



Guelph Engineering Society



Report on National Conference for Women in Engineering at _____ Western,
_____ November 21-22nd 2008 _____.

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1. Purpose of Conference

The purpose of this conference is to raise awareness about the challenges women in engineering face in the work force and in school and discuss how these challenges can be faced or avoided. The conference is not only for women, but for men as well because the lack of women in engineering and challenges caused as a result is a problem that effects both men and women, and one that both sexes need to consider in order for change to occur. This was one of the main messages of the conference as we looked at reasons for a lack of females in the engineering disciplines, ways in which we can encourage females into the profession and keep them in it.

2. Personal Goals for Conference

At this conference I hoped to learn more about how to handle being a girl in a male dominated field. As the vice president external for Guelph's WiSE chapter, I hoped to learn from other schools what they do with their WiSE groups and bring new ideas back to our group at Guelph. I also hoped to learn more about being a woman in the work force and learn from other female engineers currently in the workforce about their successes and how they overcame any challenges they may have faced.

3. Summary of Events

Briefly summarize each event you attended on the itinerary. Reflect on each one commenting on relevance to you personally and/or Engineering at the University of Guelph, and what you took/learned from the event. Point form is acceptable here.

Outreach

I participated in an outreach event with a class of grade 5 students in which they participated in one of three activities: bridge building, cart building and egg drop. All activities engaged the kids and got them interested in the field of engineering. And was lots of fun!

Your Engineering Career Road Map – Sophear Net and Victoria Campagna

In this session, two women talked about their different experiences into the working world, one beginning work immediately after undergrad and the other going to grad school. This is the advice they had:

- set SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound)

- pursue with passion --> find a balance between salary, skills, growth, status, ownership and social aspects)
- you are going to face problems but don't let them deter you, learn from your mistakes and find a detour
- there are many scholarships out there for women in engineering, keep your eye open for them
- find a mentor, male or female; in university maybe a 1st year girl partnered with a 4th year girl who can help her with challenges she faces
- keep a focus
- find a path that works for you, everyone is different
- take advantage of coop to try different things
- get involved!
- Plan ahead and keep your options open

What Women Should Know When Talking to Men – Anna Cleaver

- recommends the book 'Talking 9-5) by Deborah Tarren, its about men and women's conversation styles at work
- women gain knowledge by asking questions while men don't ask questions because they don't want to show ignorance, but look it up later in private
- men perceive questions as a lack of knowledge
- need to identify who will accept/appreciate questions and who will take it as you being dumb
- don't fish for compliments/feedback in the office (something women often do) because you probably won't get them and will get your feelings hurt
- its easy for men to dress and make no impression about themselves but it is impossible for women to dress without making some sort of impression and must therefore put time and effort into their outfit
- women downplay credentials while men down play their weaknesses --> men are more confident when speaking
- "you are your best promoter" --> you must promote yourself in the office if you want to get ahead
- "virtual opposition" --> guys sometimes fight when talking but this is just their way of communicating with each other while women take it as hostile; need to get over this and maybe even join in at the office
- men joke around a lot while when women joke around they are often self-mocking jokes, which men take as women putting themselves down

Things you can't change:

- men don't give praise/positive feedback
- direct vs indirect conversation --> telling vs. asking someone to do something: everyone prefers different methods, need to accept what the people with you work with prefer
- women ask others what they think (inclusive decision making) but you must make sure the person you are asking an opinion from knows you are making your own

decision you just want their input and aren't asking them to make the decision for you

- *men say 'I', women say 'we' --> be present when work is presented so you are recognized for the work you did, men often take the credit*

Social Impact of Engineering

- *engineering is one of the few disciplines high school students enter into directly, though many kids in high school don't know a lot about engineering and therefore enter into it with a lack of knowledge or avoid entering it at all*
- *engineering has changed the way we live because we have a direct impact on society*
- *people who want to change the world often choose the social sciences as opposed to engineering, many of these people women*
- *we need to change the perception of engineering to helping people (something women are more drawn to) to influence more women into the engineering field*
- *if engineers were more involved more in all aspects of society, imagine what kind of world we would live in*
- *to promote more high school students into engineering, the CFES is considering running a high school outreach program to promote engineering and show people how engineers impact society and create change*

4. Evaluation

i) Conference Organizers

The conference was run really well and greatly organized with great speakers and sessions that were really beneficial to go to! The career fair and banquet were also impressive. My only complaint would be that there were so many session running simultaneously and many that I would have liked to attend at the same time but could only go to one. It would be better if either the conference was longer or the sessions were shorter with less running at the same time so that delegates could experience more. Another thing I would like to see at NCWIE next year is discussion of how we can get more girls into the field of engineering. We talked a lot about how there is a lack of females and how numbers are dropping, but if we were to talk about solutions to this problem I think it could make a big difference and all delegates could bring this back to their schools.

ii) Delegate

Having been to many conferences before, I was very comfortable in the conference scene. This conference attracted a different crowd that conferences I've attended in the past, and I took this as an opportunity to meet new students from other schools, learning from their experiences and sharing with them our own experiences at Guelph. I think I represented Guelph well, participating in the sessions and attending all aspects of the conference. I learned a lot

about the need for more women in this field and some ways to deal with being a female in a male dominated atmosphere. These are things I can bring back and share with other girls not only in engineering at the university, but with younger girls through my outreach as VPX of WiSE, hopefully educating and influencing more girls to go into engineering. If I were to attend this conference again, I would hope to gain knowledge about more ways that we can attract more girls into the field of engineering because it is a growing problem that has a huge effect on the profession as a whole. One of the main messages I took from the conference is that women in engineering is a problem for both men and women, not just women, and its something all of us in this field need to think about it as numbers in the profession as a whole drop.