The EDGE

May 2001 Issue

Equity & Diversity in Geoscience & Engineering

Please don't hesitate to give your input...

Send submissions to the DAWEG Newsletter Editor

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DAWEG

Newsletter for the Division for Advancement of Women in Engineering & Geoscience

A Division of the Association of Professional Engineers & Geoscientists of British Columbia

What Counts?

By Cathy Marr, P.Eng.

I was pleased to see that Canada's latest census, the 2001 Census (long form), asks how many hours of unpaid work I do on housework, childcare and eldercare. I'm sure that it will be useful to know that Person 1 in this household spends significantly more hours a week on these activities than Person 2 does. Just as important though is the fact that in Canada we are attempting to measure the time Canadians invest in these activities.

Marilyn Waring, a feminist economist, ex-Member of Parliament and former Chair of the Finance Committee in New Zealand writes, in her book "If Women Counted", that accurate census figures are important as they are used to guide bureaucrats and politicians in making policy decisions. Our own provincial government reminds us that each completed census form in itself will be worth approximately $1,000 in transfer payments.

Historically, nations have focussed on recording data about the work or, more specifically, the paid work that its citizens have engaged in. It is only recently that developed countries such as Canada have started inquiring about the rest of the work undertaken by its citizens.

Our world works by measuring productivity and by determining what has value on the basis of the exchange of money. In fact, Ms. Waring notes the methods by which nations measure productivity and "value" as a whole for their country are specifically set out in the United Nations System of National Accounts. That is how it comes to be that child prostitution, armament production and the drug trade can add value to a country's measure of value, the GDP. In contrast, the unpaid work that people engage in is deemed to have no value when measuring a country's worth and, according to the UN accounting system which countries must adhere to, this work is regarded as unproductive.

An African villager who cooks meals for her family, cares for her children, raises chickens and goats for her family's consumption and fetches water is likely to be officially recorded in her country's census figures as being "at leisure" or, at the very least, "unproductive". As a result, government policy makers might miss the conclusion, for instance, for a village where a member of each family spends, say, four hours each day fetching water, that the investment in a well might result in a significant increase in the total productivity for the entire village.

Ms. Waring argues that a better way of determining "productivity" and, hence, "value" might be to record how people spend their time rather than to rely on recording the exchange of money. She urges us to encourage our politicians to include unpaid work in our census data collection. Canada is listed as a good example of a country that is making progress in this direction.

I am happy to see confirmation that I live in a country where this shift in how we measure value and productivity may be well underway. It occurred to me though, that an important element of unpaid work has been over-looked, as I could not find where I could record my volunteer work on the census form.

Given that many people willingly invest significant hours in one form of volunteering or another, perhaps we should encourage our representatives in government to record this work as well. We might then be in a better position to assess, for instance, how much of the slack is being picked up by the volunteer hours of Canadian citizens as the government funding for education, health care and other areas is reduced.

We might also want to consider that how people invest the precious resource of time is a measure of sorts of what is valued by these same people. Even though we may not all have the same financial resources or earning capability, we are all given the same number of hours each day to invest as we see fit. A person who chooses to reduce their paid work so that they may spend more time raising their children or volunteering in their community would then be seen as a productive member of society even though they make a lower contribution of paid work than others might.

Something to think about as we fill in our 2001 Census forms.

DAWEG Fun Run

By Lianna Mah, P.Eng.

Clear and sunny skies welcomed more than 100 participants to the seventh annual Engineering Feets Fun Run on March 4, 2001, the first weekend of Engineering Week. Runners and walkers set out on a 10 km run/5 km walk through Stanley Park in Vancouver to help raise funds for DAWEG's initiatives.

The event's winner, Tano Kenji, arrived at the finish line with an impressive time of 34:55 minutes. The first female runner, Chris Taggart, came in at 49:00 minutes.

We were pleased to have team entries from Pace Technologies, Universal Dynamics, NRC-IRAP and Fransen Engineering. The winning team was Pace Technologies.

An event such as this one could not go ahead without the assistance of many volunteers. Volunteer extraodinaire, Charissa.Dharmasetia, dedicated countless hours to planning the event. Thanks, Charissa and to all the other volunteers!! Special thanks also goes out to Conrad Desrosiers, APEGBC councillor, who graciously volunteered his time to MC the event.

On your mark, get set…

In addition, DAWEG gratefully thanks the following sponsors for their contributions:

Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of BC
Associated Engineering
BC Gas
BC Hydro
Canadian Springs Water
Conetec Investigations
CreoScitex
Dayton and Knight
Golder Associates
Horizon Engineering
Kerr Wood Leidal Associates
Knight Piesold
Mud Bay Drilling Company
Northwest Hydraulics Consultants
Pace Technologies
Pomeroy Engineering
Powerex
Running Room
Spectrum Signal Processing
Thurber Engineering
UMA Group
Universal Dynamics
URS Corporation

Race winner, Tano Kenji, with Conrad Desrosier

We look forward to seeing everyone at next year's event.

