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IEEE Recent Graduate Program "GOLD"

David J. Kemp
 MTS Advanced, Inc.
 Vice Chair, IEEE Membership Development Committee

Abstract

Service organizations sensitive to member needs will conduct periodic evaluations of member satisfaction. The IEEE did this relative to retention of student members after graduation and determined that voids existed in the services portfolio. To address these gaps, a new section-based entity has been defined and piloted. Based on results, the program is recommended for introduction Institute-wide in late 1996. The new entity has been labeled GOLD, for "Graduates Of the Last Decade," for the same targeted affinity group. The approach taken was highly participatory, involving volunteers and IEEE staff. This article discusses the background, pilot process, and plans for roll out. Reports from the pilots are included.

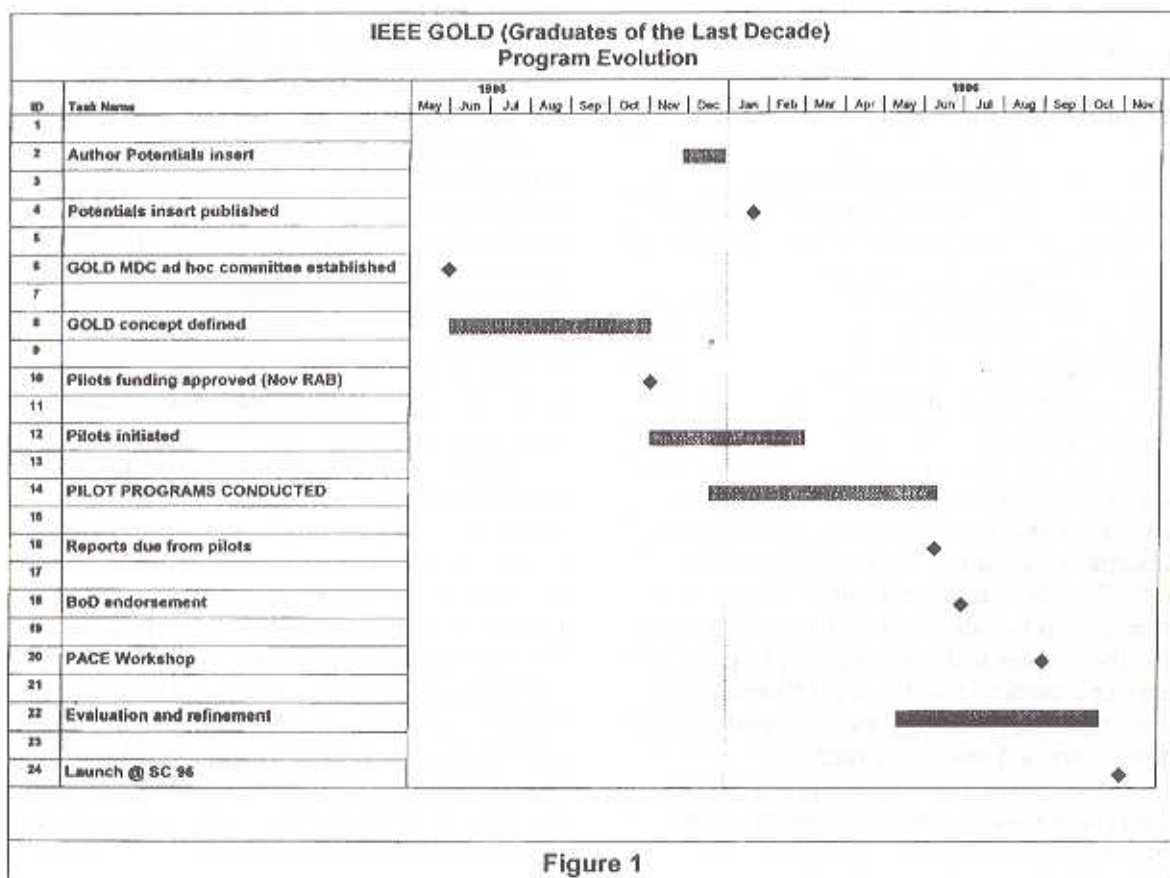
IEEE GOLD Program

Over a two-year period, 46 group and member surveys were conducted by various IEEE entities: the IEEE Student Activities Committee (SAC), the IEEE Professional

