The Student Professional Awareness Experience Program

by J. Patrick Donohoe

Is your IEEE Student Branch looking for a way to involve a large number of students in an activity that provides valuable skills for your members? If so, your branch should consider an event based on IEEE’s Student Professional Awareness Experience (SPAx) program.

The focus of the SPAx program is to develop key non-technical skills that are crucial for success in the workplace but are not taught in the classroom. Engineering is broader than the various technical skills covered in the typical engineering curriculum. Nontechnical competencies are just as critical to engineers as their technical training. The student professional awareness activities of the SPAx program are oriented to enhance the leadership, career, and professional development skills of engineering students.

The “x” in SPAx is a variable. That means your student professional awareness event can take on whatever format fits the needs of your Student Branch. Your event could be a conference with an invited expert speaker, a series of activities focused on honing career skills, a social event to foster networking and team-building skills, a design contest, a tech talk, or any other format, as long as it focuses on one or more of eight prescribed areas. These eight areas are

1) career development
2) professional integrity
3) personal skills
4) engineers and public policy
5) leadership in professional organizations
6) the practice of innovation
7) the art of communication
8) humanitarian grand challenges.

You decide what type of event works for your branch, and the IEEE provides the support to implement your ideas. Student Branches are encouraged to be creative in organizing their own professional awareness events. The traditional conference format, ventures, tech talks, or resume workshops are just some of the options to engage your members in professional awareness activities.

There are four basic steps involved with a successful SPAx event. To initiate a SPAx event, the Student Branch submits a few bits of information to the IEEE, and a SPAx coordinator in your area will follow up shortly to discuss your event plans. Then, the branch decides what type of professional awareness event would be interesting to its members. Any event or budget can be considered. The IEEE only asks that you submit an event description when seeking official approval. Once the IEEE approves your event, it’s time to plan your budget, funding, venue, program, and marketing. After holding your event, your branch sends the IEEE a report on your results and the lessons learned.

Hosting a SPAx event is a huge benefit for not only the students who gain skills through participation in the event but also for those who organize the event. Organizers can network with real-world companies as the Student Branch seeks sponsorships for the event. As a resume builder, organizers can point to their demonstration of leadership skills.

For more information on the SPAx program, visit https://ieeeusa.org/spax/index.html. You can learn from the newly revamped experience page, created specifically as a platform for Student Branches around the world to share their innovation with each other.

About the author

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