

## The Student and Young Member Presidential Group

### By Jennifer Nicks, Ph.D. (Co-Chair, ISSMGE SYMPG)

The Student and Young Member Presidential Group (SYMPG) was created by ISSMGE President Jean-Louis Briaud to get input and ideas from students and younger members (S/YM) across the globe. The group originally consisted of a total of 18 members (3 members from each of the 6 regions) who were nominated by each regional Vice President (and approved by the President in November 2009). The members are either students or younger members (< 35 years old). Since the formation of the group, the group has dropped to 16 members while waiting for 2 new nominations. The current members are (in alphabetical order by surname):

Mahnoosh Biglari (Iran)  
 Joost Bredeveld (Netherlands)  
 Lucy Coe (New Zealand)  
 Silvia García (Mexico)  
 Erdin Ibrahim (UK)  
 Daniel Jirásko (Czech Republic)  
 Young-Hoon Jung (Korea)  
 Baribeop Kabari (Nigeria)  
 Samuel Laura Huanca (Peru)  
 Xiojun Li (China)  
 Marcos Montoro (Argentina)  
 Edwin Moreno (Colombia)  
 Jennifer Nicks (USA)  
 Suzanne Powell (Canada)  
 Imen Said (Tunisia)  
 Brendan Scott (Australia)



Jennifer Nicks

The first task of the group was for each member to come up with some ideas on how to make ISSMGE more attractive to S/YM and get them more involved in the organization. From the long list of ideas, we narrowed them down to 4 that we are currently working on within the group. The 4 ideas are:

- 1) Continue to develop the ISSMGE Website
- 2) Improve communication between the ISSMGE and S/YM
- 3) Increase YM involvement in Technical Committees
- 4) Develop and increase S/YM Membership in ISSMGE

To undertake these ideas, 4 subgroups were created within the SYMPG. The subgroups are tasked with the what/why/how to implement the broad ideas set forth by the SYMPG. The chairs of each subgroup prepared a paragraph to describe these activities and future plans:

Subgroup 1: Continue to develop the ISSMGE Website (Chair: Dr. Xiojun Li)

Subgroup 1 has identified some problems of ISSMGE website from the perspective of student and young members. These problems can be classified into three categories: ease of use, contents and functionality. Subgroup 1 has also proposed some solutions for these problems:

## **SYMPG (continued)**

**By Jennifer Nicks, Ph.D. (Co-Chair, ISSMGE SYMPG)**

- Introduce more professional resources into website. Also, it will be beneficial to spread ISSMGE unique culture and attract more young people if we can introduce the masters of ISSMGE from the beginning to now. A more vivid introduction of the branches of our association, such as organization structure, research directions, key leader's video introduction, great achievement, milestone event and so on will be equally important.
- Add popular functions, such as RSS news subscription, members' blogs and forums, into ISSMGE website. Visitors of ISSMGE webpage should have an opportunity to get automatically generated news that could be sent by e-mail. Subscribing for the newsletter could be done easily through the web form and through submitting emails.
- Ease of use of website, such as page layout, color design and interactivity, plays an important role in a site's quality. Improvement on these aspects will have positive effects. On the home page up to date news in format of short articles may be included. For example newsletters from the society, scientific articles, invitations for upcoming events etc. However, it would be challenging for webmasters to update a homepage regularly.

Subgroup 1 contacted GeoForum.com co-founder Dr. Rainer Massarsch for possible collaborations in improving the ISSMGE website. Dr. Rainer Massarsch agreed that young geotechnical engineers are interested to learn, to ask questions and to get competent responses. He provided very valuable comments in addition to the ideas presented above. His comments are: (1) Discussions need to be monitored by trustworthy experts. ISSMGE TCs could monitor discussion covering their respective area. Also, to host a successful discussion forum, one needs to develop a sustainable concept. Common problems include fake questions, a lot of spam and web engines trying to hijack e-mail addresses; (2) a lot of information in the form of youtube or other videos which could be organized according to specific topics (earthquakes, liquefaction, landslides, ground improvement etc.) can be added to an area of website; and (3) Geo-commercial companies and their activities can be linked to other area of the website. These companies may have privilege of publishing information about their company.

