

A Guide to Starting your MCA Student Chapter



A program developed in cooperation with...
Mechanical Contractors Association of Canada
Provincial and Zone Mechanical Contractors Association's
Canadian Mechanical Contracting Education Foundation



Why Start a Student Chapter?

As a result of the changing demographics of our industry, there is a real and urgent need to attract the best and the brightest students into the profession of mechanical contracting. One of the proven methods to achieve this is by orientating students into our field so that they make “mechanical” their career choice.

An excellent example of the potential of this program is found south of the border. MCAA initiated their student chapter program 5 years ago. They now boast 39 student chapters across the US and they continue to grow. There are numerous accounts of mechanical contractors subsequently hiring a number of graduates out of their local chapters. At present there are now two very successful Student Chapters in Canada.

The benefits to an association are substantial. In starting a student chapter the industry observes a clear and strong commitment from the association to build for the future by bringing together the four key industry elements; the association, the contractors, the learning institutions and the future industry leaders.

To a contractor, the benefits are considerable including an increased community image, a demonstrated commitment to the industry and the enviable position of working hand in hand with the best and brightest students headed towards the construction industry. This is an opportunity to positively influence the decisions of future leaders to move into the mechanical industry and more obviously, to hire them.

The benefits to an educator or learning institution include an increased profile within the institution itself, a progressive and first mover profile, as well as a recognized level of commitment to the industry. Also, it provides for high-level, practical interaction between the institution, the industry and the students. The institution also benefits from the development of a reputation as committed to its students in this area, thus attracting more potential students to build its program.

To a student, the benefits are significant. A student enjoys interaction with other students in a relaxed environment, they meet leaders in the mechanical contracting industry, they develop valuable community contacts and in the end have a tremendous opportunity for a successful career.

By developing a student chapter you can build strong ties to the community, demonstrate a clear commitment to your membership as a visionary, regularly interact with the influencers in the mechanical contracting community, and put yourself in the enviable position of guiding and influencing the future leaders of our industry. Although there are many different ways to successfully start a student chapter this guide has been developed to offer a few thoughts and suggestions based on the successes achieved to date and to provide a template for your use.



Members of McMaster Student Chapter of the Mechanical Contractors Association (MCA) Hamilton attending MCA America Conference 2007

MCAC and CMCEF's Role

The role of MCAC and CMCEF is to initiate the Student Chapters Program and to champion the development of a template for the local Association to work from. As well, both groups must provide a promotional and marketing vehicle. Some of the other support suggestions are:

- ❑ To provide administrative support to the local associations in the start-up phase of a student chapter
- ❑ To market the program nationally via: newsletters, Just the Fax, website, and the media
- ❑ To recognize the achievements of local chapters and promote them nationally
- ❑ To encourage the use of MCAC's new online job posting and search engine where students can freely post resumes and contractors have a single source to view potential candidates from across Canada and to research policies and government regulations.
- ❑ Other possibilities: Include chapters members on the MCAC mailing list; add the chapters to the Just the Fax distribution list; offer member pricing on CMCEF seminars, perhaps offer a free seat in a seminar; encourage attendance to MCAC Annual National Conference; encourage attendance to CMCEF's Middle Management Conference; encourage attendance to provincial and zone conferences

What needs to be done to start a student chapter?

There are 4 key components to a successful student chapter and all of these components *must* work in harmony.

- ❑ An association staff member in a lead role. The position of the Association leader is to organize and coordinate the entire student chapter process with the cooperation of the other three contributing leaders.
- ❑ There must be a contractor champion or sponsor. Sometimes it is ideal to have more than one. The contractor "champion" must be willing to meet on a regularly scheduled basis and be committed to the leadership of the chapter as he/she will be the recognized "authority figure" to the students.
- ❑ A professor or instructor from an identified learning institution must be on board. The faculty

member is the vital element in recruiting students into the chapter and therefore must have a strong commitment to make it work.

- ❑ Students. Of course the students are the reason for this program. They need to see first hand the advantages of working in mechanical industry and you must gain a commitment to participating in organized events.

If any one of these elements is missing, the program simply will not work.

- ❑ The Association must first seek out a contractor who recognizes the advantages of leading a student chapter. This company must appoint a champion as the point of contact. They will be responsible for securing visitation to sites, provide financial contributions, bringing in speakers, etc...
- ❑ The next step is to identify all the institutions that have a mechanical contracting component. Identify the departments; find the department heads and the instructors then arrange a meeting with the construction/engineering faculty to: identify goals of student chapter; request a faculty advisor who will lead/coordinate students; have the advisor meet with contractors prior to start of school year.
- ❑ Once all the leadership components are in place, the final phase is recruiting the students. The majority of this function will fall to the faculty member. It is important to note that for the most part, students are generally under tremendous financial stress and most students work part-time to provide their daily necessities. The point is, students are short on time and money. Meetings that include food, especially free food, cover two of the student's most basic issues, time and money. This goes a long way to assuring the success of your meetings.
- ❑ A decision needs to be made whether there will be student fees to join
- ❑ Keeping any fees within the chapter will assist in building the financial stability of your chapter.
- ❑ Work with faculty advisors to promote the chapter and student participation is vital. Have students develop their own "Board".

Suggested activities that students can participate in with local Association

It is important to remember the two main issues a student has today, a lack of time and money. Also note that students spend all day listening to people speak so guest speakers are a good idea but they should be used sparingly. With that in mind, here are some suggestions that have proved successful:

Possible Activities may include:

- site tours
- office tours
- guest speakers
- beer and pizza nights
- participate in association social events (e.g. golf tournaments, conferences, dinners, xmas parties, etc.)
- have students work on a project (e.g.: heating/plumbing system for a church)
- students can hold fundraisers to send someone to the national conference
- develop a rewards point system
- participate at MCA Canada's conference
- attend MCAA's Student Chapter Summit and participate in their Competition
- establishment of scholarships

Time Line to set up a chapter

Based on the current time of year and working back from the school year, starting in September, the following is a recommended timeline to work with:

November - December

- recruit contractor or contractors to sponsor your chapter
- identify the institutions which have a construction component
- find a list of the instructors and particularly the department head
- initiate contact with the instructors in the construction faculty in an effort to set up an appointment to meet with them to outline your ideas

January – February

- meet with faculty and select the advisor

March - April

- have the advisor meet with the contractor(s) and the association manager to set things up for the Fall.

May – August

- establish a timetable for meetings
- secure meeting locations
- schedule tours and events
- identify any potential community projects
- finalize budgets and sponsorship commitments
- generally prepare for the upcoming student year

September

- invite students to first meeting (this needs to be enticing for them to attend)

Again, this is designed as a reference for your use and demonstrates what is possible with a student chapter. Undoubtedly, your new student chapter will be as unique and individualistic as the sponsoring associations that created it.



Members of University of Ottawa Student Chapter of the Mechanical Engineering Contracting Chapter attending MCA Ottawa function

For More Information...

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Members MCA Hamilton - McMaster Student Chapter on site tour of Portlands Energy Centre, (hosted by SNC Lavalin)