

*You who are on the road
Must have a code that you can live by
And so become yourself
Because the past is just a good bye.*

-Graham Nash

The Rewards of Membership

My President's messages this year have talked about the history and diversity of the Control Systems Society, the relevance of our research, the possible unintended consequences of control technology, the value of control education, and the effects of globalization. What is left? I suppose I could attempt to predict the future. If you've read my previous messages, however, you already know by now that I am an optimist when it comes to the future of control engineering, so beyond reaffirming my optimism there is probably little of substance that I can add to what I have already said in this regard. So, as this is my final message as CSS President, I will instead talk a little about the rewards I have received from my membership in the CSS.



I joined the CSS as a student member in 1981. Over the past quarter century my membership in the CSS has contributed a lot to my personal and professional growth. Early on, the CDC conference gave me the opportunity to meet people whose names were familiar to me only through their books and papers. I understand well the looks on the fresh faces of the new PhD's that I see at our conferences when they meet senior researchers for the first time as I'm sure I had the same look myself twenty five years ago. These conferences also enabled me to meet young researchers of my own generation which led to many friendships and, in some cases, to rewarding collaborative research projects and joint publications.

I have been actively involved in other IEEE Societies and Councils over the years but somehow I always found myself drawn back to the CSS. This has been my professional home and, as I moved through the ranks as an Associate Editor, member of the Board of Governors, Editor-in-Chief, and Vice-President, I was always impressed with the people with whom I was privileged to work and, of course, I made many additional lasting friendships as a result. As President I have had the honor of representing the CSS at several events, including the recent SICE Annual Conference in Okayama, Japan. In my travels I have found that there is great respect for the CSS and what it represents.

It is particularly puzzling to me why the membership of the CSS, and of other IEEE Societies, continues to decline. Several surveys have been conducted to try to ascertain the reasons for the drop in membership. One of the main reasons that people cite is cost or, more accurately, the feeling that they do not get sufficient value from their Society membership. I believe that this attitude misses a fundamental point about Society membership. In a volunteer run Society, such as the CSS, it is wrong to expect the

Society simply to provide you services in exchange for your dues. In essence, your dues are buying you part ownership in the Society. It is your Society and the benefit that you derive from your membership is, in my opinion, directly proportional to the energy that you put into the Society. The saying “we reap what we sow” applies in a very real sense to CSS membership. If you, as a member, take ownership in the Society then you will have a stake in helping it to prosper. A prospering Control Systems Society helps the field of control engineering to prosper. A strong field of control, in turn, benefits Society as a whole and, moreover, provides us as control educators and researchers with our livelihood. (Can you spot a feedback mechanism at work, here?)



I know that the people currently serving on the Executive Committee and the Board of Governors feel as I do, which is why they give their time and energy so generously to the Society. I am extremely grateful to them and I urge all members to give likewise to the CSS. The rewards are tangible.

In closing, I would like to offer a personal note of thanks to the Control Systems Society for giving me the opportunity to serve as the

2005 President. The CSS is really the sum total of its members and so what I really mean is thanks to all my friends and colleagues who have supported me not just this year but throughout my career and who have made the job of President an enjoyable one. The Society is in good shape, thanks to the dedication and hard work of its many members. I wish John Baillieul, the 2006 CSS President, the best of luck as he begins what I know will be a special year for him. I am confident that John will continue the high standards of excellence and take the CSS to new heights.

The coming year is one of transition for me. I am not only finishing my term as the CSS President, I am also finishing my stint as a Department Head and, after twenty years in the Department of General Engineering at Illinois, I am moving to the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering. As my administrative duties wind down, I am looking forward to renewing my efforts in teaching and research. I will, of course, not disappear entirely. I hope to see all of you at CSS sponsored conferences for many years to come.

As always, I look forward to receiving your feedback at mspong@uiuc.edu.

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2005 Control Systems Society President