

Proposal: Formalizing the Role of IEEE Student Branch Mentors

Proposal for the IEEE Life Members Committee's Consideration – John Day, 31 March 2025

Executive Summary

This proposal outlines a plan to formalize the role of Student Branch Mentors within the IEEE, leveraging the expertise of Life Members to enhance student development. Currently, the Student Branch Mentor position is undefined and underutilized, despite its potential to address critical skills gaps identified in a recent IEEE study. The study highlighted that while students possess strong technical skills, they often lack essential soft skills such as communication, problem-solving, and leadership, which are highly valued by employers. To bridge this gap, the proposal suggests engaging Life Members as mentors to share their career experiences, provide resume and job search guidance, conduct workshops, and connect students with industry professionals. The proposal addresses governance matters, proposes measures of success, and provides a draft role description and operational support considerations. The ultimate goal is to enrich the student branch experience, equip students with necessary soft skills, and enhance their career prospects, while also strengthening the connection between Life Members and the next generation of IEEE innovators.

Background

The IEEE Life Members Committee has been investigating ways to connect Life Members with future innovators through its group mentoring initiative launched in 2024. More recent research suggests that Life Members could potentially engage in this area meaningfully, by sharing their experience and knowledge with the next generation of innovators – while concurrently enriching the student branch experience and its connectivity to IEEE.

There is currently an inactive volunteer position in IEEE's volunteer rosters called *Student Branch Mentors*. This position is not defined in the MGA Ops Manual and has no standardized responsibilities. Approximately 35 individuals hold this position across 3,000+ student branches, indicating an inconsistent support and structure for this role.

Furthermore, an IEEE Presidential Ad Hoc was created in 2025 to assess how well IEEE is assisting students to prepare for a career in industry. To this end, IEEE's Corporate Research Department issued a study and report in March 2025 (synthesis of secondary research) on what skills employers are looking for from graduating engineers. According to the study, while universities generally do an excellent job of teaching core technical skills, many students graduate without the essential soft skills that employers are looking for. These skill domains and examples include:

- **Communications** (active listening, writing, presentation, non-verbal communication, empathy, and patience), which are crucial for effective interaction with colleagues, clients, and stakeholders.
- **Problem-Solving** (specifically innovation and brainstorming), essential for developing creative and effective solutions to engineering challenges.
- **Organizational Abilities** (organization, time management, goal-setting, planning, and prioritization), necessary for managing projects, meeting deadlines, and achieving goals.
- **Leadership Qualities** (teamwork and collaboration), vital for leading teams, working effectively with others, and achieving common objectives.
- **Operations Acumen** (standards, finance, product management, etc.), which can help engineers understand the business side of engineering and make informed decisions.

The study also revealed that young engineers often struggle to effectively showcase their skills on resumes,

particularly in areas highly valued by employers, such as innovation, collaboration, technical documentation, and communication. These skills are essential for success in the engineering field, yet many young engineers fail to adequately highlight them. By emphasizing these skills and providing specific examples of their application, young engineers can create more compelling resumes that stand out to potential employers and significantly improve their job prospects.

Student Branch Mentor / Life Members Opportunity

Given the disparate knowledge levels of Student Branch Counselors about IEEE, and disparate levels of support for student branches, Life Members could play a pivotal role in positively influencing the Student Branch experience and participating students through group mentoring activities that are aligned with the aforementioned skills deficiencies, with Life Member mentors also conveying the services and opportunities that IEEE offers to enhance those respective skills.

Specifically, Life Members in the position of Student Branch Mentors could:

- Share their personal experiences and insights on how they developed and applied these skills in their careers.
- Provide guidance and feedback to students on their resumes, cover letters, and job search strategies.
- Facilitate workshops and seminars on communication, problem-solving, organization, leadership, and operations.
- Connect students with industry professionals and potential employers.
- Promote IEEE resources and opportunities that can help students develop their skills and advance their careers.

By actively engaging with student branches and providing mentorship and support, Life Members can make a significant contribution to the development of future innovators and help ensure that they are equipped for the challenges and opportunities of the engineering profession.

Matters of Governance

While the role of Student Branch Mentor is listed as a position in the IEEE volunteer roster, it has neither been aggressively nor consistently utilized. As such, several governance-related questions may need to be addressed in moving forward with this proposal:

- Would this position be available for any IEEE Member to serve, i.e. not limited to Life Members?
- Which IEEE organization unit makes the appointments, e.g. IEEE Section, an IEEE affinity group, a subcommittee of a global IEEE committee?
- What is the term of the appointment to this role?
- To what degree do MGA governance documents need to be updated to reflect the formality of the position and its responsibilities?

