SWE Starts Year with a Bang

SWE dived headfirst into the new school year with many exciting events for the student body. After a great turnout at our general body meeting on September 30, SWE has been actively planning and promoting events for Columbia’s students, faculty, alumni, professionals, and the community at large. Here’s a brief summary of what we have done so far this semester!

SWE-NY - An Evening with Florence Hudson

On Monday, October 5, our collegiate section of SWE hosted SWE-NY for an evening with Florence Hudson, the 2008 winner of SWE’s Upward Mobility Award. Hudson is the Energy and Environment Executive at IBM Corporate Strategy. The evening consisted of an inspirational talk by Hudson, who talked about her life and career choices. Attendees also networked with one another over a light dinner.

Membership Mixer - “Get a taste of the SWEet life!”

The year’s first membership mixer took place on Wednesday evening, October 14. Our general body members got to mingle with one another and take a nice break from studying to enjoy free food and refreshments.

CSC Night Market

SWE had a table at the annual Chinese Students Club’s Night Market (Oct. 23), where we raised money by selling tea and our fabulous SWE t-shirts.

ACEC-NY Scholarship Informational Session

On Thursday, October 29th at 6 PM, with the help of various engineering student groups—ASME, ASCE, ESC, EWB, NSBE and SHPE—SWE hosted an informational session on the ACEC (American Council of Engineering Companies)-NY Scholarship. Intended for students approaching their final year of undergraduate study, ACEC-NY awards nine stipends of $2500, and one stipend of $5000. Further details on eligibility and awards were shared over pizza and drinks at this brief informational session.

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Save the date!

Upcoming events

Bronx High School of Science
Engineering Panel
December 4, 3:45 pm

SWE will bring a panel of female engineering students to speak to the Girls Robotics Team at Bronx High School of Science. The panel, which will consist of one student from each engineering department, will present the high schoolers with information on the classes, the career options, and the key skill and duties that correspond to each major. The individual presentations will be followed by general tips and advice, and an informal question and answer session. If you are interested in outreach to younger female students, we could always use volunteers to come represent your department. Please email ab3105@columbia.edu if you are interested in participating in this panel!

Electrical Engineering Department Women’s Lunch
December 10, 12:00 pm

The first in a series of department lunches, this casual lunch will be a chance for undergraduate and graduate students in the electrical engineering department to connect with each other and with Professor Keren Bergman, the only female professor in the department. Bergman is an IEEE fellow. Freshmen considering majoring in EE are highly encouraged to attend!

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Student Profile: Jie Qi

Each month, SWE will profile a member of its impressive general body. If you know of any outstanding female students who you think should be profiled, let us know!

Name: Jie Qi
Year: 2010
Major: Mechanical Engineering
Plans after graduation: Attend graduate school, hopefully at the Media Lab
Career aim: Not sure. Something dealing with art, design and technology. An inventor?
Other interests: Art! And exploring New York City :)
Website: http://web.mit.edu/jieqi/Public/DREU_Site/
Youtube video: http://hlt.media.mit.edu/popables/index.html
Advice for other students: Find something you really enjoy and actually go for it. It could take some searching (I started out as BME, thought about ChemE, switched my major to MechE and now I’m fascinated with EE and comp sci) but it’s totally worth it!
Favorite thing about SWE: Your yummy dessert related events (even if all I ever manage to do is salivate at the flyers ;)
Favorite thing about Columbia: Hmm. Dunno. The place has actually started to feel like home, finally, 3.5 years later.

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Event Summaries, cont. from p1

“Beyond Office Hours” - Student-Faculty Mixer

On Tuesday, November 10, SWE held its first student-faculty mixer. Both undergraduate and graduate students spent the evening mingling with female faculty from the biomedical engineering, chemical engineering, and computer science departments. A principal from the prestigious civil engineering firm Thornton Tomasetti was also in attendance. The women at the mixer were treated to free food and fantastic music by a student jazz ensemble.

SWE and Alumnae Networking Reception with Dean Feniosky Peña-Mora

In conjunction with the Columbia Engineering Alumni Association, SWE held a networking reception for SWE members and female SEAS alumnae on December 2. In addition to allowing women engineers to meet new contacts and catch up with old friends, the event was also an opportunity to meet the new Dean of the Engineering school, Dean Feniosky Peña-Mora, who is an avid supporter of the Society of Women Engineers! The event took place at the McCosh Room at the elegant Columbia Club in midtown.
Alumni Profile:  
Lauren Fong ‘09

We caught up with Lauren, who graduated with a degree in Earth and Environmental Engineering major and was also last year’s SWE president.

What have you been up to since graduation?

