

# WOOD AND FIBER SCIENCE

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## TO SECURE THE FUTURE OF THE WOOD SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY PROFESSION

The viability of professional societies, like SWST, depends on its members and their support of its missions and programs. Indication that our profession has reached "a critical point in history" (SWST Critical Issues Committee Task Group Report, 1992) and that the field of wood science and technology is in serious decline is no big surprise for us in the academic arena. A similar alarm was expressed in a more recent (1995) article in the *Forest Products Journal* {45(6):23} by D. E. Lyon et al. Yet, there is a strong demand for wood scientists and forest products specialists by industry as well as by private and public agencies. Specialists in wood technology and forest products marketing are highly sought after, and they easily find rewarding positions. So, what is the solution?

Many very good recommendations have been advanced and published. Some of those suggestions, however, almost sound as though we want somebody else to solve our problem. Examples include getting scholarships by industry, convincing university administrations, and the like. But are we doing enough ourselves, the professionals?

If our profession, and thus our society, are to survive and flourish, we must recruit new students into our academic programs. How to do it most effectively is the key to success. One program recently developed is a "students-recruit-students" effort. So far, five university programs—North Carolina State, Oregon State, Penn State, University of Idaho, and Virginia

Tech—have adopted the general principles of this recruiting effort. The main targets are students on the respective campuses who, after one or two years, have not declared their majors. The recruiters receive modest financial support and are provided access to departmental resources such as telephone and mail services. In some cases, a separate recruiting office is set up and manned by the student recruiters. Recently, these student recruiters at three universities created a network through the internet. They regularly exchange ideas and report to each other results of their efforts.

This is just one effort that appears to be highly successful. In some of the participating programs, enrollment has more than doubled over the last 2 to 4 years. One of the universities involved reports an enrollment of more than 80 wood science and forest products students.

There must be other ways to promote our profession among young people. It is the professional responsibility of all members of our society to participate, in however small a way, in the effort to secure a healthy future for wood science and technology. I challenge all members of SWST to join in and help recruit the future technologists, scientists, managers, and business persons for the forest products industry and for the profession.

GEZA IFJU

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