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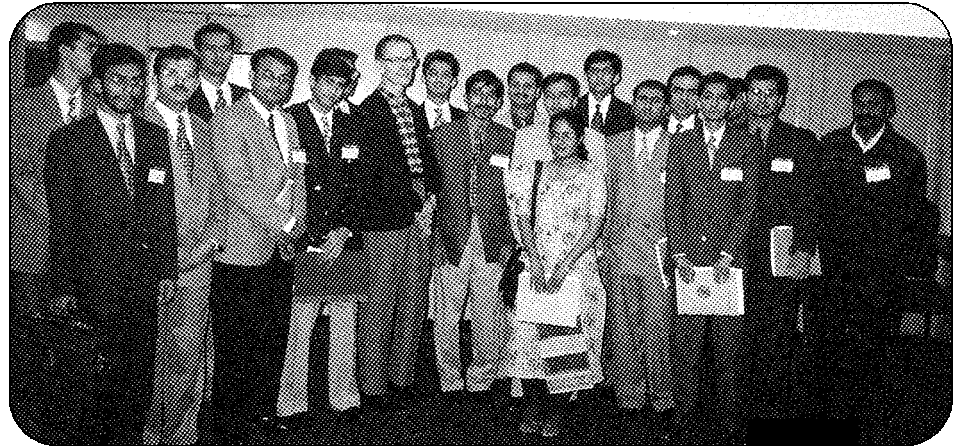
The SOA Takes the Associateship Professional Course to Pakistan

by Linden N. Cole

There were several “firsts” for the Society of Actuaries resulting from a presentation of the Associateship Professional Course in Karachi, Pakistan, on January 23, 2001. First, this was the first time that an Asian language (Urdu, in this case) has been used in the small group part of the case study discussions. Then, this was the first time a required Professionalism course of the SOA has been presented outside of Canada and the United States. Finally, this was the first time that the Society of Actuaries has presented a program of any kind in the country of Pakistan.

Doing all this was made possible by two facts. First, Nauman Cheema, FSA, the SOA ambassador in Pakistan, was available and willing to make all the advance arrangements. Then, I was going to visit Pakistan for personal reasons, relating to a mission high school in the northern part of the country where I taught for two years in the 1950s.

Since I was in the country

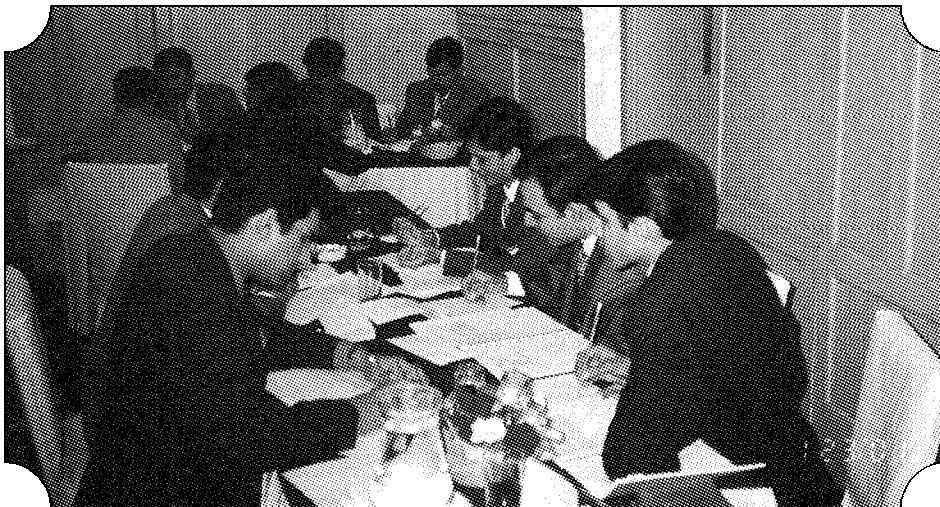


This picture is taken from the Associateship Professionalism Courses in Karachi on January 23, 2001.

anyhow, and since I have experience as a facilitator of both the Associateship Professionalism Course and the Fellowship Admissions Course, it made sense to volunteer to lead the course. Twenty actuarial students in Karachi who were required to pass it for Associateship signed up. Space was rented at the Marriott Hotel in Karachi, and all the other arrangements made. We were ready to go.

The Marriott hotel in Karachi looks a lot like a Marriott hotel anywhere, although the food in the hotel coffee shop has a nice touch of the exotic about it for Americans. Other differences are the excellent level of personal service from attendants on each floor, and the fact that you have to walk through a metal detector to enter the hotel under the watchful eye of an armed guard. I had detected no widespread feeling of insecurity or danger, so this seemed a little like overkill, but apparently there have been incidents in the past that led to these precautions. It's a good idea to be careful.

The twenty students were all on time. After the introductory presentation, they pitched into the first case study on professional ethics with enthusiasm. In addition to three case studies, we had two videos to show, but one proved to be incompatible with local equipment. Since both videos work on American equipment, I would have expected either both to work or neither to work on local equipment. So much for my logical skills.



Small groups hard at work on a case study at the Associateship Professionalism Course in Karachi.