Where Do We Go From Here?

By Cathy Marr, P.Eng.

As DAWEG's first decade draws to a conclusion, it is a good time to think about where DAWEG should be going for the next decade. Your executive has spent some amount of hours over the past year discussing strategic direction, where we should focus our efforts and, amongst other things, whether we should change DAWEG's name. We welcome the thoughts of our membership on this matter and encourage comments and discussion on both: a potential name change, and the broader strategic direction of our organization. We'd like to hear what you think. Please email your comments to Cathy Marr, Co-Chair, at cmarr@istar.ca or, better yet, submit your thoughts to Maggie Wojtarowicz, Newsletter Editor, at wmaggie101@yahoo.com for inclusion in our next newsletter.

DAWEG is One of A Kind!

By Cathy Marr, P.Eng.

After ten years in existence it's easy to take some things for granted. The unique nature of DAWEG as an organization is a case in point. Across Canada, the provincial engineering and geoscience associations have typically established a "Women's Committee" to address gender issues. Membership on these committees is then by appointment by the respective association council.

In contrast, DAWEG is a division of the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of British Columbia rather than a committee. Although it is a sub-group of the larger association, DAWEG is a grassroots organization with its own membership and an elected executive committee, which is unique in Canada's engineering and geoscience profession.

The beginnings of DAWEG can be traced to the November 1990 Westcoast Forum: "More Than Just Numbers", which was part of the Canadian Committee on Women in Engineering (CCWE) series of public forums. There was a substantial turnout for the Westcoast Forum and as a result APEGBC supported the establishment of a committee. However, when over 50 women offered to serve it was decided that other alternatives to the committee concept should be explored. In September 1991 DAWEG, the Division for Advancement of Women in Engineering and Geoscience was formed and the Inaugural AGM was held in October 1991.

In the early years DAWEG received seed money from APEGBC. Funding is now from membership fees and fund-raising events such as the annual Engineering Feets Fun Run. Currently DAWEG has over 200 members, both female and male. Membership is not limited to APEGBC members. The grassroots, self-funding nature of DAWEG has meant that DAWEG has enjoyed a degree of autonomy that a "Women's Committee" might not have had.

Web Sites of the Month

www.globalalliancesmet.org
The Global Alliance is committed to increasing the participation of women in the SMET (Science, Mathematics, Engineering, and Technology) workforce worldwide and supporting other diverse groups including ethnicity, age, discipline, languages, and cultures.

www.diversityinc.com
This website is devoted to achieving diversity and has some interesting material and news items on diversity in the workforce.

UPCOMING EVENTS…

DAWEG is Turning Ten!

Watch this space for news about a DAWEG reunion where we can all celebrate DAWEG's achievements for its first decade and share some stories about DAWEG's early formative years.

We are planning to invite members, executive and as many ex-members and ex-executive as we can to join us in the celebration.

If you want to be sure you are included, please email Samira Barakat at sbarakat@interchange.ubc.ca.

If you can't laugh at yourself, who can you laugh at?

Courtesy of "e-mail funnies"

Q: When does a person decide to become an engineer?
A: When he realizes he doesn't have the charisma to be an undertaker.

Q: How do you drive an engineer completely insane?
A: Tie him to a chair, stand in front of him, and fold up a road map the wrong way.

Q: How can you tell an extroverted engineer?
A: When he talks to you, he looks at your shoes instead of his own.

Q: Why did the engineers cross the road?
A: Because they looked in the file, and that's what they did last year.

Q: What do engineers use for birth control?
A: Their personalities.

You might be an engineer if:

Choosing between buying flowers for your wife and upgrading your RAM is a problem.

You take a cruise so you can go on a personal tour of the engine room.

In college, you thought Spring Break was metal fatigue failure.

The salespeople at the local computer store can't answer any of your questions.

At an air show, you know how fast the skydivers are falling.

For your wife's birthday you gave her a new CD-ROM drive or a PalmPilot.

You can quote scenes from any Monte Python movie.

You can type 70 words per minute but you can't read your own handwriting.

You comment to your wife that her straight hair is nice and parallel.

You sit backwards on Disney rides so you can see how they do the special effects.

You have saved every power cord from all your broken appliances.

You have more friends on the Internet than in real life.

You know what http:// stands for.

You look forward to Christmas so you can put together the kids' toys.

You see a good design, and have to change it.

You spent more on your calculator than you did on your wedding ring.

You still own a slide rule and know how to use it.

You think that people yawning around you are sleep deprived.

You window shop at Radio Shack.

Your laptop computer cost more than your car.

Your wife hasn't the foggiest idea of what you do at work.

You've already calculated how much you make per second.