

Women in Engineering event at University of Toronto **--“Getting to Know You”**

Under the support from the faculty members in Electrical and Computer Engineering (ECE) and Computer Science (CS) department at the University of Toronto (UofT), “Getting to Know You” panel discussion, which was sponsored by IBM, was held on Thursday, January 20th at the Bahen Center at UofT. This event aimed at promoting the retention of women in electrical and computing degree programs by providing a social forum for girls who are early in an electrical or computing program where they can meet and hear from women who are successful role models.

The event was organized by Women in Engineering (WIE), an affinity group under IEEE UofT student branch, along with IEEE and WISE. It was carried out in a simple but successful format. More than 30 undergraduate female ECE and CS students came to the event. And each brought home with them new contacts, ideas and perspectives, which we hope could serve as a key to open new doors for them in life.

The five-member panel was to represent women in all phases in their career. Dr. Irene Katzela is holding a career both as a professor and as an owner of a successful consulting company. Jenny Choy has worked for IBM for 20 years and was the first woman elected to the IBM Academy of Technology. Rama Natarajan had worked for 2 years after Master’s degree and is now a second year Ph.D. student in CS department. Cecily Liu a fourth year electrical engineering student and Jibsy Jacob a fourth year computer engineering student, both have finished their sixteen-month PEY (industrial) experience. We also invited professors, graduate students and representatives from IBM and IEEE.

The panel discussion was composed of three parts. First, a short introduction from each panelists; second, question and answer between audience and panelists; third, networking and dinner. A very open, direct, instructive and heated discussion followed the introduction of each panelist. Audiences are all interested in hearing how to achieve the success in engineering, while women being the minority; how to look at and overcome the problems that most female engineers are facing, for example: how to balance personal life and career. With the rich experience of the panelists, they guided us to see problems through different angles; through their examples, most of the audience walked away with a firmer belief that: we can do more and better than we thought we can! The event was planned to be from 6 to 8pm but the discussion went on until 10pm.

One of the second year ECE student said:” This is not my first time attending this kind of discussion, but this one really hit at the problems! And it is really good to know that others are facing the exact problems that I am dealing with!” And another student, Kathryn said:” this was the first Women in Engineering-related event I've attended at university and it definitely made me want to attend more!” Still more students expressed their willingness to participate and volunteer with the future WIE events.