The entire day went well. The participants were eager to learn and eager to discuss. They are an impressive and talented group, and will be a credit to the actuarial profession. In their culture, younger professionals have traditionally not been encouraged to express themselves in professional meetings, which is not so different from the Actuarial Society of America in its early days.

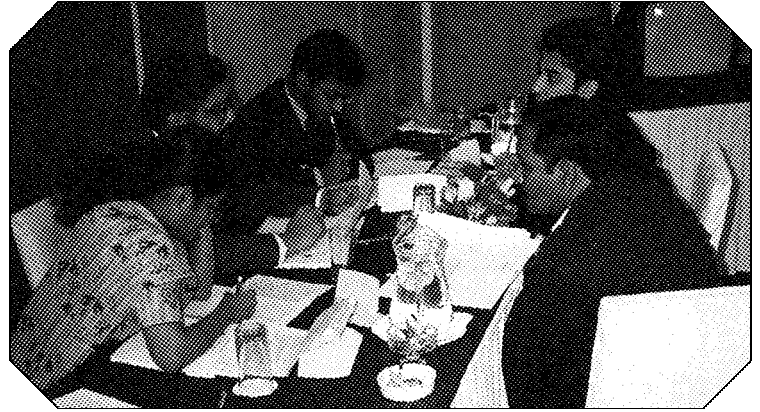
It was a new experience for these young students to be invited and encouraged to give their ideas. If this can be continued there, it will be to everyone's benefit, because their ideas are well presented and well thought out.

At the end of the day, it was clear that everyone had done well and deserved to pass the course. This means that they have met this requirement without having to travel a long distance, a major benefit to them. In terms of meeting educational objectives, the word is that all feedback has been extremely positive. The students feel that they were confronted with real life situations and learned a lot.

They suggest that in the future, the local person should do some

advance work with the SOA case study people (staff or volunteers) and modify the cases to be geared to the local situation. This might not be as simple as it sounds, since those who trained us in the case study method were adamant that each case study must be something that really happened, not something even partly fictional. Still, the suggestion sounds worth pursuing.

It should be feasible for the Society of Actuaries to present the Associateship Professional Course in other countries, providing that some conditions are met. First, there must be someone on the scene who can work with the SOA office and make the advance arrangements. Second, there must be enough participants to make the program worth presenting (20 is certainly more than enough).

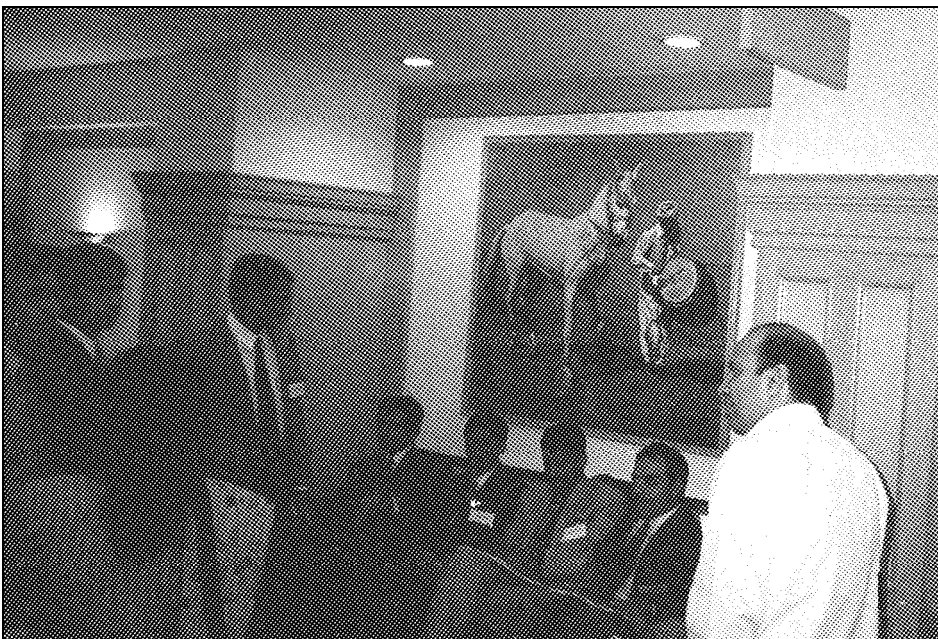


A small group is hard at work as they discuss a case study.

Finally, there must be a willing volunteer available who is trained and experienced as a case study leader. It will be good if more of these programs can be tried in various places until they are no longer viewed as "experiments" but as a normal part of SOA operations.

As a postscript, I was asked to make a presentation on Professionalism to the Pakistan Society of Actuaries the next afternoon. This group is still very small, but will grow rapidly as the current group of students qualify as members of the Society or of the British Institute. After the meeting, there were refreshments and conversation, and then the more senior members adjourned with the speaker to a restaurant called "The Village." There we enjoyed a sumptuous buffet with a dazzling array of food choices, wonderful Pakistani music with harmonium, flute, and tabla, and views looking out across the Arabian Sea. If any reader of this article has the privilege of going to Pakistan and meeting their actuaries, and they invite you to go to dinner with them, DO NOT turn down the invitation! The experience will be an unforgettable one for you, too.

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Here, this particular group is shown talking things over at a break from the case study.