Activities Committees for Engineers (PACE), and the IEEE Membership Development Committee (MDC). These activities identified gaps in the transition from IEEE student membership to graduated regular member. Some gaps existed by virtue of address changes in going from student locations to employment locations. Cultural differences were also identified. The life and career priorities of a graduate were not the same as those of persons who had been in the work force for some period and were perhaps focusing on family and home. Further, different needs for IEEE services and programs became apparent.

Most disturbing were the retention rates for students after graduation. In the fourth year after graduation, 83 percent of the individuals had ceased to maintain their membership in the IEEE. This represented a very large opportunity area for growth of the membership base and was further evidence of voids in serving members.

In June 1995, with the support and recommendation of PACE and SAC, the MDC established an ad hoc committee to develop strategies to improve the retention



rate. The committee and resulting programs adopted the name GOLD for "Graduates Of the Last Decade."

To assist the ad hoc committee in its efforts, previous survey and background materials were made available to each member. To ensure that the committee had first-hand experience and exposure to recent-graduate feedback, a survey was prepared, and each committee member was provided with a contact list of recent graduates in his or her locale.

Two initial program thrusts were defined. The first was a quick-hitter special insert for the student *IEEE Potentials* magazine. Features of the insert were to include:

- A description of IEEE benefits and services appropriate to students and recent graduates;
- Strategies and techniques for job hunting and early career development; and
- Testimonials from individuals who had found the IEEE particularly useful in securing employment and ramping up in their early years.

The second thrust developed from acknowledging recent graduates as a distinct affinity group in the IEEE. Using this notion, a section-based GOLD group with chapter-like characteristics was defined. The approach of program and service delivery both by and for GOLD members quickly emerged. The committee felt it useful to gain some actual operating experience with such a new entity prior to approaching it on an Institute-wide basis, and so a pilot model was adopted. Figure 1 provides an overview of the GOLD program introduction schedule.

In November 1996, the IEEE Regional Activities Board (RAB) approved the two thrusts for implementation. To assist the pilots, funds were made available for each.

The insert was published in the December 1995/January 1996 issue of *IEEE Potentials*. Additional copies were made for use as handouts at events such as conferences or student branch programs.

The MDC sent an invitation to participate in GOLD pilot implementation to 26 sections around the world. Each was requested both to identify GOLD affinity-group individuals to lead the pilots and to prepare a brief proposal for their program and use of funds.

The plan called for pilot operational experience to be evaluated by June, refinements incorporated, and supporting program documentation and staff resources ready for Institute-wide launch at the 1996 Sections Congress (SC'96) in November in Denver. These ambitious time frames did not allow a lot of time for leaders to familiarize themselves with the program, to plan, and to organize their activities in order to gain meaningful experience by June. Nevertheless, the pilot leaders, with section support, attained valuable experience.

By March 1996, seven pilots were approved, resourced, and under way in the Alabama, Montreal, Northern Virginia, Ottawa, Seattle, Singapore, and

Vancouver Sections.

Programs initiated by the GOLD pilot leaders included:

- Monthly meetings with guest speakers; these tended to focus on business and skill-enhancement topics as opposed to technical electro-technology topics;
- Job Fairs; the first one, conducted by Alabama, attracted 50 students and six companies;
- Social events creating networking opportunities for students, employers, recent graduates, and Section members at large;
- Focus groups and surveys to assess the needs and expectations of members;
- Tours of industrial facilities;
- GOLD member testimonials and success-story presentations;
- Section and region newsletter articles; 1) articles of interest to GOLD affinity groups, and 2) articles seeking involvement of member volunteers;
- Contacting members by telephone;
- Establishing committees to move forward beyond the pilot phase; and
- Articles for *The Institute*, the news supplement to *IEEE Spectrum*.

To offer the pilots assistance, monthly roundtable teleconferences were conducted with the pilots, GOLD committee volunteers, and IEEE staff. Similarly, the GOLD Committee met monthly to review progress and plans, programs, documentation, and the SC'96 launch.

