



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

Article from:

# The Actuary Magazine

April / May 2015 – Volume 12, Issue 2



Errol Cramer

## Letter From The President

# A GLOBAL VIEW OF THE ACTUARIAL PROFESSION

BY ERROL CRAMER

### I HAVE STRADDLED TWO WORLDS—

South Africa by birth and the United States by choice—with a unique background that has shaped my views on the profession in a global sense. I would like to share with you these perspectives: in particular, why it is of utmost strategic importance that the Society of Actuaries (SOA), a U.S.-based organization, continues to support the inclusion of candidates and membership across the globe and continues to engage actively with its actuarial partners worldwide.

### MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

I started my actuarial career in South Africa and studied under the U.K. actuarial system. A couple of years into my career, I accepted an offer of an actuarial consulting position in the United States. While in South Africa, I had made good study progress and had nearly completed my exams to become a fellow of the Institute of Actuaries (FIA). However, at that time, an FIA would have qualified me only for an ASA from the SOA. I elected instead to transfer to the SOA and retook most of my exams to qualify as an FSA. I felt it necessary to fully establish my credentials as a member of the SOA and as a U.S. practitioner.

Taking a major portion of both sets of exams, I can tell you that they were equally tough!

The SOA now has a Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) with the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries (IFoA), whereby an FSA can become an FIA (and vice versa), subject to certain conditions. This is a good development that enhances the portability of our equivalent credentials. Given the extraordinary quality of our two organizations' educational and validation programs—which we mutually evaluate on a regular basis—I was happy recently to sign a renewal of the MRA which included acceptance of our new General Insurance (GI) track.

For many of us, our most valuable personal financial asset is our SOA credential, which, together with our IFoA partner and a few other selected organizations, represents what I consider the gold standard of actuarial training and credentialing in the world.

Actuaries are well known for our technical prowess. However, what makes us great as professionals is the combination of business acumen and leadership skills applied to our solid technical training. In South Africa, I was fortunate to be given considerable leadership opportunities right at the entry level, something I attribute to a relative shortage then of business managers. It required me at an early age

to learn to manage, to supervise a staff, and to accompany a sales team with the authority to negotiate deals directly with clients. It was invaluable! In meetings with students and candidates, I constantly drive home the importance of developing critical business and leadership skills throughout their careers.

As a candidate under the U.K. system, we were tested on a broad swath of actuarial practice, including life, pensions, retirement and GI. I started my career in pensions, but have spent the bulk of my career in life insurance, working on financial reporting, product development and innovation, regulatory affairs, and mergers and acquisitions (M&A), to name a few. I credit my broad background training, both in the U.K. system and in the SOA, along with my desire to learn continuously throughout my career, with enabling me to move across the range of assignments I've carried. SOA candidates benefit from the choices available to them among the specialty tracks and the (relative) ease of entry that exists where an actuary is committed to new learning.

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### OUR GLOBAL MEMBERSHIP

A surprise coming aboard as SOA president was to discover a conspicuous absence of marketing efforts at attracting candidates outside of North America—and yet, we have a large and growing base of international candidates and members. In large part, this is from China where there is a growing demand for actuaries, and a desire by a select few to attain the high-level SOA credential as a distinguisher. At SOA gatherings, I seek out members from outside North America, or China, to ask, “Why FSA and not an easier and more local pathway?” The most common response is the value of our credential—it’s tough to get, but is among the highest prestige of any actuarial credential in the world!

I am always impressed at the high quality of our international members, but not surprised, as they have actively sought out a rigorous credential that is typically neither required in their country nor studied in their native tongue. I would like to share with you the stories of three new fellows I met at our most recent Fellowship Admissions Course (FAC).

Achille Raoul Sime Lanang, FSA, MAAA, CERA, from Cameroon, studied in France and is now a successful consultant in the United States. He is also our first General Insurance fellow, earned entirely through our new track, an achievement that drew thunderous applause from his fellow graduates! Ahmed Mohamed Abdelrahman,

FSA, from Egypt, worked at Goldman Sachs in London, United Kingdom. He has a Master of Mathematics from the University of Waterloo and a Master of Finance from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Sloan School of Management, in addition to a bachelor’s degree in actuarial science from the American University in Cairo. He has also just been accepted into the Ph.D. program in the Department of Economics at the University of Chicago. He plans to work on social systems to raise economic safety nets globally with great attention to his home country, Egypt. Incredibly, all this at 22 years of age! Finally, Guy Camille Saad, FSA, from Lebanon, has been highly successful in starting his own insurance business in Beirut providing services to the Gulf States.

The advertisement features a dark background with a hand holding a stylus, pointing at a bar chart. The chart consists of four vertical bars of increasing height, each with a percentage label above it: 25% (red), 65% (yellow), 80% (blue), and 100% (green). The bars are outlined in a sketchy, hand-drawn style. To the right of the chart, text encourages tracking CPD earnings while learning, provides a website for more information, and includes a small photo of a person's face.

**CPD ATTESTATION  
IS A SNAP**

25%

65%

80%

100%

Keep track of what you earn ...while you learn.

Visit [soa.org/cpd](http://soa.org/cpd) to learn more.

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All of our new fellows have their own, unique stories to tell. My point is simply that our continued focus on the quality of our credentials leads to the ever increasing diversity of our members and opportunities for actuaries to make a difference around the world. This raises the collective prestige of our credential and benefits us all.

### OUR GLOBAL PARTNERS

Relationships with other actuarial organizations globally are important to us in supporting our global members, but, even more importantly in helping strengthen the value of the actuarial credential worldwide. While we value and cherish our SOA-specific credential—and this is recognized by our employers, clients and publics—the world sees us collectively as a singular actuarial profession.

In addition to upholding the quality of the ASA and FSA designations around the world, the SOA is also committed to the career-long learning programs to all members to develop actuaries. Part of this process is maintaining common actuarial standards through membership and participation (along with 70+ other countries) in the International Actuarial Association (IAA), growing long-term, special relationships with organizations like the Canadian Institute of Actuaries (CIA) (I'm looking forward to celebrating with the CIA on the occasion of their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary), and the IFoA of the United Kingdom; and developing relationships like those with the China Association of Actuaries (CAA). These key global relationships combined represent the majority of credentialed and designated actuaries world-wide. Being committed to professional development for members choosing the ASA

and FSA designation, regardless of where they live and work, requires the SOA to be accountable to local issues important to their market, employers and regulators.

As I write this, I am preparing to depart for an SOA trip to Asia to make connections with members there and learn more about their local issues and how we continue to build and tailor services to members in that region. The actuarial profession has taken me on a personal and professional journey that spans the globe. I invite you to virtually take the same trip in this special international issue of *The Actuary* where several of our actuaries living and working around the world have contributed their ideas and knowledge as examples of the global view of the actuarial profession. Now where is my passport? ▀

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# SOA EXPLORER TOOL

**Find fellow actuaries around the block or around the globe**

The newly-created SOA Explorer Tool is a global map showing you where SOA members, their employers and actuarial universities are located.

To use the SOA Explorer Tool, visit [soa.org](http://soa.org) and sign in as a member.