Since graduation I’ve been traveling a bit. The day before graduation in May I got into a program in Denmark that is put on by the Engineering College of Aarhus called the Wind Turbine Technology Summer School. The program was fully sponsored by Siemens and Vestas, the two leading wind energy companies in Denmark. It was my first time in Europe and I had the best time applying my Environmental Engineering knowledge and meeting and working with students from all over Europe and the world. The highlights of the program were climbing to the top of an 80 meter wind turbine, touring the Siemens and Vestas headquarters and facilities, networking with those companies’ professionals and viewing the Danish countryside. I would encourage everyone reading this and her friends to apply for this program.

Shortly after getting back from Europe, I left for China on one of those organized guided tours, a graduation gift from my grand aunt. It was also my first time in China and I was excited to see things like the Great Wall, the Terracotta Warriors and the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River (go hydroelectricity!). It was interesting to be able to speak with some of the people about their environmental and pollution control challenges.

Can you tell us about a memorable experience you had while in SEAS?

Last year my friend Amy and I entered the Disney ImagiNations Design Competition. We entered through our department [EEE], and designed a new ride based on The Incredibles, that had the Incredibles battling air pollution and climate change. It used the latest green technology, of course. We made a film with costumes and props, created computer graphics, and received financial help for all of it from the Arts Initiative at Columbia University, which has a great program that helps to fund student projects in the arts.

There’s something about SEAS, the magic of Mudd and maybe the engineering curriculum that creates a sense of camaraderie among engineers. Late nights (and early mornings!) are abundant but more fun when in the company of those who are going through the same thing. My senior design project involved experiments in the laboratory and hoping that the chemical reaction would occur in the beaker, thus turning its contents from clear to white. Long hours and days where the sun would rise and set outside the lab window, waiting for the important reaction to occur, would have seemed even longer if it weren’t for my team members/friends there in the lab with me. From serious conversations to belting Broadway show tunes (it’s okay, everyone else had already left the lab) that project, which resulted in some exciting developments as well, will be an experience on which I look back fondly.

Speaking of Broadway, being in SEAS at Columbia gives students access to New York theatre which is mostly wonderful. I definitely took advantage of student rate tickets and having the time to stand in line for a Broadway lottery or two. One day during a finals week the decision came down to 1) studying for finals or 2) taking a break that night to go to an opening night of a Broadway show for free (again, go Arts Initiative!). To this day we still talk about being at the opening night and closing night of “Glory Days.” Haven’t heard of it? It closed the same night and only ran for one night…the night we were there! Hi-larious.

What advice would you give to female SEAS students to prepare them for the “real world”?

I can’t say for sure that I am in the real world yet, even though I’ve seen a bit of the outside world (outside of Mudd, outside of the US!) since graduation. Ask me again in a couple of years or even months! I have maybe one constructive suggestion (and the other kind of falls under it).

Do everything. Lots of opportunities come up in college. Say yes to everything. I mean this advice within the limits of reason, of course.
Alumni Profile, cont. from p3

The older people weren’t kidding when they said that right now is one of the few chances to try new things and not worry too much about why it’s important. If you think you’re going to graduate school, apply for all those National Science Foundation (NSF) Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REUs), then go to a part of the country that’s not where you’re from or even close to New York! My REU was in Alabama. Go to the opening night of the Broadway show; it could also be closing night. Join an intramural sports team. Take the Fundamentals of Engineering Exam (FE). Study abroad. Join a research group of the professor who is doing something you think is cool, even if she’s not in your department. One of the most interesting internships I did at Columbia was at Sex and the City: The Movie. It had nothing to do with engineering but it was an experience and I found it on LionShare, which at the time was Columbia-Trak. The resources are there. Say yes and figure it out later.

Join SWE. This tip is not just a shameless plug for the best professional society student group at Columbia. I mean, get involved and come to the things detailed in the weekly SWE-mail. SWE is a community of women (and some men) in engineering school…just like you. You will meet cool, smart people who want to continue to do great things after SEAS, as well as network with professionals who are already doing great things! What I’m trying to say is getting involved in SWE can only result in good things happening, and at the very least you’ll have some new friends.

Get involved: help SWE plan a speed networking event for EWeeks!

This year SWE is excited to host the first annual Speed Networking event during ESC’s National Engineering Week celebration. In collaboration with other undergraduate engineering groups on campus, this event will bring engineering alumni, professionals and faculty face-to-face with undergraduate students.

At the SWE National Conference in California, SWE members participated in a speed networking event. Modeled after the speed dating concept, students had ten minutes to speak one on one with a mentor in the engineering field before moving on to speak to another mentor. We were so impressed by the event that we want to host a similar event for engineering undergraduates. We intend to invite alumni, engineering professionals, and faculty to come inspire the future leaders in engineering, and discover what it really means to be a Columbia engineer. For students, this is an opportunity to ask questions, get advice, make connections, and practice the art of interviewing in a relaxed and fun setting.

Set for February 17th, we hope that students will come and practice their best pick up lines. There is still time to join the SWE corporate committee and have a say in shaping this exciting event, and truly help SWE take the chain rule to a whole new level. If you are interested in helping out, contact Sarah Glazer at glazer.sarah@gmail.com.