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What's new in actuarial education and research: Use interactive CD-ROM to find out

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The first in a series of interactive CD-ROM modules titled, "What's New in Actuarial Education and Research," is being distributed to the subscribers of *ARCH*. Distribution is sponsored by *ARCH*, the Education and Research Section, the Committee on Knowledge Extension Research, and ACTEX Publications. The project was supported in part by the William Elliott Chair of Insurance.

The module focuses on the highlights of the 30th Actuarial Research Conference (ARC), at Penn State University, August 1995. Its theme was, "Communicating Educational Topics and Research Results."

This module will be demonstrated at both SOA spring meetings: Session 18 at Marco Island on May 29 and Session 21 at Colorado Springs on June 26.

Purpose of module

ARCs can be an important source of new ideas for practicing actuaries, especially since they involve a free and unfettered exchange. Priorities being what they are, however, few practicing actuaries attend ARCs. This is unfortunate, because practitioners, even those who profess to get lost in actuarial theory, can come away with a good sense of what's new and who is doing it. Of course for some, it is sufficient that many of the papers presented at ARCs are contained in its proceedings. Many practitioners, however, particularly those who lack the relevant background, find it difficult to keep up with research papers.

The CD-ROM module was developed to fill the need for a summary of ARCs' highlights, with an emphasis on the focus of the presentation, communication, and easy access.

Module format

All 37 presentations of the 30th ARC were videotaped, and the highlights of

each talk were digitized and recorded on CD-ROM. This CD-ROM was then used to develop a computer-based, user-friendly multimedia summary of conference highlights.

There are two ways to easily access the highlights of each presentation. The first, which is shown in Figure 1, gives access by clicking the computer mouse on the image of the presenter. Passing the mouse over the image displays the name of the presenter and the title of the presentation.

The second way is through one of the indexes shown in Figure 2. At the top of the screen, the presentations are indexed by research papers, education papers, presenters, and topics. The educators addressed such topics as on-line communication, current educational issues, and instructional design.

The general topics covered by the researchers include credibility, finance and investments, retirement issues, and statistical methods.

Figure 3 shows a typical presentation screen. In this instance, the presenter is discussing the output (left center) of an interactive computer game that simulates the management of an insurance company. When you enter the screen for each of the presentations, the presenter (right center) gives a short statement of the "bottom line" of the talk, and the abstract of the presentation



Figure 1

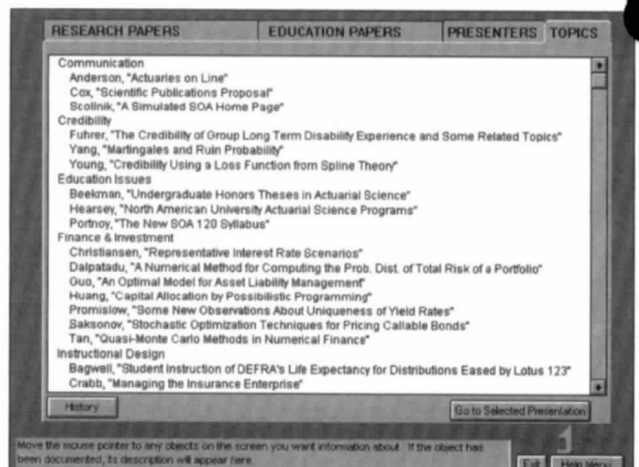


Figure 2

is shown. One can quickly peruse all the talks by staying on a presentation screen just long enough for the speaker to present his or her bottom line.

After being presented with the bottom line, the user can choose other highlights of the talk to review. In this case, there are two other options, "Objective" and "Annual Results."

Equipment requirements

If your desktop or notepad computer is of recent vintage and IBM-compatible, with a CD-ROM player and speakers, you can probably run the module.

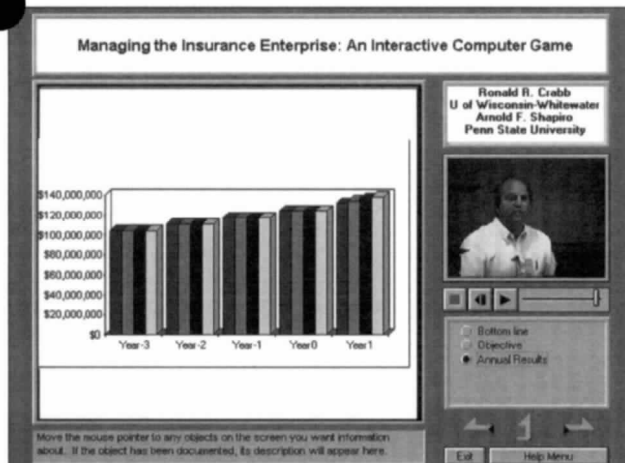


Figure 3

The equipment needed to run the software is readily available: Windows (3.1 or better), an IBM PC or compatible (486 DX2 66 MHZ or better), a CD-ROM player (2X or better), a super VGA monitor, and a sound card (Sound-Blaster Pro or compatible).

The underlying technology has been significantly improved since our first continuing education module in 1991, and ease of use

should make it more accessible. Of course, one test of the usefulness of the module will be the extent to which it helps improve communication between our researchers and our practitioners.

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SOA Foundation solicits grants for math education

The Society of Actuaries Foundation has committed up to \$100,000 to fund the development of tutoring programs that involve actuaries as volunteers.

"Mathematics is a core topic critical to a student's future success," said Harry Panjer, Foundation director of research and education. "We should invest in ensuring the literacy and numeracy of our children, who are valued human capital in the future economy. By helping improve students' ability to learn mathematics, the Foundation can contribute to the overall quality of society. Actuaries are great volunteers and value the importance of the role of basic mathematics in shaping their lives."

The Foundation is soliciting grant applications from local groups to develop a network of math tutors in U.S. and Canadian public elementary schools. Grant applications and information will be sent to all actuarial club presidents and to charter investors of the Foundation. Collaboration and co-funding between school systems, actuarial clubs, businesses, and other

stakeholders in education are encouraged.

The grant proposals should outline network development, tutors' training, support from schools and key organizations, budget, and a reporting and evaluation plan. "We encourage applicants to be creative in designing and organizing their programs to suit local needs and resources," Panjer said.

Up to five projects will be funded for a two-year trial period. These pilot projects will involve actuaries and others in the local community who provide academic support, primarily through individual tutoring for students of all ability levels. The pilot projects will test the effectiveness of tutoring programs and, if successful, become organizational models for long-term programs in other locations.

The application deadline is August 1, 1996. For a brochure describing the objectives and application procedures, contact the SOA Foundation, 475 N. Martingale Road, Suite 800, Schaumburg, IL 60173. Telephone: 847/706-3600; fax: 847/706-3599, or e-mail: 102577.765@compuserve.com

The SOA Foundation fulfills its

mission to "contribute to the understanding and resolution of present and future social and economic problems by investing in innovative research, education, and communication initiatives," primarily through personal financial contributions from the actuarial profession.

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Without change, there is no creativity, growth, progress, nor excitement. Without commitment to change, an organization lacks vision and a real mission. So, here's looking at change, with less fear and more creativity. Angelica Michail is a consultant with National Actuarial Network. She is a member of the SOA Committee on Management and Personal Development and recently earned her Executive MBA from the Peter Drucker Management Center, Claremont Graduate School in Claremont, California.