

“The Girl from SAE”

by Stephanie Cornelius

Anybody who has known me over the last five years will tell you, “Oh, that’s the girl from SAE.” I am one of the few women in the Society of Automotive Engineers. If there is one thing that defines what I have done with myself over the last five years, it’s my participation in SAE.

I got involved with the SAE when I was a freshman, and I stuck with it. My first semester at UB I suddenly found myself without the clubs and sports activities in which I participated in high school, and I was getting bored. I decided to attend some club meetings to find something to do, and I walked into an SAE meeting by mistake. I saw that it was the only club I had seen so far that actually did something. As a freshman it’s easy to get discouraged about engineering, but what SAE did was show me the application and end result of my coursework, and that was incentive to stick with it. Now it’s nearly five years later, and I’m still with SAE. I spent four years as an officer, two as president, and this year I was captain of the Supermileage team.

The main activity of SAE is to design and build three prototype vehicles – a racecar, an off-road vehicle, and a fuel economy vehicle – and compete against other colleges from around the world every spring. Some of our best performances occurred my sophomore year, with a ninth place finish in the highly competitive Formula SAE event. In the Supermileage competition, our high-fuel economy vehicle got 805 miles per gallon. We were the top team from the United States and won second place overall.

We have a faculty advisor, which is very important when interfacing with the University; however, the club itself is completely student-run. We prefer it that way. I’ve seen other chapters around the nation that have an iron-fisted faculty advisor who tells them what projects to work on and how they will spend their money. I think that limits the total experience SAE can provide. It’s the first glimpse into the professional world for a student: one part technical, one part management, and all parts teamwork.

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