Ingredients of Professionalism
A Panel Discussion

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MODERATOR'S INTRODUCTION

The concept of Professionalism is not easy to define. In medieval times there were only three "Professions," the Church, the Law, and Medicine. Now many occupations are vying for the distinction. In the case of Engineering these include many sub-specializations, for instance trash collectors, some of whom consider themselves "Sanitary Engineers." O.K. so where would we be without them (neck-deep in garbage), but are they professionals? That depends on how many of the "ingredients of professionalism" are practiced in their daily work. But what are these "ingredients"? That is the crux of the matter, and the subject which this panel is to discuss.

It has been suggested that the following are some aspects of professionalism which should be discussed:

Responsibility

Special Training	Competence
Altruism	Ethical Conduct
Effective Communication	Respect for Self and Others

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SOME PANELISTS' PRELIMINARY POSITIONS

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Ingredients of Professionalism

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This panel has the mandate of exploring questions, such as: What is professionalism? Who is a professional? What constitutes a profession? Webster places the professional between "profanum vulgus" (the common herd) and "professor" (the uncommon/weird individual). Interestingly, this is also the placement of the professional in the eyes of the general public and in the eyes of the professionals themselves. I think we can all agree that the professional is, thankfully, somewhat more than a profanum vulgus in capability and, thankfully again, somewhat less removed from the real world than the academic.

I will try to identify the ingredients of professionalism, focussing on those ingredients which are fundamental to the issue. I claim no special expertise or right to discuss such issues other than the fact that I have been and remain a professional, I am a professor by profession, and I spend most of my time being a profanum vulgus.

I will dispense with a large part of professionalism by dividing it into two parts:

1. The Physical Part;
2. The Mental Part.

The physical part consists of:

a. The professional person;
b. The tools used;
c. The product;
d. The general public;
e. The professional society.

These are the physical things of the environment. They are needed to make professionalism, but they are of no immediate use in defining professionalism.

The mental part is more interesting and fruitful for my purposes. It consists of:

a. The expertise (knowledge/know-how/facts/reasoning/logic);
b. That other stuff (a sense of harmony/quality/ethics/style/trustworthiness/respect/responsibility/the pursuit of excellence).

The common use of the word professional is invariably of one of these two categories. Examples:

He is a professional student.
Computer Science is my profession.
The work was professionally done.
He is very professional about the way he digs ditches.

Our expectations of professionals are thus twofold. We expect the professional not only to do specialized and skillful work, but to take pride in the work, to be internally driven to do a good job, technically and socially. We expect the professional to consider all aspects of the issue as a package, so that appropriate actions are taken. We expect the professional to hold himself accountable for his actions.

Presumably, the motivation here for inquiring into the ingredients of professionalism is to understand it and enhance or promote professionalism. So, what must we do?

Well, we have systems in place for promoting the physical part and the expertise type of the mental part. These systems can always be made better. But by far the weakest part, and thus the part that deserves our attention, is that other stuff which is so hard to define and deal with (primarily because it is largely undefinable and obtuse).

Being professionals in technical areas means that we are singularly ill-prepared to enter this netherworld of the mind, emotions, motivations, values, etc. But enter we must. After you . . .?

Ingredients of Professionalism

by

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Standards

Set and maintain standards in everything undertaken (e.g. quality, care and attention to detail, reliability, precision, etc.) ("If it is worth doing at all then it requires/deserves your best.")

Knowledge

Continuous acquisition of knowledge concerning one's chosen profession and discipline in order to maintain overall proficiency and state-of-the-art awareness.

Expertise

Ability to put acquired knowledge and training to use in an efficient, effective and expert manner.

Initiative

Self-imposed responsibility to take whatever action may be necessary to avoid problems or to eliminate problems -- also action (previously unidentified) which will ensure success.

Attitude

Objective approach to all work-oriented questions; freely giving quality help and support whenever asked or in a position to do so; acceptance and reaction to criticism in a serious, calm, and neutral manner.

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Some Observations on Professionalism and Computer Simulation

by

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and

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The headline of the February 6th issue of the "Chronicle of Higher Education" reads "Brouhaha over Historian's Use of Sources Renews Scholars' Interest in Ethics Codes."

The article goes on to quote Rosemary Chalk, staff officer of the Committee on Scientific Freedom and responsibility of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, who says, "We are seeing a lot more interest in ethics within the associations." A survey conducted by the Committee in 1980 found a "widespread re-examination of the present status of professional self-regulation."

Among the professional organizations which have adopted formal ethics codes, and in some cases mechanisms for investigation of alleged violations and sanctions for offenders, are the American Psychological Association, the American Sociological Association, the American Political Science Association, the American Anthropological Association, and -- a little closer to home -- the American Statistical Association.