Measures of Success

The influence of the envisioned Student Branch Mentor on Student Members and Student Branches can come in many forms, including but not limited to the following metrics and opportunities for establishing targets and goals:

Metric	Description	Target/Goal
<i>Number of Life Members Applying for Student Branch Mentor Positions</i>	Indicates interest and engagement from Life Members.	Increase by X% within Y months of posting.
<i>Number of Student Branches with Active Mentors</i>	Reflects the reach and implementation of the program.	Increase to Z branches within A time frame.
<i>Student Participation in Mentor-led Workshops/Seminars</i>	Measures engagement and utilization of mentorship opportunities.	Average W students per session.
<i>Student Feedback on Mentor Effectiveness</i>	Assesses the quality and impact of mentorship.	Average rating of V on a 1-5 scale.
<i>Number of Students Securing Internships/Jobs Post-Mentorship</i>	Demonstrates tangible career outcomes.	Increase by U% compared to pre-mentorship rates.
<i>Increase in Student Branch Activity and Engagement</i>	Reflects overall improvement in branch functioning.	Measure through participation rates, event frequency, etc.
<i>Improvement in Student Resumes and Interview Skills</i>	Assesses development of soft skills.	Track changes through pre/post mentorship assessments.
<i>Utilization of IEEE Resources and Opportunities</i>	Measures awareness and engagement with IEEE offerings.	Increase by T% in student sign-ups or activity.
Metric	Description	Target/Goal

Draft Role Description – Student Branch Mentor

Purpose: To connect Life Members with student innovators through group mentoring, sharing experience and knowledge, enriching the student branch experience, and enhancing connectivity to IEEE.

Responsibilities:

- Share personal experiences and insights on developing and applying essential soft skills (communications, problem-solving, organizational abilities, leadership qualities, operations acumen) in their careers.
- Provide guidance and feedback to students on resumes, cover letters, and job search strategies.
- Facilitate workshops and seminars on communication, problem-solving, organization, leadership, and operations.
- Connect students with industry professionals and potential employers.
- Promote IEEE resources and opportunities that help students develop skills and advance careers.

Operational Support:

- Participate in recruitment, onboarding, and training provided by the IEEE Life Members Committee.
- Utilize training sessions, workshops, online learning modules, webinars, and resource library materials.
- Engage in communication and coordination efforts with the Life Members Committee and student branch counselors.

- Provide and receive evaluation and feedback on program effectiveness and individual performance.

Desired Outcomes:

- Increased number of Life Members applying for Student Branch Mentor positions.
- Increased number of Student Branches with active mentors.
- High student participation in mentor-led workshops/seminars.
- Positive student feedback on mentor effectiveness.
- Increased number of students securing internships/jobs post-mentorship.
- Improvement in student resumes and interview skills.
- Increased utilization of IEEE resources and opportunities.

Considerations for Operational Support

The IEEE Life Members Committee should consider the following operational support aspects for Life Members serving as Student Branch Mentors:

Recruitment and Onboarding

- Recruitment:
 - Develop a clear job description for the Student Branch Mentor role.
 - Create an application process and selection criteria via IEEE Volunteering portal.
 - Promote the opportunity through IEEE communication channels.
- Onboarding:
 - Provide orientation materials and training on IEEE resources and procedures.
 - Offer training on mentoring best practices and essential, (soft) skills development.
 - Assign mentors to specific student branches or groups.

Training and Resources

- Training:
 - Conduct regular training sessions on relevant topics (e.g., resume writing, interview skills, industry trends).
 - Offer workshops on communication, problem-solving, and leadership.
 - Provide access to online learning modules and webinars.
- Resources:
 - Develop a resource library with materials for workshops and seminars.
 - Provide templates for resumes, cover letters, and other job search documents.
 - Offer access to IEEE materials.

Communication and Coordination

- Communication:
 - Establish a communication plan for mentors to connect and share best practices.
 - Provide regular updates and announcements from the Life Members Committee.
 - Facilitate communication between student branch mentors and student branch counselors.
- Coordination:
 - Develop a schedule for workshops and seminars.
 - Coordinate mentor assignments and student branch pairings.
 - Organize regular check-ins and feedback sessions.

Evaluation and Feedback

- Evaluation:
 - Collect feedback from students and mentors on the effectiveness of the program.
 - Track metrics such as participation rates and student outcomes.
 - Conduct periodic reviews of the program and make adjustments as needed.
- Feedback:
 - Provide regular feedback to mentors on their performance.
 - Encourage mentors to share their experiences and suggestions for improvement.
 - Implement a mechanism for addressing concerns and resolving issues.

Financial Support

- Financial:
 - Consider providing travel reimbursement or stipends for mentors.
 - Allocate budget for training materials and resources.
 - Explore funding opportunities to support the program.

As per financial underwriting for this initiative, the Life Members Committee retains the prerogative to propose an increase to its annual budget and/or re-direct its existing budgetary expenditures.