Each of the pilots took an individual, creative approach. The results so far validate the need for such an affinity group. The pilots are intended to continue and are planning fall 1996 programs. Their individual reports are attached.

IEEE bylaws were reviewed relative to GOLD, and it was determined that no barriers existed for implementation. There are some areas of the bylaws in which reference to GOLD might facilitate recognition of the group and reinforce support, resources, and funding. In one sense GOLD can be considered thematic and as such may not warrant formal changes in bylaws. The committee has agreed, however, to monitor the progress of the GOLD roll out and consider bylaw revisions, if necessary.

Problems encountered were not major and match those of other entities. They included volunteer recruitment and obtaining timely and accurate member data. Items of this nature will continue to be addressed within the IEEE infrastructure, but more particularly at SC'96. During SC'96 one tutorial, two workshops, and a caucus session will not only communicate the program but also bring the tremendously strong and creative talents of volunteers from around the world to refine and enhance the GOLD program as well as other needs of younger members. MDC, PACE, SAC, and the pilot leaders will participate in the SC'96 GOLD events. Specific suggestions will also be sought on the ways in which the technical soci-



eties may be able to enhance and participate in GOLD programs.

Communication of GOLD to the members of the Institute and volunteers has been predominantly through articles in *The Institute*, *SCOOP*, and pilot-section newsletters. Program resource guides are currently being updated to reflect the program. An electronic bulletin board was established to facilitate communication with the pilots and assist networking among them.

Enthusiasm has been high. Regions and sections are expressing interest in commencing their programs. Members and staff realize the potential for the program and are volunteering their assistance. As an interim step prior to SC'96, the GOLD program is being addressed via a specific tutorial at the 1996 PACE Conference and Workshop in Phoenix, Arizona, in August.

Recommendations to proceed with Institute-wide roll out have been prepared for the June MDC and RAB meetings in Montreal. The RAB model is being recommended. This model will bring to bear the experiences, forums, and resources such as sections, regions, MDC, and RAB staff. Close liaison will continue with others such as PACE and SAC.

The IEEE Institute Research office is involved to assist with monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the program, particularly as it relates to graduated-student-member retention. Specific goals have been established for increased retention.

Significant benefits are expected to accrue to the GOLD program. These include:

- Leadership development,
- Service to members,
- Membership growth, and
- Continuity and streamlining of the student-to-member transition.

Special acknowledgment is extended to the following sections and GOLD pilot leaders. Without their daring and creative involvement, the program would not have evolved so successfully.

Alabama	Kim Garing
Ottawa	Darren Bessette
Montreal	Bassel Al-Samman
North Virginia	Kim Faunce & Kathleen Perez-Lopez
Seattle	Leann Kostek
Singapore	Shankar Krishnan and Chen-Khong Tham
Vancouver	Sheelo McGuire

GOLD Pilot Reports

The following reports were submitted by GOLD pilot program leaders in June 1996:

Seattle Section

Objective: To create a group within the Seattle Section whose focus would be on members with less than 10 years' experience.

Advertising: We advertised every month in the sec-

tion's newsletter. We also sent a letter directly to the five student branches in the Seattle Section offering to speak to their members about the Young Professionals Network. Only one school took up our offer.

Meetings: We have met monthly since November. Our schedule has been a speaker in the odd months and social network gathering in the even months. I have listed below our meeting topics. We have averaged 12 people at the speaker meetings and about six people at the social network meetings.

January - Are You Interested in Starting Your Own Business?

March - Career Decisions in 1990's

May - Finding the Hidden Negotiator in Yourself

Funding: We have not used all of the \$500 we received in our grant money. In the fall we plan on doing a direct mailing to the list Laura Durrett has supplied. We are currently in the process of creating a three-panel flyer on the network for distribution at various section events.

