

ANZSCON2017 Student Branch Findings

Introduction

At ANZSCON the Australia Council and Region 10 SAC's (Sasha Nikolic and Rajesh Ingle) conducted a joint session to discover some of the best practice and weaknesses within the student branches. Participants attending the Student Track were formed into three mixed groups and were guided through a number of questions. The students were asked to discuss the answers within the groups and then a group summary was communicated. It is important to note that within the group's differences in opinion may have been evident, but the findings listed in this document were the consensus. Note that the findings were not made using formalised qualitative research methods and analysis.

How to use this data

The findings listed are simply a summary of key points made through the group summaries. There is no guarantee of how accurate the findings are across the wider community. No solutions are provided to any issues raised. The idea is for each section to reflect on the data and compare this with current practice within their student branches and determine which of the findings are of value.

Key Findings

1. Most IEEE email communication is ignored within the wider student membership. There was a very clear concern that the students were being targeted with too many irrelevant emails resulting in important emails being missed or at worst delivered directly to the junk folder. A number of students provided evidence that their junk folder was filled with IEEE emails.
2. Smaller branches tended to take more out of IEEE communications while the larger branches tended to simply just do their own thing
3. Most agreed that a successful student branch comes from a strong student branch councillor engaging with the branch
4. Almost all awards currently being run within the region are of little student interest or the communication is not on the student radar
5. The competition that gained the most interest with students was IEEE Xtreme, but knowledge of this competition was only starting to gain traction. It was acknowledged that similar competitions were needed that targeted other skills outside of programming. It was acknowledged that the timing of IEEE Xtreme was an impediment at some universities.
6. Local student branch competitions that were targeted to supplement subjects at university (such as PCB design) were popular

7. The undergraduates expressed that they were too busy and too much work was required for the student paper competition. As an alternative they suggested allowing students to directly submit their thesis or final year projects or allow a poster submission
8. Most student branches do very little in terms of collaboration. Incentives are needed to increase this
9. Student branches from India and Japan provided examples of how collaboration works in their section (mini ANZSCON styled events and competitions) but the success was based on section support for funding travel
10. Competition for resources and prestige ruled out student branches wanting to help mentor and support struggling branches within the same section. However, they were very open to supporting student branches outside their section.
11. An award or competition (some form of incentive) would encourage the more successful student branches to reach out and help the struggling branches
12. There was great concern of how the IEEE sign up process discouraged new membership. A lot of recruiting for IEEE occurs at start of session clubs day. The complex process and the fact that the sign up process does not function correctly from a mobile phone creates many missed opportunities. One student branch went to the trouble of creating a custom Google form that was used to collect important information, with the committee members undertaking a batch process completing the rest of the signup at a later time. While this project was successful for signups the setup and work involved was very high.
13. Industry partnerships and involvement with the student branch is very important to the student members and the way IEEE could be advertised. One student branch in particular was very successful in building industry partnerships. When IEEE members gained jobs or went on work experience they asked the employer to sponsor the branch. Funding was used to support events, especially student/industry events like trivia nights creating fun social networking opportunities
14. A number of student branches started their own businesses in order to increase funding. For example, one student branch would bulk print student notes (only available online at the university) and sell them to the students.
15. Some of the undergraduate based student branches (and in some cases with lots of members) were only loosely tied with the IEEE, with official IEEE membership mainly taken up by committee members.
16. There seemed to have been two different types of student branches. That is student branches that are dominated by undergraduate students and branches dominated by postgraduate students. There did not seem to be much evidence of successfully integrating both undergraduate and postgraduates within the one branch.