



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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OPINION

The invisible actuary

by Anna M. Rappaport
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Society of Actuaries

Where do people get their ideas about our profession? Most seem unaware of what we do, and those familiar with the profession often have very skewed ideas about us. I recently attended a non-actuarial business meeting attended mostly by human resources executives. The guest speaker was an actuary. He was introduced with words to the effect that “unlike other actuaries, he is an interesting speaker.” I was incredulous, but even more so when the speaker went along with it. Needless to say, that stereotype is not helping us.

This caricature of somebody who’s kind of a technical nerd, can’t communicate very well, can’t talk, and uses jargon hurts us with our customers. That’s just not a profile of actuaries today. If I could change that perception with the stroke of a wand, it would be to one that portrays us like any other

professionals—savvy, and with a variety of personalities and interests. Frankly, we’re just as interesting as lawyers, managers, or any other profession.

For example, we have a president who sings, and many actuaries run marathons or participate in other amateur athletics, the arts, and even auto racing. One of the most fascinating accomplishments by an actuary is the novella just completed by the former editor of *The Actuary*, Mike Cowell. I’ve read it and it’s wonderful. It deals with complex social issues related to an aging population. Not only is the novella really interesting, it also serves the community in raising these issues.

In addition to having interesting hobbies and outside activities, many actuaries have a strong sense of responsibility and duty to the public, which transcends both their professional work and community participation. Though for the most part invisible to consumers, actuaries

have a duty to plan participants and policyholders. That duty makes us more aware of our public responsibility. The SOA recognized this in its new vision statement adopted in 1996.

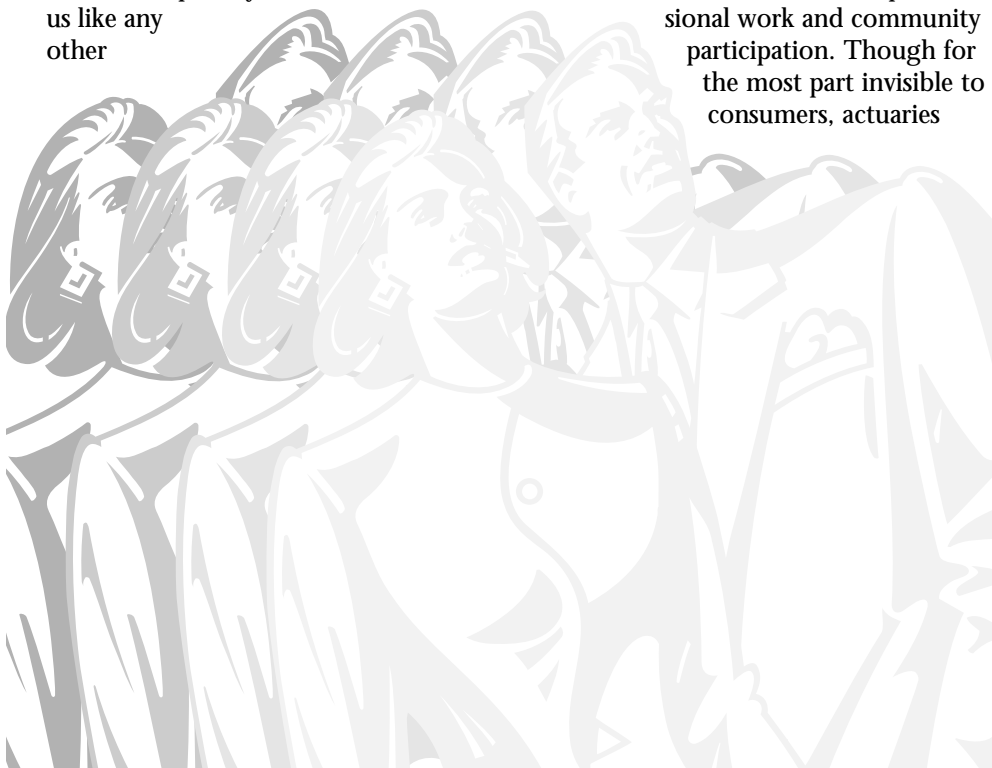
For example, look at the outreach efforts of the new SOA Foundation. It has dedicated itself to using the specialized skills of actuaries to the advantage of all our citizens. Nowhere is that more evident than in the various math tutoring/mentoring programs established and run by actuaries that are being funded by the Foundation’s new grant program.