Description	Debit	Credit	Balance
4/95 Grant		500	500
3/95 Speaker expense	100		400
5/95 Speaker expense	40		360
8/95 Flyer	150		210
9/95 Direct Mailing	100		110

Summary: We have held monthly meetings since November. The e-mail list has grown to more than 25 people. We have a small core group that attends regularly and another group that has attended at least two meetings. Everyone who has come out has enjoyed the meetings and has encouraged us to continue our efforts. We are looking forward to next year to strengthen the group and possibly elect some officers.

Overall the Young Professionals Network has been slow in taking off, but I am confident that next year we will have a core of ten people who will regularly attend our meetings.

Singapore Section

We had a change of the section committee in mid-February 1996 and began working on GOLD-related activities only in March. Initially, we were not able to identify IEEE members who were recent graduates, so we had to reach out to them through the IEEE Singapore newsletter and WWW pages. Flyers were also mailed out to alumni of one of the universities by inserting them with their regular newsletter. IEEE student branches at the local universities also assisted us in encouraging final-year EE students to continue their IEEE membership after graduation.

We have had rather poor response from the GOLD target group to our request for volunteers to help organize GOLD events. So far, it is the Membership Development Subcommittee of the Singapore Section that has been really pushing GOLD. It is early yet, but we suspect that the GOLD program philosophy "to be run by and for recent graduates" may not work here at



this stage. Since there is a problem retaining members in this age group, it follows that it is even more difficult to encourage them to help promote GOLD.

We have decided to adopt the approach that the GOLD program is the responsibility of all IEEE members, young and old alike. Senior engineers have been encouraged to speak to new engineers in their companies on the benefits of IEEE membership. Section and chapter committees have been asked to take into account the interests of their younger members, including student members, when planning IEEE activities and also to involve them in the organization of special events.

We have not incurred any costs under the GOLD program budget yet. Some expenditures will be incurred when we hold an event later this month which enables student members, recent graduates, and more established IEEE members to attend a talk and mingle with one another over refreshments.

In conclusion, we believe that it takes some time before results of the GOLD program can be seen in terms of a higher membership retention rate among student members and more GOLD category graduates' becoming IEEE members. In the meantime, we will continue to organize GOLD activities and promote the program.

The following article appeared in the Singapore Section newsletter, *Smoke Signals*, in May 1996:

IEEE Membership Drive for Recent Graduates for the GOLD Program

Recent studies by several IEEE committees in the U.S. have shown that many student members do not continue their IEEE membership after they leave university. By the fourth year after graduation, only 17 percent of IEEE student members still belong to the IEEE. They may have found jobs quickly and fail to see the value of continuing their IEEE membership. The IEEE also has an image of being an organization for more senior and experienced professionals, with its courses, conferences, and publications not oriented to the needs of young electrical and computer engineers. In addition, young members who want to be active in the IEEE may have faced difficulties connecting with the established membership.

A new program—named GOLD—has been initiated by the IEEE Membership Development Committee (MDC) to address these issues. GOLD stands for "Graduates Of the Last Decade" and is intended to be a new affinity group within the IEEE, to be run by and for recent graduates. The main objective of the GOLD program is to enhance the membership retention rate of recent graduates by making the IEEE more relevant and accessible to them. At the moment, the program is still in its "pilot" stage, with Singapore being the only participating section outside North America.

In Singapore, many graduates find jobs almost immediately after graduation and become immersed quickly in their careers. The cost of regular IEEE membership,

being significantly higher than that for student membership (although a graduated fee-increase scheme exists), together with the perceived lack of benefits and relevance of IEEE membership, have led to the same phenomenon here as in the United States.

To meet the objective of the GOLD program, the following actions need to be carried out: (1) promote greater awareness of the benefits of IEEE membership among recent graduates; (2) strengthen the link between IEEE sections and chapters with the student branches and organize joint activities involving both regular and student members; (3) organize activities which are of interest to recent graduates, such as professional-development courses; and (4) encourage the participation of younger members in IEEE activities, e.g. organization of special-interest seminars, conferences, and courses. Following the philosophy of GOLD "to be run by and for recent graduates," these activities will be carried out by a GOLD Committee within the IEEE Singapore Section Membership Development Subcommittee.

