Worldwide student involvement in human factors and ergonomics societies: What can HFESA learn?

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1. Introduction

Involvement of students in professional societies has been demonstrated to positively impact on their future professional development and identities (Astin, 1984). Actively involved student members are more likely to develop strong, dynamic, and ongoing relationships with that society. Currently, the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society of Australia (HFESA) has a paucity of student members being attracted to the Society. In November 2014, HFESA had only nine registered 'full-time' students. The Society has raised this as an issue affecting its legacy, and is seeking to develop strategies to encourage an increase in student membership and active student participation. This research aims to examine student involvement in human factors and ergonomics (HF/E) societies around the world, in order to determine what HFESA could learn to increase involvement of student members.

2. Method

A survey was designed using the online platform KeySurvey. With written support from the Executive Committee of the International Ergonomics Association (IEA) and the President of HFESA, the 48 IEA federated societies were sent an invitation to participate in the survey via email. A follow-up email was sent two weeks later. The survey explored a range of issues related to student membership and support, including: the percentage of current members that are considered to be 'students'; the nature of student members' studies; how students are integrated into conferences and boards; and the benefits that students receive by being actively involved in activities within the society.

3. Results

Results show the nature of student support in other IEA federated societies. The research found that student support and involvement between IEA federated societies were varied in terms of the number of student memberships and opportunities available to students. The comparative positioning of HFESA to other IEA federated societies was demonstrated. Suggestions for how HFESA may support, recruit and involve student members were subsequently developed.

4. Discussion

The nature of student recruitment and involvement appears to vary across IEA federated societies. Aspects of active student involvement within society activities, opportunities for mentorship, student specific activities at formal society events and conferences, and peer networking may strengthen student involvement within IEA federated societies. Further, broadening the definitions of 'student members' to include undergraduates and part-time students may increase the membership and participation of students within societies. By further considering the needs of students, HFESA will nurture the future of both the Society and the profession.

References