

The Education Working Group of the SAIMM—Young Professionals Council

In the June edition of the *Journal*, three areas that the YPC will focus on, namely education, career guidance, and enterprise were presented. A working group for each focus area has been constituted by the YPC. This article briefly introduces the Education Working Group (EWG).

Importance

The YPC's mandate is to represent members of the SAIMM in the 'Student' category. With this category constituting nearly 25% of the SAIMM membership and effectively representing the future of the Institute, identifying and serving the needs of the student membership is an important function of the YPC. In this regard, the YPC has identified current challenges and opportunities faced by students in the minerals industry that need attention.

Challenges

Students in the minerals-related fields of study face a number of challenges that have arisen due to the recent contraction in demand for commodities. Whereas in the last decade students were well sponsored by mining companies, this funding for education has dwindled significantly. It had been anticipated that universities would have to collectively produce upwards of 300 graduates annually to meet the demands of the minerals industry. While the universities are now able to produce this number of graduates, the industry is unable to absorb them all. The unfortunate result is that a growing number of students find themselves unemployed after graduation. The throughput of students in mining and metallurgy remains a challenge for the universities and greater academic support for students is desirable.

Opportunities

Despite the challenges in education, there are still significant opportunities. Current graduates receive some of the best education in the world, which not only equips them with excellent technical knowledge but also instils an understanding of contemporary issues such as sustainability, ethics, social consciousness, health, safety, and the environment. This education takes place in an innovative and high-technology surround at universities equipped with cutting-edge technology such as three-dimensional virtual reality training. This quality education provides the opportunity for industry to absorb high-calibre graduates that can bring a fresh wave of energy, innovation, and responsible leadership to move the minerals industry into the forefront of sustainable wealth creation on the African continent.

Mission statement

It is therefore apparent to the YPC that specific focus on education is a strategic imperative. The purpose of the EWG is to represent the interests of primarily undergraduates in basic and higher education on matters of career guidance, academic development, and life skills. In order to fulfil its purpose, the EWG will aim to influence policy on education in mining and metallurgy; support efforts to secure funding for education, chiefly through the SAIMM Scholarship Trust Fund; provide guidance on career choices in the minerals industry; provide academic support to learners and students; facilitate mentorship and life skills initiatives to guide students through their academic life; and also to encourage life-long learning and postgraduate education.

Call to action

The EWG currently consists of members of the YPC, student representatives from the universities, and other SAIMM members. The EWG is part of the organizing committee of the Young Professionals Conference to be held from 21 to 22 October 2015. This conference brings together the annual student colloquium, showcasing the top students from the universities, and the Young Professionals Conference, which provides an opportunity for the young professionals of the minerals industry to present their work to their peers. For more information on the EWG and to join this working group, contact Desmond Klenam (lordemy@hotmail.com) or Sihe Nhleko (sihesenkosi.nhleko@wits.ac.za).

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