All IEEE members appreciate the ready access to general and timely articles on various branches of electrical and computer engineering in *IEEE Spectrum* as well as technical articles in our own areas of specialization in IEEE society transactions and magazines. In addition, IEEE organizes many courses and conferences which serve to enhance participants' technical expertise in various fields, and members are entitled to attend these at discounted fees. Furthermore, there is the intangible but important benefit of having the opportunity to meet and "network" with IEEE experts and other professionals in the field from all over the world.

These benefits should be brought to the attention of recent graduates, the best channel being no other than IEEE members themselves. In the current climate of promoting high value-added and R&D activities in Singapore, the benefits of IEEE membership have become important even for young engineers. The Membership Development Subcommittee would like to encourage you to spare some time and talk to young engineers in your establishment about the benefits of IEEE membership from your own perspective. Finally, section and chapter committees should also encourage the participation of younger members in their activities.

We are currently working with the student branches to organize an event targeted at graduating final-year students from the universities and polytechnics in May and June of this year. The event will be open to IEEE members and student members as well as recent graduates and other students. We intend to have a short seminar by a prominent recent graduate, after which students and members can interact over light refreshments and snacks (please check our WWW page for details of this event).

If you would like to be a member of the GOLD Committee and help us in our efforts, or you simply want to participate in GOLD program activities, please do not hesitate to contact us.



mittee we should utilize the strength and close ties that the Student Activities Committee had established with the region's university IEEE branches to achieve our goal. It was decided to sponsor a job fair for the region's electrical engineering students. May 24, 1996, was chosen as the date of our job fair.

With enthusiasm, abundant leadership, and cooperation, our committee divided up the responsibilities for the job fair and went to work. We sent surveys to each of the region's four universities to establish an estimated number of students who might attend. Next, we contacted the Chamber of Commerce to send us a list of electrical engineering companies throughout the state of Alabama. From this list we called, faxed, and e-mailed several corporations to ask them to attend the job fair. Through corporate sponsorship we received a lot of free amenities: a soda producer donated drinks and cups; Alabama Power donated use of its auditorium, tables, table cloths, extension cords, etc. Finally, as a follow up we split the committee up and visited each of the region's four universities. We attended a student IEEE branch meeting, handed out and posted flyers and maps, and gave a brief presentation about GOLD to the students.

On May 24, 1996, several electrical engineering companies welcomed some 50-plus students to the first GOLD/IEEE job fair! It was quite a success. As the students entered the auditorium we had name tags and a sign-in information sheet for them to fill out. The information sheet had date of graduation, current and permanent address, and school name.

Out of the \$500 allotted for the program, our committee only used \$120!

After the job fair, we have already started planning for future activities: a tour of Bell South Telecommunications Laboratory, a canoe trip, and a fall student activity. We have two GOLD members who will be responsible for GOLD membership recruits. They will use the list national sent, the information sheets the students filled out at the job fair, the corporate-compiled list of electrical engineers hired in the past 10 years, and meeting with the section members for potential GOLD members.

Our section has shown us a lot of support; they always update the section with our reports. Several of us have volunteered to be on IEEE committees other than GOLD, such as our section magazine *Significant Bits*, Student Activities, PACE Committee, and Student Education.

Our committee is dedicated to the GOLD goal of member retention. We hope that this pilot will find a permanent home somewhere in the IEEE. Our committee has only seen good effects come from this pilot committee. Not only did it get several engineers involved with the IEEE again, but we grew closer as a group and established both a social and technical society. We are looking forward to seeing our GOLD Committee grow and ultimately the sections!

Northern Virginia

After discussions with our section chair, we decided to request an extension of the kickoff time frame for the section's GOLD program. Given our personal and job commitments, we were not able to get the program started in the original time frame.

We are planning to work on GOLD during the summer and hope to have more to report in the fall. Our focus will be on drumming up some interest among the graduates of the last two years (aka GOLTYs) and seeing if that will mature into a GOLD program.

Ottawa Section

Our objective is to try to get recent grads to continue their membership long after they have graduated. The first things we are trying to address are why they discontinue their membership, why others maintain their membership, what benefits currently offered are marketable to GOLD members, and what new products and services the IEEE can offer to entice those thinking of leaving.

