

30 BY 30 TASK FORCE WORKS TOWARD GENDER PARITY IN ENGINEERING

PEO is moving forward on its commitment to implement the Engineers Canada–led initiative to encourage more women to seek their engineering licences. Less than one-sixth of Ontario’s licensed engineers are women, even though they make up more than half the population. *Engineering Dimensions* spoke with PEO’s 30 by 30 Task Force members to learn what they’ll be doing to meet PEO’s goal of having women represent 30 per cent of newly licensed engineers by 2030.

By Adam Sidsworth

PEO’s 30 by 30 Task Force, which had its action and work plans approved by Council in September and November 2018, is continuing in the first of its two-year mission to increase the number of newly licensed women engineers in Ontario.

Engineers Canada launched the 30 by 30 initiative in 2011 to raise the percentage of newly licensed women engineers to 30 per cent by 2030. A “newly licensed” engineer is an engineer who obtained her engineering licence the previous calendar year. In Engineers Canada’s own words, “the 30 per cent figure is widely accepted as the threshold for self-sustaining change.” Thirty per cent may seem small, but consider that at the end of 2017:

- Only 13 per cent of the almost 296,000 licensed engineers across Canada were women;
- A scant 17 per cent of newly licensed engineers across Canada and 19 per cent in Ontario were women;
- Only 48 per cent of Ontario’s 2013 engineering-program graduates had obtained their engineering licences by 2017, an unfortunate number, given the increasing number of women studying engineering; and
- Other licensed professions, notably medicine and law, have already achieved parity (see “International Women in Engineering Day reminds us of work still ahead,” *Engineering Dimensions*, September/October 2018, p. 16).

All 12 provincial and territorial regulators across Canada have adopted the initiative, and although the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers initially championed the initiative in its role as Ontario’s engineering advocate, it became apparent that PEO, in its licence-issuing role, also needs to participate. So, in September 2017, Council approved the formation of a task force to develop an action plan. Helen Wojcinski, P.Eng., FEC, task force chair and PEO’s 30 by 30 champion for Engineers Canada, is thankful to PEO Past President Bob Dony, PhD, P.Eng., FEC, one of the task force’s four members, who, in his then role of president, was instrumental in bringing the 30 by 30 mandate to Council’s attention. “He’s a strong advocate and brought this issue forward by providing me with the podium to speak to Council about the 30 by 30 initiative and then further made the case to Council over the course of his presidency,” Wojcinski notes.

The task force’s other two members are Christian Bellini, P.Eng., FEC, an Engineers Canada director on PEO Council; and Lola Mireya Hidalgo, P.Eng., a PEO Western Region councillor. The task force is now developing a communication and engagement strategy to identify stakeholder groups with whom it can work to meet the initiative. “We’re a time-limited task force, and we’re a small task force,” Bellini notes. “It’s the role of the task force to engage the champions who will carry the 30 by 30 forward... We’ve already identified groups of stakeholders—institutions, regulators, and private and public businesses—and each of these require a different approach.”

Past President Dony adds: “Christian [Bellini] has an Engineers Canada perspective, Lola [Mireya Hidalgo] has that connection with Council and Helen is so committed. This is fundamentally important to PEO. We need

movement to get rid of the gender gap and [get to that] critical mass to be reflective of society and people. It’s an ambitious plan to get this as part of PEO’s and Ontario’s engineering culture.”

TAKING ACTION

PEO’s 30 by 30 action plan aims to help women engineers enter leadership positions on Council, task forces, committees and chapters. “Over the years I’ve met incredibly talented and hard-working female engineering students and recent graduates who not only excel in their academics but also flourish when taking on additional workloads and volunteer leadership opportunities,” Mireya Hidalgo says. “[Hopefully] these women will become licensed and stay in the engineering profession.”

But Wojcinski adamantly asserts: “Women are not a diversity group; rather, we make up half the population. Within half the population you have diversity. It’s not only the right thing to do but is also smart business. It’s about changing attitudes.”

Wojcinski and Bellini state that the task force is still in the process of defining its metrics so the success of the program can be tracked. “The 30 by 30 can’t simply be a slogan but an actual goal that we measure annually to evaluate the progress we’re making and the efficacy of our efforts,” Wojcinski adds. A key component of the strategy is to transfer the responsibility for implementing the plan to the appropriate stakeholders along the pathway to licensure.”

Wojcinski is proud that the 30 by 30 Task Force has members in positions of decision-making, given the enormous stride for gender equality in engineering. Both Dony and Wojcinski reiterate the unconscious bias against women in engineering, and there is more work to be done to address this underlying issue.

The task force is scheduled to complete its mandate by June 2020 but will provide an update to Council this fall. [e](#)