Our planning for the S-PAC began more than three months before the event. We started out with biweekly planning meetings and quickly filled the S-PAC committee positions. Our first task was to arrange for speakers. We had picked 24 January of this year for our S-PAC date. As a result, it was difficult to get speakers-most were not very interested in driving on the icy roads of Connecticut. Somehow, though, with the help of Region #1 S-PAC coordinator Vishnu Pandey and the IEEE Connecticut Consultants group, we were privileged to obtain one US national and two local speakers.

Another challenge was that this date was also the first Saturday of Spring semester. This had been done on purpose so as to prevent conflict with the home basketball games of our top-ranked Huskies. However, being right after winter break, we knew we had to put a lot of effort into advertising to get people to attend. We rigorously advertised through emails, posters and ads in the student newspaper. We also began selling tickets three days in advance of the event date. The first two days of ticket sales were very disappointing. On the third day, sales improved due to the help of our faculty advisor and professors.

The evening before the event, we went into the conference room to make sure everything was ready. But to our surprise we found that the entire audio-visual set up was gone! It really astonished us. We then started calling the appropriate authorities to get the equipment returned. We worked late into the evening reinstalling and testing the AV equipment to make sure we were ready for the big event.

The event

Finally, the much-awaited date arrived. All the committee members were decked out in coats and ties and bbling with enthusiasm to get the conference going in a big way. Dr. Ayers, Faculty Advisor of the IEEE UConn Chapter, began the conference by thanking the speakers and guests for travelling to UConn to contribute to the S-PAC, and to the students who had braved the zero degree weather to attend that Saturday morning. Satnam Singh, a PhD student and Chair of the IEEE student branch, also said a few words and introduced the Master of Ceremonies, Mr. Wayne Blanding.

After Blanding said a few words, he introduced Mr. Jim Watson, a distinguished IEEE national speaker. Mr. Wason then began his talk entitled, “In Search of Diamonds.” Mr. Watson captured the attention of the audience with his enthusiasm. He requested that everybody take a piece of paper and write, “To achieve your highest level of success” at the top, and then jot down key ideas in his talk. The first idea to note was to “volunteer and get involved.” This is important because he remembered how someone who volunteered to speak to a group of students inspired him when he was in college.

The next point in Mr. Watson’s talk was to “plan and control your career.” You don’t have control over your job, as you may get laid off, but you do have control over your career. He spoke about the relevance of a “first job” after college. He said it would be the first step in your career and explained how to make the most of it. He also explained the different areas engineers can go into when they graduate including academia, energy and space exploration.

Mr. Watson also offered sound advice about networking. In addition to talking about its importance, he gave practical ideas on how to network including contacting alumni, arranging social events and workshops. At the conclusion of “In Search of Diamonds,” Mr. Watson answered questions from the audience. He discussed the pros and cons of working at a large corporation or a smaller engineering company after graduation, starting a business and how to answer certain job interview ques-
tions. His presentation was excellent and earned a long applause by the audience.

After lunch, Tim Shrimplin, an undergraduate student who also helped coordinate the conference, raffled off door prizes such as DVDs, video games, and a gift certificate from Kaplan Computers. The Master of Ceremonies then introduced Mr. Mike Conroy and Dr. Jim Ussalis who presented a talk on the "New Era in Engineering Consulting." They shared their experiences and thoughts about consulting, an occupation that many students dream about. This topic was especially interesting to students since consulting brings challenges on two fronts: 1) solving engineering problems, and 2) running a business. The speakers presented a thorough overview of how to deal with these challenges. They covered the importance of the level of education (bachelors, masters and doctorate) with respect to the technical side of the field, as well as advantages and disadvantages of focusing on specific areas within electrical engineering, such as radio frequency (RF) engineering. Important business topics such as the most effective way of advertising to drive a business were also covered.

After a break, the final presentation by Mr. Alfred C. Thompson II, "Communication as an Essential Skill for Engineers" began. Students learned of the importance of effective communication, and were eager to practice as Mr. Thompson included realistic situations based on experiences as a Microsoft employee and former teacher. He also used humor to help send his message, such as posing the question, "How do you stop engineers from talking? Take away their pencils and paper!" He also covered a major fear of people today—public speaking. He spoke of his fear of public speaking, and how he overcame it. Important details, such as how to know your audience, were also covered, as many people ignore these notions by oversimplifying them. He also answered various questions asked by the audience.

Following the final presentation, the S-PAC committee members were presented with certificates to recognize their hard work in putting together the conference. Attendees were rewarded for their diligence at sticking it out to the end with more door prizes, including a DVD player. The conference was a great success and served as an excellent means for engineering students to learn what to expect upon graduation. Many stuck around after the event to talk with the speakers who shared further insights. S-PAC committee members and the faculty advisor, Dr. Ayers, considered the event a complete success. The conference would not have been possible without speakers (of course) and the students who attended the event.

—Madhukar Jalota, Secretary; Satnam Singh, Chair; Wayne Blanding, Master of Ceremony, University of Connecticut-Storrs IEEE Student Branch

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**S-PACS where to get started**

Interested in having an S-PAC at your school? The ideal time to start planning for one is now. (The recommended time frame of preparation before the actual event is three to six months.) But where and how to get started? A vast amount of information can be found at the following web site:

<www.ieeeusa.org/committees/SPAC>

Click on the S-PAC option and the next page provides links that branch out to even more content-filled links including one for requesting help with funding the event. You will learn that the six primary steps to holding an S-PAC are: 1) contact your regional S-PAC coordinator, 2) begin S-PAC planning, 3) select speakers, 4) publicize the conference and initiate ticket sales, 6) before the S-PAC and 7) after the S-PAC. Links will also connect you to task timelines, sample agendas, other schools’ stories, and a troubleshooting guide for potential problems such as insufficient advertising or inter committee conflicts. —MKC