

Student Activities—The Future of SRM

By Jennifer Pluhar

The mood in the committee meeting was serious. The action on the table could mean big changes for the Student Activities Committee and SRM. The discussion went on for at least an hour, with committee members voicing strong and passionate opinions. The proposal that lay before the committee would create a new contest for students, the Undergraduate Range Management Exam, or URME. Some feared this would be the "kiss of death" for the only individual competition at the Annual Meetings, the Plant Identification Contest, a long-standing tradition that began in 1951. Others argued that range management was more than Plant ID and that more activities for students were entirely appropriate and would result in more student members becoming "regular" and even active members upon graduation. The vote was close, but a new opportunity for students was launched.

Although that meeting seems ages ago, it was in the early 1980s. The first URME took place in 1984 at the Rapid City, South Dakota, Annual Meeting, joining the Plant Identification Contest as a competitive opportunity for student members attending the SRM Annual Meeting. These days it is possible for students to attend the Annual Meeting and compete in not only Plant ID and URME, but in public speaking and graduate student paper and poster contests. They can also strive to win cash with the prestigious "Combined Award." Those not interested in competitive events can present papers in the Undergraduate Paper Session, have their resumes reviewed, or attend a workshop with tips for job hunting. No other professional organization offers so much for their student membership. Student members typically make up 25% of the attendance at our Annual Meetings.

The Student Activities Committee, formerly known as Student Affairs, is a shining example of SRM member involvement and interest. The committee was the first to utilize an "open membership" type of structure. This was not because of any concerted effort; rather, the large, open membership of this committee grew out of necessity. The committee offers everything from 8 competitive activities for students as well as a significant scholarship, 5 days' worth of activities for high school students from many SRM Sections, and workshops on perfecting a resume and finding a job, to a paper session and the ever popular "Tapping the Top" student—professional interaction. All of these activities demand dedicated volunteers to plan, carry out, compute scores, and solicit donors for awards.

Flashback to 1989. The scene is the Student Affairs Committee meeting in Billings, Montana. Looking back, it is easy to see that this tense meeting of the committee was a turning point for not only Student Activities, but the SRM committee structure in general. The committee consisted of 9 "regular" members, 3 appointed annually, serving for 3-year terms. Additionally, there were "subcommittee chairs" for the various activities, including the Plant ID Contest, High School Youth Forum, and University Chapter Display Contest. Section Student or Youth Activities Chairs were also invited as "ad hoc" committee members. The committee was deep in discussion again. Should the subcommittee chairs be allowed to vote on items before the committee? Some felt the vote should be restricted to those members appointed by the SRM President while others felt the subcommittee chairs represented continuity on the committee and knew the activities better than the appointed members. Fortunately, subcommittee chairs were granted voting rights.

Those discussions seem as distant as the early days of our government when Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton, Vice President and Secretary of the Treasury of the United States, settled their differences with a duel! The Student Activities Committee no longer has the luxury of dwelling on such minute matters as who can vote. The direction today is keeping the many activities and opportunities on the path of excellence. The number of activities and opportunities available to student members attending an Annual Meeting has grown by leaps and bounds. Committee members consist of the various subcommittee chairs as well as others who are attracted to the energy and infectious enthusiasm of the students and their functions. Many subcommittee chairs are young SRM members in the early years of their careers. Their dedication to SRM and Student Activities is extraordinary. They are often at SRM meetings "on their own dime" and are juggling commitments to young families to be able to participate. Those members pushing strollers and chasing toddlers at Annual Meetings are likely involved in student activities, many "giving back" to the activities that boosted their educational and professional experiences.

The Student Activities Committee became the place within SRM to which new college graduates who wanted to become involved in SRM activities gravitated. They brought new ideas and many new activities were born. More student activities at the Annual Meetings meant the committee

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needed more subcommittee chairs and members to plan and carry out these activities. The committee grew quickly beyond the "traditional" structure. Subcommittee chairs recruited more members for their activities. SRM leaders including Past President Jack Bohning let the committee control its own destiny. Past President Rod Heitschmidt directed the committee to continue with what had become a very open membership structure. He further pointed to the successes of the Student Activities Committee and encouraged other committees to open their memberships as well.

The growth and success of the Student Activities Committee would not have been possible without the continued support of the SRM Officers and Directors. By giving the committee the reins and stepping out of the way, they facilitated the explosion of opportunities available for our student members. Several quiet donors have enhanced activities when financial support was needed as well. Although some SRM discussions in recent years have focused on a "doom and gloom" prophecy for SRM and the profession of range management, working with the youth of SRM has been inspiring. The future of SRM is in capable hands.

Author is a past Chair of the SRM Student Activities Committee.





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