Jim Lynch of Security Mutual Life Insurance has gotten its actuarial department involved in providing tutors for individual students at the Benjamin Franklin Elementary School in Binghamton, N.Y.

Actuaries from Blue Cross of California and Cigna are involved in a pioneering project to use “telementoring” for Newman Elementary School in Chino, Calif. Because of the distances involved, the mentors reach the students through the Internet.

“The Financial Wizard Program,” the creation of John Hancock’s Mark Newton, originally benefited Boston’s Samuel Mason Elementary School. Now the program, which introduces children in pre-school to grade 5 to the idea of applying math concepts to business, is being considered by other Boston schools.

The Nashville Actuarial Club joined the PENCIL Foundation (Public Education: Nashville Citizens Involved in Leadership) to create the program “Multiples of Success,” providing math tutoring. Alan Pennington and Bill Bryan, of Bryan, Pendleton, Swats & McAllister, have taken the lead here.



In Springfield, Mass., Liberty School has partnered with Mass Mutual to create a pilot project aimed at fourth grade students. Actuaries Richard Breen and Bob Bartholomew helped get it off the ground.

Teresa R. Winer, a self-employed actuary formerly with Life Insurance Co. of Georgia, put together a project using actuaries as one-on-one tutors and as leaders in math clubs and labs at Warren T. Jackson Elementary School in Atlanta.

These are some of the outstanding recent efforts by actuaries, but not all efforts have to be alike. What's critical is to network and open lines of dialogue with people outside our profession. I have been involved with several different activities: the Chicago Network, the Pension Research

Council, the National Academy on Aging, and the Health and Medicine Policy Research Group. Each of these groups brings together diverse perspectives from business leaders, academics, and the community. I would encourage everyone to get involved in groups like these because they're where real people are talking about real issues.

We spend too much time talking to ourselves. We go to a lot of meetings, but they are frequently meetings with other actuaries. If we can be in the places where the issues that we're concerned about are being worked on and talked about, I think we do a lot more good.

Anna M. Rappaport is managing director of William M. Mercer Incorporated in Chicago.

Position open at George Mason

George Mason University, Fairfax, VA, has a tenure-track position open at the rank of assistant or associate professor in the department of mathematical sciences.

Preferred areas of specialization are actuarial science, mathematical finance, numerical analysis, or applied mathematics. Qualifications for actuarial candidates include a doctorate or Fellowship in an actuarial society.

The applicant chosen will teach both undergraduate and graduate students. He or she also will be expected to take a leadership role in expanding the bachelor and master degree programs in either actuarial mathematics or computational and applied mathematics, including recruiting and advising students, coordinating activities with related departments in business or engineering, expanding contact with local industry, and developing external funding. Opportunities for interdisciplinary work and teaching doctoral students exist in the Institute for Computational Sciences and Informatics.

Applications arriving before March 10 will be considered, and late applications will be accepted until the position is filled. Candidates should arrange for a vita, statement of teaching and research interest, and at least three letters of reference to be sent to: Ittai Kan, Chair of Search Committee, Department of Mathematical Sciences, George Mason University, MS 3F2, 4400 University Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030-4444 (e-mail: ikan@gmu.edu).

What's the difference (continued from page 5)

meaning detail-oriented (in part), to intuition, or "big-picture" thinking (labeled "iNtuition" on the MBTI).

These perceptual differences can create significant barriers to effective communication among actuaries. There were gender and cultural differences among the six groups. Female English-speaking Canadian actuaries and both female and male French-speaking Canadian actuaries tended to prefer Sensing, which indicates that they gather information about the world from a practical, down-to-earth perspective by attending to facts. However, male English-speaking Canadian actuaries and male U.S. actuaries tended to prefer iNtuition, suggesting that they perceive information about the world from a wide perspective, attending to the patterns and possibilities. Female U.S. actuaries

were evenly divided between Sensing and iNtuition preferences.

Availability of reports

A report on the Canadian portion of the study is available for \$50. Those wishing copies should contact Nandane Basdeo at the Institute of Insurance and Pension Research, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G1 (telephone: 519/888-4744; fax: 519/746-1875; e-mail, nbasdeo@jeeves.uwaterloo.ca) and request Report # 96-06. A full analysis of the U.S. data has not been completed due to lack of funding.

Mary C. Patrick, Ph.D., is an organizational and educational psychologist who designed and conducted the APRP. She can be reached at 206/803-9028 (e-mail: 103633.2210@compuserve.com).