SPREAD THE WORD

UNIVERSITY OUTREACH PROGRAM

BY LISAMARIE LUKAS

The SOA's UNIVERSITY OUTREACH PROGRAM continues to evolve. Read how the program is connecting with the next generation.

AS CHILDREN, MANY OF US probably dreamed of becoming police officers, doctors, or even the president of the United States. And then, our skills developed and we learned what we really loved to do—prompting us to take another look at what we actually wanted to be when we "grew up."

When did you decide that you wanted to be an actuary? Maybe you were lucky and you found your love of math when you were young and had someone in your life who introduced you to the actuarial profession. But, we know that for many, decisions about future careers are usually made in college—students choose a major (and maybe a minor or two) and that starts them down their eventual career paths.

Armed with this knowledge, the Society of Actuaries has actively been engaging with students on college campuses across North America. Our visits, which are conducted on behalf of the profession, are a great way

What a few of our **featured actuaries** have to say

Simeon Ling, *consultant, Towers Watson;* **John Horvath**, *director, UnitedHealth Group;* **Steve Vernon**, *president, Rest-of-Life Communications; and* **Sunit Patel**, *senior vice president, Fidelity Investments,* commented on the benefits of the University Outreach Program.

Q: How did you get involved in the program?

A: SP: The SOA was going to my alma matter and I thought it would be a great way to give back to both my school and the SOA, both of which were very important to my career.

Q: What about the students you've met has most surprised you?

A: SL: The members of the actuarial club have strong camaraderie and aid one another in the exam process. Last year, one of the candidates that had passed an exam hosted a mini-seminar to help other students who were taking the same exam at a subsequent date. It is great to see future actuaries seeing themselves as on the same team, rather than competing opponents.

JH: The diversity. It was great to see that the actuarial professional has piqued students' interest with a variety of backgrounds.

Q: What do you think is the biggest benefit of the program?

A: SV: Students were able to talk with actuaries to hear what a "day in the life" is like, and to get career planning advice.

SP: It gives students a chance to find out first-hand what it is like to work as an actuary and it gives the SOA an opportunity to dispel some of the stereotypes that still exist about the profession

SL: Helping the students obtain a clear understanding of the SOA and its overall purposes and outlook. Students can see the SOA as more than just an administrator of difficult exams! Also, providing the students with an official roadmap of the exam process is helpful for the students who only hear about it through the rumor mill or through online forums.

THE STUDENTS I MET HAVE ENERGY, AMBITION AND WILLINGNESS TO TRY NEW THINGS—ALWAYS A GOOD COMBINATION FOR THE PROFESSION. – STEVE VERNON

Q: What's the one piece of advice you always share with students?

A: SV: Ask as many questions as you can—become an informed "consumer" of your career.

SP: Be as well rounded as possible. As you go through different experiences, you'll figure out better where your greatest interests are and it will be easier to pursue them if you are well-grounded in various disciplines.

Q: Having met with students, what do you think about the future of the profession?

A: JH: The branding campaign has clearly paid off. It was amazing to see so many students interested in the profession. The profession will see a great deal of up-and-coming talent over the next few years.

SL: I am looking forward to collaborating and working with these aspiring actuaries as they enter the profession and bring their strong work ethic, technological know-how and energy to the profession.

SV: The students I met have energy, ambition and willingness to try new things—always a good combination for the profession.

to connect with students. Since the program started in 2007, we've met with more than 1,300 students, talking with them about the profession and its opportunities—and dispelling some commonly held myths about the education system and exam process along the way. Staff from the SOA's education and marketing/communications teams host the visits, joined by a practicing actuary (or two) who graciously gives his or her time to help students understand what it's really like to be a member of the actuarial profession.

The results speak for themselves—in a post-event survey sent to each participant, we consistently hear that students appreciated our visit, feel more informed about the education and exam system and are likely to recommend that a friend attend a similar session. And, the word must be getting out, as each year the number of requests we receive from schools wanting us to visit far exceeds the number of visits we're able to make.

