

## **Defining HFES: The Time is Now**

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I would like to take a moment to thank the society leadership, to include the members of executive council and the division chairs, for supporting and enabling me to carry out a variety of new initiatives over the past year, on behalf of you, our membership. It truly has been a rewarding and memorable year for me. And I have been inspired by your insights and dedication. Please join me in giving a round of applause for our executive council members and division chairs.

I also would like to sincerely thank the HFES staff, with whom I have worked closely with all year and now consider a party of my extended family. They are an incredible group of dedicated people who do more than just the job they are paid for. They have a true commitment to the society, and the profession as a whole, that extends way beyond their job responsibilities. To Lynn, Lois, Carlos, Cameron, Cara, Stephanie and Susan—thank you for supporting me throughout the year and for our many enjoyable interactions.

As for my presidential address, I'm going to deviate from normal practice and forego a typical PowerPoint presentation. Instead, I simply want to make a request; that is, a request for all members to answer one question, and to take the next year in doing so. It is, admittedly, not new to question who we are and who we want to be as a society, and indeed, several past presidents have touched on this very subject. You might then wonder why, at this point in time, I ask you to revisit this question. The answer is simple. As president of the society over the last year, and a member of the leadership for the past 5 years, I have witnessed a growing number of important efforts that are stymied by our inability to articulate who should and who shouldn't be a part of our membership and/or who we are trying to reach with our science, standards and application principles.

From accreditation, publications, outreach, diversity, conference content, and more....the society leaders often struggle to make decisions due to this very issue of self identification. As one example, consider the simple case of the HFES online directory of academic programs. Not too long ago a university who started a new human factors-related graduate program contacted HFES with the simple request of being listed in our directory of graduate programs. Mind you being listed in our directory is not an endorsement; rather, the directory is a factual list of graduate education opportunities within our field for prospective students to view and ponder. Yet, this simple request produced a provocative and heated debate amongst the members who are responsible for reviewing such requests. Some thought the program should be listed without reservation; it was after all a human factors-related design program, the program asked

to be listed in our directory and there seemed little reason not to add the program to the list of other educational opportunities already listed. Others did not think the program should be listed; they were offended by the lack of certain courses or topics represented in the program, as well as the focus on design over research.

My point is not to suggest that one position was right over the other... but to highlight the problems caused by the lack of a consensus view of what constitutes the portion of the incredibly broad field human factors and ergonomics we wish to represent in this particular society, that being HFES.

Note that what any individual believes is, or is not, human factors is not the issue at hand. Instead, it is the understanding, amongst us all, of what this particular society represents that is in desperate need of critical thinking and consensus development.

Now this is no easy task. One the one hand we can't, or perhaps better stated, needn't be all things to everyone within the broadest definition of our field. Yet, on the other hand, it is not healthy to so narrowly define ourselves that we become more and more susceptible to attrition towards other factions of our broader field that we have ignored, are ignorant about, or worse yet, have purposely shunned.

We must approach this like any other human factors problem. Who are the users? What are the needs? What are the metrics? What is the desired impact? What will yield success and satisfaction? Simply stated, we should not aim to grow our membership if we are happy with who is in this room. But we shouldn't resist growth if our end goals are better achieved by having others join us.

Only when we answer these questions about our membership, and thus the purpose of our society, can we apply a consensus vision to HFES operations and governance.

As you think about this issue, I will attempt to bias you with one premise; that the unique core of HFES is and should always continue to be the science of human factors and ergonomics. We must remain the creators, protectors and promoters of our science. The more difficult question then, is what are we, as a society, beyond that? Will our science be used and adopted if the intended audience isn't here to experience the excitement of our new findings and to continually motivate the directions of needed scientific endeavors?

I stated at the start that others have posed this question before. But while I'm using similar words, it is no doubt a new world—our field has grown in popularity, specialty sub-fields have emerged, and due to the present era of technology, the applicability of

our of our discipline to both unique and everyday product interaction contexts has never been greater. Case in point, even my toilet in my hotel room has a complicated computer controlled interface! Thus, the answer today might not be the same as it was in yesteryear. Within this context, I hope you will help me identify the new-age purpose of our Society in the next year.

Finally, I wish to thank all of you for allowing me over the last year to represent the society and the special people who are its members. It has been both an honor and a pleasure.