



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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Letter From The President

A DIALOGUE WITH OUR FUTURE MEMBERS

BY ERROL CRAMER

THE CONTINUED VIBRANCY AND VITALITY of our organization depends on our success in recruiting and training the best minds as our future generations of members. In fact, we exist as an organization solely as a collection of professionals highly skilled in our respective areas of practice. We need then to be attuned to the college kids of today—the millennials—to hear their voices and let them know the story of our profession and the opportunities waiting. These will be our support staff in the near future and our successors in retirement.

The traditional route for prospective new members currently is through actuarial science programs and these are often, but not exclusively, through schools that have earned the Society of Actuaries' (SOA's) Center of Actuarial Excellence (CAE) certification. One of my most enjoyable duties as SOA president is to meet and dialogue with members and potential future members, and this includes visits to schools and other college events. One such recent event was a weekend seminar and job fair of the Actuarial Students National Association (ASNA) in Montreal which drew 600 college students from across Canada. The theme was aptly named "*Insuring the Future*." I was heartened by the high quality of attendees

who were very knowledgeable, focused and eager to engage in conversation.

From my various meetings with U.S. and Canadian students, three themes typically arise. First, they want to know what employers value most in a job candidate. A key concern is getting that entry level position. My answer is communication skills and business acumen. What distinguishes a professional from a technician is the ability to use judgment in making critical assessments of complex situations. And, to be effective, one needs strong communication skills. At ASNA, the SOA sponsored a case study where teams were presented complex, real-life issues a chief actuary may face, e.g., grow sales of Product X profitability while maintaining risks within established margins, and prepare and make a presentation to the board. Observing the process, I saw team members fully engaged and competing with fierce determination.

Second, they want to know how best to acquire the critical business skills. My answer is that as entry level hires they will be evaluated typically on leadership potential. The lesson I give them for interviews is to demonstrate they are

engaged in the profession and industry (e.g., read the business news), are eager to learn, and ask insightful questions. Some learning may occur based on any business courses taken at school—and the SOA syllabus includes some communication and professionalism opportunities—but adequately acquiring these skills is a career long process. I tell my history of getting involved early on in volunteering for professional and industry organizations, and the subsequent leadership positions I have held on many boards and committees.

Third, they want to know what choices to make for their career tracks. Students often express a lot of angst over having to commit to a track (the SOA has six specialty tracks on the way to becoming an FSA), and fear of locking themselves into a particular area of practice early in their career. I let them know of life's twists and turns that will lead them into many different work opportunities, and that's OK. Also, I let them know that exams are only an initial selection process for entry into membership, and career-long work experience and professional development will equip them for moving onto other tracks as needed. I note that tracks are just one distinguisher, that deeper specialization



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typically occurs with experience—e.g., disability versus long-term care—and that we also have 20 sections for members to share common practice interests.

Another event, the CAE Student Summit, brings together high potential actuarial students who can serve as SOA ambassadors within their schools. Each CAE school worldwide selects two students with demonstrated leadership abilities for a two-day summit in Chicago. The students provide us with a window into how the SOA and the actuarial profession are perceived, and a wealth of ideas on how to better engage students. I presented my own 35-year career story of being an “accidental

attended schools without a specific actuarial program and those who are considering a career change. These events, which are very popular and quickly reach maximum capacity, are open to individuals who have passed at least a couple of SOA exams. The most value I derive from these meetings is from the interactions I have during breaks and the social event. The No. 1 question I get asked is how to get an entry level position. Times have changed since I started. Now it is almost expected that hires would be made only from those who served prior internships with the company or firm, which locks out many of these alternate candidates. I tell them to be forthright in their applications, offer to take an internship as a starting point,

and this leads to an obvious correlation with a wide variety of educational institutions, including highly selective schools.

In summary, I feel heartened at the supply and quality of potential future members we are drawing. My initial pitch to students was, “You will not be the actuary I am, just as I was not the actuary my managers were 35 years ago when I started my career. You have more sophisticated tools from an ever-changing world, and that’s progress.” My new pitch is, “You are a generation attuned to far more advanced technology and speed of change than mine, but, one thing that is a constant and never goes out of style are the leadership and business skills we need to excel as professionals.”

As a final note, discussion of supply is incomplete without consideration of the demand side. The SOA—jointly with the Casualty Actuarial Society (CAS) and the Canadian Institute of Actuaries (CIA)—recently completed the Actuarial Supply/Demand Study for North America, with a wealth of useful information for the actuarial organizations, schools, and most importantly, the students. We will be releasing this information soon, so please look forward to this discussion. **A**

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actuary” from an academia track, crossing from South Africa to the United States, from consulting to the corporate world, from worker to management, and running the gamut of almost every practice area and insurance product line, seizing at each turn opportunities for new endeavors and learning. Feedback was enthusiastically positive—they felt my personal story to be highly engaging and exciting in showing them the profession’s possibilities as real life—and they felt the variety and flexibility in choices along the way to be a compelling selling point for becoming an FSA.

Another set of events, the SOA Candidate Connect meetings, provide an opportunity for those who might come from less traditional routes, including those who

and indicate they don’t expect to get paid based on their exams passed. (Some people I meet are ASAs or are close to achieving their FSA designation, but have zero actuarial experience.)

As a result of the discussions I have had at Candidate Connect events, I have added to my travel agenda visits to some Ivy League and top-tier schools that are not CAE designated and may not have a specific actuarial program, but certainly have many very intelligent students. From personal experience in my hometown of Chicago, some of the smartest actuaries I know were hired from the University of Chicago and Northwestern University, neither known as actuarial schools. The SOA has a rigorous and selective exam process