The way we are going about it is to try to become more visible in the community by offering GOLD members opportunities to find their first job. An example of how we went about this was to have a wine and cheese where students, HR managers, and technical managers were invited to socialize with each other. Our goal was to help the students develop their network of contacts. Unfortunately, due to the timing of the event, the student turnout was low. We plan on having another in the fall.

Another thing we are planning is to ask current members to fill in a questionnaire describing what they get out of the IEEE, how they see the IEEE, and how they would sell it to someone else. We think that, by understanding what keeps members, we could tailor a program that is geared to keeping members. Included in this survey would be a section asking those members what other services they would like to see as well.

We are currently working with an automobile manufacturer to come up with an incentive program that would allow members to receive discounts on new vehicles. We see that this would be a benefit because most grads purchase a vehicle within their first year of employment.

The Ottawa Section is hoping to lay the foundation for which a program can be initiated to improve the relations between the students and the members in industry. We hope through continued networking the benefits of the IEEE will be communicated, and GOLD members will continue to stay involved with the IEEE.

Montreal Section

The GOLD program for the Montreal Section was approved at the beginning of March. Shortly after that, we formed a committee of three members in addition to an advisor. The committee members are IEEE members who graduated in the past two years and who have actively participated in IEEE events and have realized the benefits of their membership. We were quite fortunate to have the past president of the Montreal Section, Mr. Holdrinet, as an advisor to the committee.



About the Author

We focused our efforts on members and potential members who graduated in the past four years. We chose the idea of having an industrial tour to a company in which many employees are IEEE members who could present the benefits of retaining the IEEE membership.

We tried to make the GOLD program more visible by publishing an article in the section's newsletter about the GOLD program and its goals in addition to the names and contacts of the committee. We have also established an e-mail alias for GOLD through IEEE Canada (GOLD.Montreal@ieee.ca) to facilitate the communication process.

During the month of April, we addressed the graduating class of Concordia University during its annual IEEE banquet. Mr. Holdrinet spoke about the influence that the IEEE has had on his career. I gave a brief speech about the GOLD program, its purpose and goals, and encouraged the students to join the committee and give suggestions for events that would be beneficial to all members.

We encountered many problems during the preparation of the kickoff event. In order to create a list of potential and previous members, we contacted several universities, asking them to supply us with the names and addresses of old members. The response was very poor due to final exams and the summer vacation. Based on that, we decided to delay the kickoff event until the end of August. After all, there is no point of having the event without any participants.

Another problem that we faced was the fact that all of the committee members got very busy with their jobs, since most of them are new graduates. Also, one member left town on a long business trip.

Other issues and problems that we are facing:

- Most of the people are discouraged by the fact that the IEEE membership dues are very high, particularly when converted to Canadian dollars. That and the fact that most of the IEEE publications are available at many companies eliminate the need for an IEEE membership.
- The fact that most of the IEEE conferences and seminars are aimed toward senior engineers in the design sector creates a lack of interest among junior engineers.
- Many of the past members have not "recovered" from the experience of having poor service from the IEEE headquarters in the form of magazines and membership delays.
- The IEEE's image among many people is that it's a large bureaucratic organization.

In conclusion, we highly believe in the goals and benefits of the GOLD program. It will take us some time to get this program started in the Montreal Section. By having some IEEE programs, events, and publications aimed toward junior engineers (similar to *Potentials* for engineering students), many people will be encouraged to join the IEEE and to contribute to its activities.

Dave J. Kemp is project executive with MTS Advanced, Inc., in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. He is vice chair of the IEEE MDC; president-elect of IEEE Canada (Region 7); vice president, member relations, of the IEEE Engineering Management Society; and a member of the IEEE Professional Communication Society's adcom as chapters coordinator. He is chair of the MDC ad hoc GOLD Committee.

Mr. Kemp can be contacted at MTS Advanced, Inc., P.O. Box 6666, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R3C 3V6; office phone: (204) 992-2494; fax: (204) 992-2494; home phone: (204) 889-5979; e-mail: d.kemp@ieee.org.