In the midst of this groundswell, we have the "Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Simulationists," written, compiled, and presented for our consideration by John McLeod in Simulation in the Service of Society [SIMULATION, January 1985]. Clearly the key consideration in any discussion of 'professionalism' is ethics -- and we are well under way, thanks to John, although the issues of formal adoption by the Society for Computer Simulation and -- even more so -- of enforcement mechanisms have not really been broached. We have paid less attention to a systematic exploration of the value aspects of contemporary issues that involve our branch of science and technology. Is a commitment to deal with such issues an intrinsic component of professional conduct?

Our values and ethics as computer simulationists come not only from our rearing, but are also the result of our socialization into the profession, which has taken place in our education and in the organizations in which we work. We believe that those of us involved in the education of future simulationists have a special opportunity and responsibility to illuminate for our students the ethical and value implications of our profession. The work of the simulationist within her or his organization, possible sources of tension between individual ethics and organizational demands, and the resolution of such situations deserve further deliberation.

Finally, are there other aspects of professional conduct which we seek to reinforce which do not fall into the categories of ethics or values? For example, how do we classify the desirability of personal development in the field beyond that minimal currency needed to avoid misrepresentation of one's qualifications or of participation in the relevant professional society (in this case SCS), or of being a mentor to a more junior simulationist? These questions and many more prompt us to look forward to the '85 SCSC panel discussion on "Elements of Professionalism."

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Ingredients for Professionalism

by

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and
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I believe the two most important ingredients for professionalism are ethics and competence. A professional must always be open, honest, and impartial; willing to discuss any (potential) conflicts of interest; aware of society's and other parties' interests, as well as those of the clients; must deliver the "correct" answer to the problem (not just what the client wants); charge a fair price; etc.

Professionals will only undertake that work which they have competence in and where they can and will deliver a high quality product; will always seek the help of other professionals when their competence is needed; will always continue to improve their own competency.

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Ingredients of Professionalism:
SCS Past President's View

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As a non-academic member of this panel, let me express a pragmatic view of what I believe characterizes a professional.

First of all, the field in which the person is working must be complicated and inspire some measure of respect or, preferably, awe. Indicating that you are a mathematician, for example, is usually great to inspire such a reaction. If you declare that you are a "simulationist" you are bound to inspire an appreciable reaction since there are so many syllables in the word and no one has ever heard it before. So, our field of simulation qualifies as suitable for a professional.

Secondly, a professional must earn his living by practicing in his field. It helps if the earning power is sufficient to live very comfortably; thus we usually cite the medical doctor as typical of the modern day professional. In any case, the real professional must earn his way by performing in his or her field of specialization. By the way, in American industry, that is very difficult to do. When we find good professionals, we usually promote them to be managers, then managers of managers. Since the wizards of "management science" have convinced many industrial leaders that lateral movement of managers is healthy, our erstwhile professional soon finds that he or she no longer is tied strongly to any field of specialization.

The third, and weakest way, to qualify as a professional is to join a technical society like SCS. However, I shouldn't minimize the importance of societies and their activities, since they are an important ingredient in maintaining contact with other people with similar interests. For many who find themselves moving into other types of job activities than their original profession, it is a mechanism to preserve contacts with people and concepts and keep a spark alive for future nurturing. Society membership, though weak as a qualifier for professionalism, is an important ingredient in fostering professional development when accompanied by vigorous participation in society activities.

Ingredients of Professionalism:
SCS Executive Director's Point of View

by

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The American Heritage Dictionary tells us that a profession is an occupation or vocation requiring training in the liberal arts or sciences, and advanced study in a specialized field. By this definition there are not many working in the field who would not be considered professionals. I believe there is more to it, however.

The fields of endeavor normally considered to be professions share two very obvious characteristics. They are (1) a recognized and well-publicized code of ethics; and (2) some form of certification.

Even before examining the requirements of a profession, however, we may wish to give a good deal of thought to the desirability of being "professionals" at all. Do we want or need this label?

A perception of the simulationist as a professional could mean greater acceptance of his work by the outside world. Many of us believe that computer simulation as a planning tool is a very important concept that needs to be widely communicated and used in an increasing variety of applications. This sort of acceptance, and a widespread view of the simulationist as a professional, may in fact be very important to the future of the human species.

The Society for Computer Simulation is the only organization in a position to codify and achieve acceptance of a code of ethics. It is also the only organization that can possibly set any standards for certification of simulationists.

Perhaps the Board of Directors should be petitioned by interested members to establish such programs.

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