To meet this increasing demand, we continue to take our "show on the road." This year we visited campuses from California to

What **students** we have met have to say

Joseph P. Feinberg, *University of California at Santa Barbara, class of 2010, is now an actuarial analyst for WellPoint, Inc.;* **Sarah Schachet**, *senior at Wharton, secretary of the Penn Actuarial Society; and* **Matthew Berg**, *senior at Wharton, treasurer of the Penn Actuarial Society,* took a lot of interesting information away with them. They share their thoughts here.

Q: What made you attend the presentation?

A: JF: I decided to attend the presentation because I was interested in a new perspective of the actuarial field. So far in the actuarial club we had had presentations from the companies telling us why their company would be the best to work for, and we had presentations from senior level actuaries (retired or otherwise) who would tell us what kind of challenges the actuarial firms and companies encounter on a large scale. What I had not yet heard, and was interested in hearing from the SOA, was what an actuary does on a task level. Although my schooling prepared me for some of the actuarial exams, we did not yet have any classes that were geared toward teaching actuarial work.

SS: I wanted to attend the presentation to find out more about the professional organization that is responsible for the exam process and for maintaining the credibility and integrity of the FSA designation.

Q: What was the most helpful insight offered?

A: SS: The greatest insight offered during the presentation was about the resilience of the actuarial profession during lean economic times such as the recent recession. In times such as these, it is exciting and fitting to be studying in a field that helps identify, quantify and mitigate the financial impact of risks taken in the business world.

MB: One of the most interesting insights was that this is a profession that, now more than ever, is critical to the mitigation of risk throughout the financial industry. It will be fascinating to see how the actuarial profession evolves as risk management increases in importance.

Q: Did the presentation dispel any myths?

A: SS: The presentation did an excellent job dispelling the idea that actuaries are number-crunching automatons. Instead, the presenters emphasized that actuaries are a group of powerful contributors and leaders in their workplaces because of a depth and breadth of knowledge coupled with strong business acumen.

Q: Was there any advice or information that surprised you?

A: JF: I think the number of companies hiring actuaries was the most shocking piece of information I learned from the presentation. There was a moment when the speakers listed several companies in each of the actuarial fields. Without hesitation, they were able to name about 20 companies, and seemed as though they would have done another 50 had they not had other important things to discuss.

SS: I was impressed by the presenters' thorough explanation of the rationale for the components of the ASA and FSA credentials, particularly about the modules and the DMAC. It's reassuring to know that the SOA makes improvements to the exam process based on the evolving skills necessary for professional success as an actuary.

MB: The real-world experience given by the featured actuary was somewhat surprising in that he was able to easily move from pension work, to actuarial consulting, and then to investment management.

