

REGINA ENGINEERING STUDENTS' SOCIETY

Canadian Federation of Engineering Students Congress

Delegate Report

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CFES Congress 2012 – Whitehorse, YT

In the first week of January, the Regina Engineering Student society deemed me the pleasure of attending the Canadian Federation of Engineering Students' congress in Whitehorse, YT. Whitehorse in January isn't a very popular destination, but much of the conference was spent inside attending plenary sessions and student leadership workshops and roundtables. The insight and information that I was able to receive from professionals, colleagues, and venerable student society legends was invaluable. I look forward to bringing back this newfound knowledge and helping to make the RESS a better student society.

The first session that I attended was entitled Keys to Productive Discussion. Productive discussion is a very important part of working with the RESS. The three keys to remember when communicating with anybody are respect, attitude and preparation. Respect is the most important one, and the most self-explanatory. If the members of a discussion don't respect one another, then nothing productive will ever be accomplished. The second key is attitude. In a discussion, each party has the needs that he or she wants, but it is important to remember not to get selfish or personal. A level head must be kept, as well as a strong view towards the end goal. The third and final key is preparation. End goals can be achieved much faster if you enter it well prepared, especially if the discussion gets complicated and good notes are taken during.

I attended a session called Interacting with Other Groups. The most important idea that I took away from this session was the idea of a communal calendar. A few times this year events have been planned on the same day as other groups around the school. For example, an event was accidentally planned on the same day as the engineering graduation banquet, and the RESS and Engineers without Borders offer free coffee on the same day of the week. Mix-ups like this could be easily avoided with a simple, yet effective, communal calendar. I envision a calendar that many groups would have access to, meaning that scheduling conflicts would no longer occur. The calendar would also act as a centralized information source for any event on or off campus relating to engineering. This would improve communication between all groups on campus and the student body.

The next session that I attended was called Give Yourself a Professional Edge. This session was given by Richard LeClerc, an engineer working for the Canadian Intellectual Property Office. This session outlined why patents and intellectual property are very important. The CIPO has a program where members of the organization will go to post-secondary and higher education institutions to educate the student body about intellectual property and the importance of patents. My colleague Jason Whitelaw is currently in the process of organizing one of these presentations.

I attended a roundtable discussion about managing traditions. In many other schools, dangerous and or publically unacceptable traditions are becoming impossible to mitigate. Inappropriate songs, public drunkenness, or downright illegal behaviour are occurring year after year simply because students feel obligated to participate simply for the fact that they are seen as traditions. Though no harmful traditions

are in place at the University of Regina, I was able to learn what other schools are doing to deal with these traditions.

A session called Reaching a Consensus was put on which outlined a critical thinking strategy called deBono's 6 Hats of Critical Thinking. This strategy works very well for group discussions, and is a way to lead the group into more efficiently reaching an end goal. Through different idea funnels and filters, this method of discussion helps to ensure that all areas are covered when making a group decision. Theoretical hats are worn by each member of the discussion and can be switched randomly or according to a set schedule to help guide discussion. The hats are categorized as follows:

White – neutral, objective, searching for facts

Red – emotional, illogical, ideas based on gut feelings

Black – serious, somber, logically negative, focusses on errors

Yellow – sunny, positive, optimistic, sees opportunities

Green – growth, creative thinking, generates solely new ideas

Blue – calm, controlled, organized, leader of the session

Through different strategies, the wearer of the blue hat is able to lead the discussions through different stages to allow for a more productive group discussion. This is something that I will definitely be willing to bring to the table at our RESS meetings.

I attended two separate sessions called The Big Mistakes, and Risky Business which both had a similar topic and message. The sessions were about what other schools have done wrong in the past, and how they avoided absolute catastrophe. Every now and then, an incident at another school spirals out of control, leaving the student society facing dire consequences. Through quick action and effective damage control, all incidents that we heard about were dealt with without any damaging repercussions. I now feel that if we were ever to face a situation like this that we would be better equipped to handle it.

I attended a session put on by John Streicker, a professional engineer and a climate change specialist. The presentation was entitled Climate Change in the North, and discussed the unique issues that the northern part of the world faces due to climate change. The north experiences small climate change impacts in a large way, seen in the melting of the ice caps and the unthawing of permafrost. The presentation was very enlightening as issues were brought up that are unique to the north, and not always heard of in the rest of the world.

A session called Strategic Planning was put on by a very influential student from the University of British Columbia. He explained in depth how to create a risk assessment portfolio. This tool is used to identify risks, and rank them in order of which need to be dealt with immediately. Through a series of ranking

processes, the most pertinent risks are identified. The RESS is not in desperate need of utilizing a tool like this, however it is absolutely something that may be looked into within the next few years to help mitigate different risks.

The 2012 CFES congress was hugely beneficial to me. A very large amount of material was presented to me in a very short amount of time. I know that I will be able to bring back much of the information and be able to utilise it effectively with the RESS. I look forward to implementing some new ideas, allowing us to better benefit the student body.