The Future Safety Leaders Conference and The Future of the EHS Field
By Todd William Loushine and Don Jackson

On October 3, 2011, NIOSH released a report on the predicted growth of the U.S. occupational safety and health field. The study essentially indicated that in the next 5 years, U.S. businesses plan to hire an estimated 25,000 people to safety positions while U.S. universities plan to grant approximately 12,000 safety degrees. These data raise a concern: Who will fill the balance of 13,000 EHS positions? These findings are actually not too surprising or new. Articles in Professional Safety and textbooks have warned of future shortages of well-trained EHS professionals due to retirement of baby-boomers and the ever-increasing need by U.S. business owners to protect the public, workers, facilities and business continuity.

The good news is that it is not too late to engage in discussions and activities to conceive solutions that will provide organizations with knowledgeable, well-prepared EHS professionals. ASSE is already initiating efforts to promote the safety field to young college students via education resources, student chapter services, ASSE Foundation scholarships and the Outstanding Student Section Award. Arguably one of ASSE’s most important efforts toward promotion of the field and assistance to current students is the Future Safety Leaders Conference (FSLC). ASSE has planned and hosted FSLC since 2004; however, its origins date to the late 1990s. In its infancy, FSLC was designed to bring together student chapter officers to talk about how to improve the effectiveness and growth of student chapter activities.

Over time, the conference’s goals/objectives have evolved based on planning committee member ideas, conference sponsor suggestions and student attendee feedback. The conference objectives have evolved from student section best practices sharing and technical tours to career preparation, branding yourself as a safety professional and networking techniques. The conference is now an elite event that requires students to complete an application process, write essays and obtain a reference from an academic advisor. A selection committee then reviews applicants and selects the best of the best to fill the available spots at the conference.

In November 2011, the FSLC had three company sponsors that covered the entire cost of the conference: URS, Liberty Mutual and CNA. The event was held at the Crown Plaza in Rosemont, IL, near ASSE headquarters. The goal of last year’s event was to provide students with an opportunity to
network with hiring organizations, provide one-on-one assistance with developing tools for position application and interviewing, and instill leadership skills to future EHS professionals.

This year, on Nov. 8-9, the goal is to expand the available opportunities to students and further develop their networking and communication skills with the sponsor representatives and local EHS experts who have volunteered to meet with the student attendees. The conference itself has become a breeding ground for exceptional EHS professionals. Every year, previous conference attendees and now EHS graduates share their stories of success and gratitude to FSLC providers and ASSE guiding them to their young careers.

FSLC is also becoming recognized as a prime opportunity for employers to meet soon-to-be college graduates for internship, co-op or job opportunities. And as a virtual flood of EHS opportunities become available in the coming years, perhaps employers would be wise to get involved with FSLC to meet potentially the best prepared students available. While visiting the conference, mentors/sponsors/hiring employers could also meet with university faculty and student advisors to learn more about their program specialties and make plans to visit the university programs they feel would best fit their current and future needs for qualified safety professionals.

If you understand the value in the FSLC, why not get involved? Do you have time to mentor students, or have internship/job opportunities to share and possibly interview candidates? Or do you just want to share your wisdom and experiences during a networking event on Nov. 8? Your involvement is vital to the success of young professionals, and your personal reward will be great.

Here are some FSLC attendee comments from the 2011 event:

“The "mock interviews" that were in fact more real than mock. It was very nice to know that my resume was prescreened and the company I am interested in is interested in me!”

“I really appreciated the resume critiques and the mock interviews. I found it to be really helpful to have to interact with professionals and discuss my school related projects.”

“Please do not change the breakout sessions; they are great! I feel confident that the knowledge gained from these sessions will help me standout from my peers (that did not attend FSLC 2011) and ultimately get a career I desire. Thank you!”

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“The networking time was superb. It worked very well that it was broken up throughout the day to gain comfort amongst the students to slowly approach those individuals that spoke or they felt could help them in their success.”

“The awesome organization and detail it took to host such a meaningful conference. It was very evident that a lot time and effort went into planning the events and making sure all the students had a clear idea of what to do and when. Also! It was great to see the sponsors available for questions and conversations throughout the entirety of the conference. This was a great time to make opportunities for those students who were interested. Awesome.”

ASSE will host its 2012 Future Safety Leaders Conference Nov. 7th-9th at the Hyatt Regency Woodfield in Schaumburg, IL. We have four sponsors this year: URS, CNA, Liberty Mutual, and BCSP. If you are interested in sponsoring this event for 2013, please contact Mary Goranson, ASSE Foundation Manager, at mgoranson@asse.org. If you would like to learn more about the conference, visit the ASSE website at http://www.asse.org/fslc.

As the U.S. economy continues to improve and U.S. companies strive to minimize risk and improve efficiency of organizations, ASSE and the FSLC will continue to improve and provide our top students with additional opportunities to excel while providing companies with an excellent recruiting and networking event.