

ASC Lifetime Recognition Award

Stephen Schuette – April 2012

Thank you. – First I would like to thank Ann, my wife of 44 years and mother of our three daughters. I was fortunate to have her support for these many years. Along with her early career as a teacher, she has always found time to give encouragement and guidance. Next, I would like to thank all of those that have worked hard over the years to develop our discipline. During my professional career, our graduate programs have grown dramatically, the computer has continued to maximize our efficiency in construction, we have achieved credibility in higher education, and the industry has embraced our efforts to give them a better prepared professional.

From the very beginning, our founders of CM education had the vision of fulfilling the managerial needs of the future construction industry. It is well known that in the 1930s the University of Florida was the first to explore the establishment of contemporary construction management education. Several other schools trace their beginnings to the 1940s and 1960s. In those early years it was very difficult to develop the discipline. In an ASC website publication, it states, “In the early 1960s, it was noted that of the many existing professional and educational societies concerned with building, none provided a place, a welcome, or any benefit for a curriculum with the teaching of construction as a major objective.” It further states, “People engaged in teaching architecture, civil engineering, and like disciplines unfortunately felt (and openly stated) that construction curriculums should be properly relegated to the status of secondary adjunct.”

If it was not for the Associated Schools of Construction, it is doubtful that we could have achieved all that we now enjoy. The early program directors of construction education started discussing how they could establish the programs on-campus. They soon realized that they needed to meet at a national level. The ASC was established at a meeting on March 19th and 20th, 1965 at the University of Florida. Nine schools had representatives at the meeting including Arizona

State, Auburn, Clemson, Colorado State, Florida, Michigan State, University of Minnesota, University of Nebraska, and the Virginia Polytechnic Institute.

I was fortunate to have met several of those early founding fathers of our discipline. As a student at Bradley University, I remember a meeting in which I had the opportunity to pick up attendees at the airport and tend their bar. The bartending may have influenced my desire to seek a career in construction education.

The early programs were a subset in architecture or engineering. And a few were not tied to any allied disciplines. Whenever the program or department was housed, they all had the elements of professional constructor. Common to the programs were the issues of managing time, money, and other resources. This included an understanding of terminology, structures, ethics, safety, history of our profession, technology, control systems, methods, materials, field operations, and etc.

Early in my career while teaching at Auburn, I had the opportunity to observe and minimally participate in the development of two organizations that enhanced the earlier work of the Associated Schools of Construction: The American Institute of Constructors (AIC) and the American Council for Construction Education (ACCE). In addition, several trade organizations started to recognize construction education, including the Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC), Associated General Contractors (AGC), and the National Association of Homebuilders (NAHB). These organizations and contractors realized that the future of their industry was in the young people, and the universities were the direct suppliers of the future.

In recent years, additional construction associations have joined in the support of our construction education programs. Among those are the Mechanical Contractors Association, National Electrical Contractors Association, American society for Healthcare Engineering, the Restoration Industry Association, and the National Demolition Association. These organizations and other provide funding and expertise in the development of our faculty in those sectors of the industry.

Today, we are doing considerably more research and international outreach. These activities will broaden our horizon and assist the construction industry in becoming more efficient and profitable. ASC has certainly been a leader in these efforts. In the very early years of ASC, research papers were not a part of the annual meeting, but now they are the main focus. In addition, the ASC Journal is doing very well. This week, ASC has taken a major step toward the internationalization of our discipline by meeting here in Birmingham England. Congratulations to Chuck and the current ASC Leadership.

A key component of the direction and guidance during my career was the question, “Who is the customer?” During the Purdue freshmen orientation, I remember the cheers from the parents when I told the students that my job was to get them off their parents’ payroll. So, the question is this: “Who is the customer?” In my opinion, the customer is the construction industry. They are the ones that are going to “buy” or hire our product, support our programs, and give us guidance.

During my years at Purdue, Clemson, and Auburn, I can say that nearly every decision I made was with the customer in mind, and how these decisions could provide added value to them. It is not always easy to determine the needs of a customer, but listening, entrepreneurship, and market analysis does help. Just like in business, we need to continuously evaluate our position, consolidate, and/or expand our product lines. Curriculum changes may be necessary as we explore the needs of the customer. From my time as a student and several years with a general construction company, I knew that we were not including major segments of the construction industry in our university educational programs. For example, the HVAC component was very weak in most universities and demolition was never mentioned. At Purdue, we set in place a process to study the needs of the industry and began a specialization (or track) in MEP.

I felt there were three components required to invest in our new “product lines.”

1. There had to be a long-term industry need

2. The Industry had to provide support with a commitment of time and money
3. Compared to demand, only minimal attention was being given to the industry segment in higher education.

After we developed the model for MEP, we used the model to expand the markets to Healthcare, Disaster Restoration, and Demolition. It was an honor to be involved in the leadership and development of specialty construction education. In all of these specializations, a key component for success was the faculty member. Finding a faculty member in these areas was problematic, so many times we had to “make one.” The industry has always supported these efforts. In the case of MEP, we were able to bring together the MCA and NECA to form the Mechanical Electrical Academic Consortium (MEAC) in the early 1990s. In the case of healthcare, disaster restoration, and demolition no faculty existed. These areas were untouched and had high potential for success as a specialty or track in construction education. The “silver platter” was given to those faculty members and they, with assistance from the construction community, performed very well in development of the discipline and meeting the needs of the customer. As a consequence of this diversification and customer understanding, Purdue and other programs still enjoy a very high placement of their graduates even in our current economic times. Many other disciplines on campus would be very satisfied with our lowest placement rates.

The future depends on your understanding of the customer and hiring good faculty. Faculty that participate in ASC and interact with the construction industry will assure that our discipline will stay focused on the customer. There are a lot of outside influences that try to make us focus on other issues, such as university administrators. If we remember our customer, they will lead us to the answers of current or future needs and the opportunities they will afford.

It has been great to be associated with an academic discipline that has respect for capitalism and entrepreneurship when preparing the next generation of constructions. Our partnership with the construction industry is outstanding, and all that we need to do is take advantage and give back to the industry. Today,

we have received the recognition from the academic world and are now welcome to be on campus. Even in our tough economic times, many schools are developing new programs and expanding existing programs. The large number of faculty openings on the ASC website is evidence of this growth.

Ann and I appreciate the opportunities that we have had from my time as a young professor at Auburn University, approximately 10 years in the construction industry, and several rewarding years at Clemson and Purdue Universities. Meeting with colleagues at ASC has been invaluable in the development of new ideas and direction. Thanks again for the recognition. An award from your peers is AWESOME!!!