

# No prerequisites required

A student member recounts her experiences of growth and satisfaction in volunteering at last June's International Humanitarian Technology Conference (IHTC 2015) in Ottawa.

By Alise Wang

Last year, if you were to tell me that I would be one of the Masters of Ceremony at an international conference banquet, I'd laugh and tell you that you must be crazy. Needless to say, it felt surreal being on the podium this past June at IHTC, speaking to some of the most educated and intellectual individuals I've met. Looking back, I wonder how I even got there.

I was your stereotypical introverted first year nerd when I started school at the University of Ottawa for chemical engineering in 2014. I stepped into school every day with my head down, holding my textbooks like a bulletproof shield against my chest with one hand and my calculator in the other, speed-walking to the nearest table so I could sit down and study. I remember



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asking myself "so this is it?! This is what my life is going to consist of for the next four years? Just moulding in this library? There has to be more to engineering than these tiresome trigonometric integrals..."

Although, yes, it is sadly true that integrals take up a lot of the math in engineering, but this major isn't just about the math: it's about the connecting with the people doing the math, and communicating to non-engineers in a way that makes them understand the math.

I came to university with ambitions of getting involved with humanitarian work after my degree, and applying my engineering knowledge for philanthropic purposes. My dream career is to help a developing country improve their water filtration systems in a way that'll give them independence and self-sufficiency. I had no idea how to start this journey, but the IEEE provided me with the initiative to take the first steps towards my goal. I was fortunate enough to

attend the STRAT 24 cocktail event in January and learn about this organization's vision. STRAT 24 was a student competition hosted by Enactus UOttawa and the IEEE Ottawa Section, sponsored by uOttawa and CISCO. A selected number of students in small groups were given a case study written by Alfredo Herrera and Joan Kerr about IEEE Humanitarian Initiatives, and were locked in hotel rooms for twenty four hours to research and give a well thought-out presentation to the judges. I was so inspired listening to the students' presentations that I immediately became an IEEE student member as soon as I got home.

A few weeks later, I attended SPAC, an annual conference specializing in helping students net-

## Summary of IHTC Student Activities

by Sawsan Abdul-Majid

Student activities at IHTC 2015 were organized in two streams:

**1. Student competition, Oral and Poster (mainly post-graduate students)**  
Students' papers with international submissions were peer-reviewed. Accepted papers were judged during the conference; six judges were invited to form two judging committees.

Oral presentations and posters were judged using the following criteria:

- Originality, complexity, usefulness of the product,
- Clarity of link to humanity,
- Alignment with the conference theme, and
- Presentation skills.

Awards presented to students were funded by the IEEE Canadian Foundation, and the IEEE Region 7 Humanitarian Initiatives Committee.

Three oral presentation winners were selected and money awards of \$400, \$300, and \$200 were granted with Certificates to first-, second-, and third-placed Oral presenters accordingly.

Additionally, the first-placed poster presentation winner received \$300.

**2. STRAT 24—Take Two students special panel, undergraduate students (faculty of Engineering at UOttawa)**  
This panel was presented with a challenging case history written by



Winning participants and organizers of the IHTC 2015 Student Competitions receive some well-deserved recognition. Left to Right: Simona Verga (DRDC), Alexander Poultney (Villanova University), Michael Benson (Villanova University), Sawsan Abdul-Majid (University of Ottawa), Mahmoud Kabalan (Villanova University), Maaz Irfan (University of Ottawa), Reem W. I. Alanqar (University of Ottawa), Joan Kerr, (FBSC), Zaeem Queshi (University of Ottawa)

veteran HIC committee members Alfredo Herrera and Joan Kerr, and asked to present their individual solutions.

No easy assignment, as the case history had already been piloted in January by IEEE Ottawa Section and Enactus UOttawa at the STRAT 24 Student Competition; UOttawa, and

CISCO were among the sponsors for that event.

Dr. Abdul Majid, IHTC 2015 Students Activities chair, as well as a few IHTC 2015 Board members acted as judges, with 24 students participating. The success of this earlier competition was the inspiration for the IHTC 2015 student special panel. IHTC 2015

invited and sponsored a team of STRAT 24 students to present enhanced solutions by reviewing the same case study used at STRAT 24 competition.

The panel moderators for STRAT 24—Take Two were Dr. Sawsan Abdul-Majid, Ms Joan Kerr and Alfredo Herrera.

work with working professionals in the technological field, hosted by the IEEE UOttawa and Carleton student branches. Through this conference, I was able to step out of my shell and network for the first time. I was even lucky enough to meet an IEEE Ottawa Section member, Wolfram Lunscher, and learn about volunteering for future IEEE events! It was extremely nerve-racking but eased me into the idea of being social.

A few months later, I was introduced by Wolfram to the International Humanitarian Technology Conference, where I met Dr. Sawsan Abdul-Majid, one of the chairs of the Technical and Student Activities Committees. I spent the next couple of months attending meetings, working with talented professionals in the committee, and making a plethora of spreadsheets via Excel to organize information about the oral paper presentations. When I found myself standing on that banquet podium, I realized that, through this conference, I've gained more organizational and interpersonal skills than I ever did in a lecture hall.

Volunteering for the IHTC was one of the best experiences I've ever had, and one of the bravest decisions I've ever made. Through IHTC, I met even more professionals and academics, learned about many intelligent technolo-

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gies from presentations, and was given the amazing opportunity to be a part of the executive team of the IEEE UOttawa student branch, a group of some of the smartest and perseverant students I've ever met. None of this would have happened if I decided to stay home that night of STRAT 24 because I wouldn't have met such brilliant individuals like Sawsan Abdul-Majid, Maria Rey, Raed Abdullah, Wolfram Lunscher, Pritpal Singh, Alfredo Herrera, Richard Pommainville, and the rest of the committee, that I am now proud to call my colleagues and friends.

I cannot begin to explain how important it is for students to be more involved with events through IEEE. There is no better way to meet influential academics and professionals than to work with them firsthand or start a conversation with them at a conference. As a shy and introverted student myself, I can completely relate to anyone who finds difficulty networking; and as a student who's ambitious to learn for the future, I will tell you that networking is one of the most important assets you will need to have a successful career, so go slap on a tie or a pair of heels and a crisp dress shirt, put your textbooks down, and get yourself out there! ■

### **About the Author**

**Alise (Hui) Wang** was born in Beijing and moved to Calgary, Alberta when she was four years old. She is currently a second year undergraduate Chemical Engineering, Engineering Management and Entrepreneurship student at the University of Ottawa. After volunteering for IHTC, she joined the IEEE UOttawa Student Branch Executive Committee as VP Secretary. Alise is also an active member of Engineers Without Borders and Kin Canada. After graduation, she hopes to use her degree towards philanthropic projects across the world, specifically in water treatment.