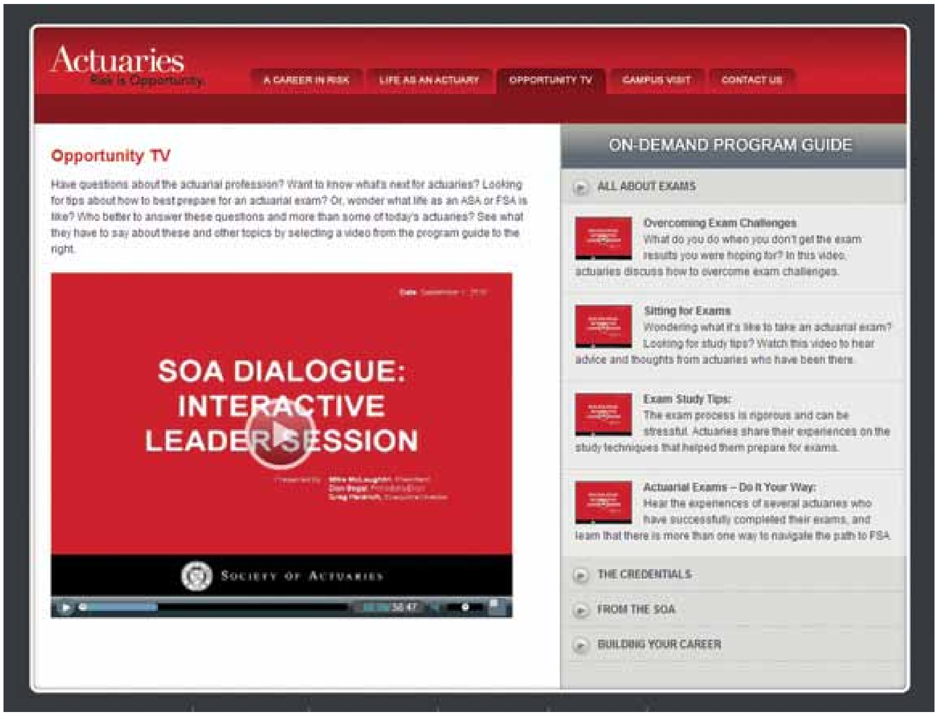
Q: Are you still interested in the profession?

A: SS: I am still very much interested in the profession and excited about the opportunities available to actuaries.

New York City and we've also started building a "virtual" visit program to increase the resources available to students online.

How are we doing that? Over the course of two days of filming, we've captured the contents of a typical visit, which will be used to create a University Outreach video that will be available for download on *www.riskisopportunity.net.* Just as we do during our in-person visits, this video will highlight opportunities for actuaries, share information about the exam and education pathways and offer students the chance to hear directly from practicing actuaries. It's an exciting growth of the University Outreach program that will enable us to introduce even more students to the actuarial profession—and hopefully encourage academically talented, math-oriented college students to pursue their actuarial credentials.

But, the filmed visit won't be the only new material added to the website. We know the way students demand content has evolved—and so we're evolving the website to meet these changing expectations. First, we plan to soon launch an "Opportunity TV"



section of the website, bringing videos like Actuaries in Action and others onto this site so that students have an opportunity to watch them (See illustration above). This content will be a great complement to the filmed visit, allowing students to hear directly from even more actuaries and enabling us to share existing content in a new way.

On the note of connecting students to practicing actuaries, we know that's something they most value about our program. So in the coming weeks, we're launching a new series called "Day In The Life Of" on *riskisopportunity.net.*

This series will feature actuaries at various stages of their careers, from different practice areas and locations, talking about what a day in their life is really like. Students love this perspective, as it helps them understand what it's like to be an actuary in a way that taking exams can't. The participants will share their stories using either a "faux" Twitter account or Outlook calendar—and eventually maybe by recording short videos, too.

And finally, we'll help students learn even more about the SOA University Outreach staff by posting short biographies of the team that attends visits or is featured in the video. It is important to us that students understand the SOA team is approachable and excited about opportunities to talk directly with students and candidates.

Curious? Stay tuned to *riskisopportunity.net* during the coming weeks to learn more and see first-hand the new content we've developed! And of course, we'd love for you to get involved in helping us to build our University Outreach program. If you know a school that might benefit from a visit, let them know about our program and encourage them to reach out to us. And, if you're willing to be a featured actuary or to share a day in your life with students, we'd love to hear from you! Finally, if you've done anything to connect with university students, it'd be great to hear from you—maybe you'll have the next idea for ways we can continue to build this program. A

STUDENTS ARE LISTENING

Our University Outreach program continues to grow and has proven to be a valuable way for us to connect with future members of the profession. What we've learned is that students really appreciate the opportunity to talk with practicing actuaries.

Hearing from one or two actuaries is great, but we want to be able to provide an array of insights and perspectives. So, we're asking—what advice do you have? What's one thing you think we need to make sure to tell students as we travel around the country?

Share your thoughts! Join the conversation at *blog.soa.org*.

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