

The Case for Individual ISSMGE Membership

By Harvey E. Wahls

The Geo-Institute is the US Member Society of International Society for Soil Mechanics and Geotechnical Engineering (ISSMGE) and represents the US geotechnical community in the ISSMGE Administrative Council. However, G-I members are not individual members of ISSMGE unless they pay the optional ISSMGE dues, currently \$30, which are a checkoff item on the annual ASCE dues statement. For 2001, approximately 2200, or about 25%, of the G-I members have opted to become ISSMGE members. This is a significant decline from our ISSMGE membership of more than 4500 in the early 1990s. The decreases in membership appear to correlate with increases in the dues. Also, there appear to be uncertainties regarding the benefits of ISSMGE membership.

As the International Secretary of the G-I and formerly the USNS Secretary of the ASCE GT Division, I have served as the US liaison with the ISSMGE since 1985. In October 2001, Bob Holtz will assume this responsibility. As I leave this position, I would like to share my perceptions of ISSMGE activities and their benefits to both individual G-I members and to the international geotechnical profession.

What does ISSMGE Do?

The objective of the ISSMGE is to promote international cooperation among engineers and scientists for the advancement of geotechnics and its engineering applications. This parallels one of the Geo-Institute's stated missions "to integrate the talents and perspectives of individuals and organizations in the worldwide geo-industry to advance the state-of-the-art and the state-of-the-practice of the geo-industry." Thus, interaction with the ISSMGE clearly is one way for the G-I to pursue this goal at the international level.

The primary ISSMGE activities that promote technology transfer are international conferences and technical committees. The conferences include quadrennial International Conferences on Soil Mechanics and Geotechnical Engineering (ICSMGE), regional Conferences on Soil Mechanics and Geotechnical Engineering, e.g., Panamerican Conferences, and Congresses on Environmental Geotechnics (ICEG). Many invited state of the art papers from these conferences have become major landmark references for geotechnical engineers. US attendance at these conferences typically is only 50-100, including about 10-20 invited program participants. Attendees are about evenly split between academics and practitioners. In addition, typically more than 100 US members, overwhelmingly from the academic community, author or co-author proceedings papers.

ISSMGE Technical Committees plan international specialty conferences, symposia and workshops; prepare review reports for discussion at technical sessions or publication in proceedings of international or regional conferences; and publish separate volumes of papers and/or state of the art or review reports. At least one (TC17) has established new international journal. Currently there are about 30 ISSMGE TCs with total membership of about 500, including 40-50 G-I members. Three TCs currently are sponsored by Geo-Institute: TC 17-

Ground Improvement, TC 32- Risk Assessment and Management and TC 33- Scour of Foundations.

Benefits of Individual Membership

There are two tangible benefits of individual ISSMGE membership. The first is a subscription to Geotechnical News, the quarterly magazine that provides a combination of news of North American and international activities and short general interest technical articles. More than 80% of the ISSMGE dues is used for this subscription, and increases in the subscription rate have been the major cause of dues increases. Secondly, individual members of ISSMGE members now have free internet access to the Swedish Geotechnical (SGI) Database of more than 50,000 geotechnical references.

Less than 10% of our individual ISSMGE members participate directly in ISSMGE conferences and/or technical committees. Thus, for most members, the only other advantages of membership are the indirect benefits from the advancement of the state of the art and practice of geotechnical engineering that may result from ISSMGE activities.

Contributions to the State of Practice

The advancement of the worldwide state of the art and practice of geotechnical engineering is a two-way street for G-I members. On the one hand, many US engineers now are competing or collaborating with foreign engineers on projects in the US and abroad. To remain competitive, US geo-professionals must stay abreast of advances in practice in other countries. Experience has demonstrated that many geotechnical innovations originate outside the US and then gradually are integrated into US practice. Numerous examples can be cited. Cone penetrometers, pressuremeters and dilatometers were originally developed in Europe and today are common site characterization tools in most parts of the US. Similarly, the design /construction options available to US geo-professionals now routinely include reinforced earth walls and slopes, deep dynamic compaction, micropiles, slurry walls, and prefabricated wick drains. Piled raft foundations may be a more recent example that to date has seen only limited applications in the US. All of these technologies originated outside the US and gradually have been introduced into US practice through interactions of US and foreign geo-professionals both in the US and abroad. US participation in ISSMGE activities facilitates these interactions and thus accelerates the transfer of new technology.

On the other hand, US geotechnical engineers also have made many significant contributions to the advancement of geotechnical engineering practice. The G-I and its members have a professional responsibility to transfer this technology to others to enhance the state of practice throughout the world, especially in developing countries. In addition to its conferences and technical committee activities, ISSMGE contributes directly to this objective by supporting lecture tours and workshops by prominent engineers, including some G-I members, in developing countries and donating model geotechnical libraries to universities and geotechnical organizations in developing countries. ISSMGE also has organized regional Young Geotechnical Engineers Conferences to encourage the development of young geotechnical engineers.

Concluding Remarks

Based on my personal experience, I believe that ISSMGE activities provide international interactions and networking opportunities that contribute to the worldwide advancement of the state of the art and practice of geotechnical engineering. Currently, about \$5 of your individual ISSMGE dues support these activities. This is a very modest investment from which I believe everyone who practices in the geo-profession eventually will benefit.

Finally, I would note that similar arguments can be made for supporting the advancement of geotechnical practice through the activities of other international organizations, such as the International Society for Rock Mechanics (ISRM) and International Association of Engineering Geologists (IAEG). In the future, the Geo-Institute hopes to develop more direct interactions with these and other international organizations and will encourage all individual members to support the activities of at least one international organization.