Subgroup 1 also consulted ISSMGE Secretary General Prof. Neil Taylor on how the ISSMGE website works. Prof. Neil Taylor said they are thinking of ways in which the website can be improved and he said the work of Subgroup 1 is very helpful.

Future plans include keeping a close contact with Prof. Neil Taylor and Dr. Rainer Massarsch, interacting with the Innovation and Development Committee and working out a proposal for the improvement of ISSMGE website.

### **Subgroup 2: Improve communication between the ISSMGE and S/YM (Chair: Brendan Scott)**

Subgroup 2 is focusing on improving communication between the ISSMGE and younger members. Mailing lists of younger members have recently been created and are being populated; however, there is a need to make the society more interactive and attractive for younger members. Multimedia methods of communication that facilitate two-way communication between the ISSMGE and members are being investigated as an avenue for improving communication.

Subgroup 2 is also proposing to conduct a survey of young members (and potential future members) from different parts of the world. The aim of this survey is to determine how (and/or if) current young members of the ISSMGE are receiving information from the ISSMGE; changes or improvements that young members would like to see; what can be done to attract more younger members; and determine what percentage of youth in member societies are active ISSMGE members. A flyer on the ISSMGE will also be created to send to both current and potential future members. The aim of this flyer is to highlight and promote the work of the ISSMGE and attract younger members to join and become more involved.

## **SYMPG (continued)**

**By Jennifer Nicks, Ph.D. (Co-Chair, ISSMGE SYMPG)**

**Subgroup 3: Continue Increase YM involvement in Technical Committees (Chair: Dr. Young-Hoon Jung)**

Subgroup 3 of ISSMGE is organized to encourage young members to be involved with the technical committee (TC) of the ISSMGE. Current guidelines define general membership of TCs: four members nominated by the chairperson of TC, four members nominated by the technical oversight committee (TOC), and two members from each member society. Current guidelines do not consider explicitly the involvement in TCs for young members who may have a great potential but do not have some past activity in the technical domain of interest. The members of Subgroup 3 discussed how to increase the TC involvement of young members and recommended that each technical committee must involve six young members who are nominated from each regional ISSMGE. Currently we are discussing details on requirement and role of young TC members with Dr. Suzanne Lacasse, head of the TOC. A proposal will be developed to modify the existing guidelines and submitted for approval by the ISSMGE Board.

**Subgroup 4: Develop and increase S/YM Membership in ISSMGE (Chair: Lucy Coe)**

Subgroup 4 has been set up to develop and grow a student and young members group for ISSMGE. The main purpose of the new membership is to promote interaction between the ISSMGE and young engineers. As a sub group, with input from our peers, we have started developing objectives for this student and young members group and a strategy for implementing it.

We propose that the student and young members group is developed within each member society and at an international level. We understand that the ISSMGE will need to work closely with member societies to develop this new membership and that the new membership needs to be compatible with ISSMGE requirements.

Recently, we have surveyed member societies to receive feedback on the student and young member groups already present within these groups. Initial findings of the survey indicate that of the respondents, two thirds of societies had a young person's membership, with over 80% having special events targeted at young members including reduced fees, awards and scholarships, special symposiums and sponsored attendance at nation conferences.

The societies that did not yet have an official young membership were open to creating this within their societies. Other suggestions for implementing the student and young membership include reduced fees, promotion of interaction with more experienced engineers and with other geotechnical societies, and advertisement of events, courses etc.

Going forward we will be collating all survey results and further developing a strategy for the student and young member group.

**Corresponding Members:**

When ISSMGE President Jean-Louis Briaud created the group, he realized that many more students and younger members were interested in contributing to the SYMPG than could be nominated. He then created the Corresponding Members of the SYMPG. This group receives the e-mails of the SYMPG and can contribute by e-mail to either co-chair of the SYMPG (Dr. Briaud or Dr. Nicks), but cannot actively participate in the meetings or vote on initiatives within the SYMPG. To date, there are 25 Corresponding Members.

If you are a student or younger member interested in becoming a Corresponding Member of the SYMPG, please contact Dr. Jennifer Nicks at [jennifernicks@gmail.com](mailto:jennifernicks@gmail.com)