichy was established with Larry as the chairman. Under Larry's leadership, the SPAC Program was conceived and structured. The foundation for SPACs was Larry's long experience with pre-college engineering guidance programs within IEEE, the Engineers Council for Professional development (ECPD), and activities associated with Age Discrimination and Engineering Education and Accreditation. The results of this sub-committee was a proposal to provide a new student program to the United States Activities Board (USAB) for their consideration.



Larry Dwon's term on SAC expired in 1977. Dr. Charles K. Alexander became chairman of the sub-committee and followed through with the proposal to USAB. In subsequent years, Dr. Alexander was successful in influencing USAB to fund the program quite generously.

The next step in the development of this program occurred in 1977 when Hans Cherney and Larry Dwon became co-chairmen of a joint Educational Activities Board (EAB) and IEEE-USAB Career Development Committee (CDC). This committee explored the status of engineering education with regard to teaching students about professionalism,

ethics, and other important career related matters. The results of their study confirmed the need for a program such as SPACs and inspired Hans to vigorously support student programs.

In 1978, R. M. Azeltine, Manager Student Services on IEEE Staff, and Larry Dwon prepared an initial funding request for SPACs. In 1979, Dr Alexander organized the first two S-PACs, one at Vanderbilt and one at Youngstown State University. At Vanderbilt, the conference was completed in one session. At YSU, each speaker gave a presentation on different days in a progressive format. The Vanderbilt format was adapted as a model for future conferences.

In 1979, Hans Cherney was elected Director of Region 1. In this capacity, Hans gave SPACs a high priority by allocating significant funds to the program. This, and his untiring promotion of the program, resulted in outstanding results in Region 1 during the early years of this program.

The next major step in the development of this program took place in January 1984 when a new Student Awareness Task Force met to establish criteria for a successful and ongoing student awareness activity. Chaired by Larry Dwon, task force members Hans Cherney, Aaron Collins, Jim Watson and Joseph Wiencko, Jr. defined program details and recommended a standing committee be established under USAB.

Chairpersons for the SPAC Committee have been:

1985-1987 Larry Dwon  
1988-1989 Charles Alexander  
1990-1991 Jim Leonard  
1992-1994 Cecelia Jankowski  
1995-1996 John Wright  
1997-1998 Loren Lacy  
1999-2002 Julie Gaevart  
2003-2004 Louis Lovas  
2005-2006 John Paserba

In the 23 years (1979-2002) of this program, 598 S-PACs have been hosted for thousands of students at 183 different Colleges and Universities in Regions 1-6. Regions 7-10 have also completed many conferences under the support of the Regional Activities Board and the Student Activities Committee.

The success of the SPAC program lead to the development of a similar program for practicing engineers and other technical professionals called Member Professional Awareness Conferences (M-PACs). Based on a proposal by Larry Dwon to IEEE-USAB in 1990, a committee was formed to explore a program called Professional Awareness for Section Engineers (PASE). Several successful PASE events were held on a trial basis with funding from the IEEE-USAB SPAC Committee.

In 1992, Jim Watson chaired a committee with Dr. Charles Alexander, Joel Snyder and Jim Leonard to formally structure a professional awareness program for practicing professionals. The M-PAC program was the outcome of this committee, and Jim Leonard assumed the responsibility of program implementation.

The development of these major programs with the focus on non-technical skills was not an easy task. Many have contributed their time, talents, and experience to the success of this program over the past 25 years.

However, the one single individual who could be considered as the Father of S-PACs and M-PACs is Larry Dwon. In addition to his extensive involvement in the early development of these programs, Larry was a speaker at 125 S-PACs before retiring as a national speaker.

As an experienced maverick, Larry's foresight and deliberate perseverance made it possible to establish a non-technical program for students in an organization that is primarily focused on technical issues. Thousands of students and practicing professionals have greatly enhanced their careers by participating in these programs.

This Student Professional Awareness Conference historical summary is provided by Jim Watson from information by Larry Dwon and many others associated with this program.

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