With the help of the Hajim Student Organization Supplemental Grant, the Society of Women Engineers (SWE) represented the University of Rochester at the National SWE Conference this October in Philadelphia, PA. This summary of our experience gives each member’s perspective on this incredible opportunity. We have brought back a plethora of new skills and knowledge to spread to our organization and the Hajim School community to make this campus ever better. We cannot thank the Hajim School enough for the time, effort, and funding put into ensuring we had a rewarding and valuable experience.
Attending the SWE national conference in Philadelphia was an incredibly inspiring and educational professional experience. The career fair created many opportunities to practice networking skills and meet professional engineers in my field, and I was able to create connections with many engineers and companies that I would not have otherwise made. The talks and workshops we attended were very relevant to us as students, including sessions on effective leadership and enhancing communication skills. I also enjoyed getting the opportunity to talk to members of other collegiate SWE chapters from across the nation, which really put into perspective the goals of the larger organization that our chapter at the University of Rochester is a part of. I am very grateful to have been able to attend this conference and I hope that this wonderful opportunity continues to be available to our SWE community.

-Nicole Naselaris ‘19

Overall, the conference was an amazing experience. It was my first ever professional conference and gave me a completely new set of experiences and perspectives. I am so thankful that I was given this opportunity to learn and grow as both a student and a future engineer. The career fair included companies and attendees from all over the both the United States and the world. It was very valuable to be able to talk to and share experiences with such a diverse group of people. The career fair really gave me a sense of what it is like to engage in professional conversations and gave me practice in my networking skills. The seminars I attended were highly engaging and I learned a lot that I didn't know about advocacy, new technologies, different ways of thinking for problem solving, and SWE as a whole. The conference did an excellent job of advocating for all types of diversity in every aspect and level of the engineering profession.

- Frances McAfee ‘19

I have been looking forward to going to the SWE National Conference since I first joined SWE. The upperclassmen shared some of the experiences that they had at conferences that they had attended and their stories were nothing short of inspiring. I hope to be able to share what I have learned from the conference with the rest of our chapter and the Rochester community to continue that tradition. I learned so many things being the Business Manager of SWE as we prepared for the trip. It really tested my leadership skills and planning abilities to organize registration, transportation, and hotels for our members. It really paid off. We had nine young women go and we were all able to celebrate our passions for engineering together with successful and aspiring women from all over the world at the worlds largest gathering of women in engineering. One of the greatest features of the conference was the workshops and presentations. I especially enjoyed a presentation that focused on the impostor complex that shows up so regularly for minority groups in school and the workplace. It explained how people feel like they may not fit the mold of people expected to complete the job at hand. It was incredible to realize that most successful people experience this feeling and that as a women in engineering, I am not alone. The presenter gave us techniques to deal with the symptoms of the complex and how to work towards overcoming these obstacles. I hope to be able to share some of these ideas with the rest of the SWE members and my peers in my classes to help everyone realize that we are not alone and that we belong here at Hajim.

-Kathryn LaBine ‘18
This was my first time attending a SWE conference. At first I thought the conference would be mainly a networking and career fair experience, but to my surprise the SWE conference had much more to offer. I went to a wide variety of talks that covered everything from diversity in the workplace to leadership and management skills. During the talks I was unsure if there was a difference between the collegiate and professional level, but I soon realized that the presenters and the rest of the women in attendance were also going through the same workplace and everyday struggles.

One of the talks I went to was called ‘It Would Be Okay If A Man Said It.’ The speakers, two women from Intel, faced workplace challenges and decided to do a study about the power dynamics of men versus women during meetings. They presented video clips from their study showing corporate executives and leaders (mostly women) responding to their questions about men versus women during meetings. They found that during many meetings, and in other business-related situations, women’s ideas are generally “mansplanted” or that the credit for a woman’s idea is given to a man. Additionally, they are not taken seriously, they are not seen as ‘technical’ enough, they are interrupted or talked over, or even revered as too aggressive for speaking up. This hit home. I knew exactly how the executives in the video felt, as I have experienced the same issues. I would like to share what I have learned from this talk to the UofR community; everything from preventative measures to dealing with this in action, with the goal that this behavior would reduce and eventually eliminate the disparity between the power dynamics of men and women.

I attended other talks which would directly benefit the UofR SWE chapter. For example, one talk that covered management skills presented how a manager works on developing a group, or organization, to make sure that everyone is meeting the expectations. The role of the manager is to ensure clear communication is developed and maintained, and that the project moves forward smoothly. This kind of information will not only help the UofR SWE E-Board make an ever better organization, but it can also be used to help strengthen regular members’ involvement and commitment to SWE.

The experiences I took away from attending the National SWE conference are undoubtedly some of the most significant and impactful I have had since coming to college. I hope to share with the UofR SWE chapter members how beneficial attending the conference was for me and for our chapter. I would encourage women to attend the conference, but men should also have the opportunity to attend the SWE conference. The conference gives men a chance to also obtain different perspectives that may challenge their initial biases and preconceived notions of women in the workplace, and especially those in STEM related fields.

I would like to thank the Hajim School of Engineering and Applied Sciences for allowing me the opportunity to attend my first conference. Meliora.

-Shira Johnston ‘17
The SWE national conference was a wonderful opportunity to network with professionals and meet students from other universities across the country. The career fair was the most beneficial experience for me because there were over 200 companies present. I learned about many companies I haven’t heard of before and was introduced to a plethora of internship opportunities. My networking skills definitely improved over the course of the conference because I gained more confidence in myself and was able to present myself professionally to recruiters. By learning about the many opportunities available for me as a chemical engineer I gained more confidence in my future goals. Furthermore, by actually speaking to professionals at different companies I gained a better understanding of where I would like to apply for internships. In addition, I attended several seminars/workshops that further enriched my experience. One in particular was a workshop on advocating for women in the workplace. By listening to professionals speak on empowering women engineers I felt inspired to become a greater leader in my community and gain more confidence in myself amongst my peers. After attending this conference, I hope to encourage more women engineers at the U of R to join the SWE community and attend the regional/national conferences in the future. Up until now I have been so consumed with my studies that I didn’t realize the bigger picture of where I am heading or what my goals are. However, after this conference I definitely gained a better perspective on where I would like to go after I graduate from the U of R.

-Haley Miyaoka ‘18

The conference was truly an amazing experience and I'm thankful that Hajim helped us get there. I was able to attend a lightning talk about working and living in a global world. Several women presented on their own experiences, growing up in developing countries and finding success as engineers in America. A few women also presented on how their job enables them to travel the world and engage with different cultures. The conference itself included attendees from so many diverse groups including NSBE, SHPE, members of the LGBTQ community, and other under-represented groups. Standing at the career fair and watching all these people walk by shows that SWE truly is for all women in engineering. This conference allows us to engage with fellow undergraduate engineers at UR and share our experience with them by putting on our own workshops. I personally hope to start up a mini-seminar series and many of these will come from my experience at the conference. I can share interview and resume tips, talk about the workshops I attended and what I learned, or how to start applying to graduate school.

-Rebecca Walton ‘18
The National SWE conference was an exceptionally enriching experience, and hugely inspiring. It presented me with the opportunity to network with women in engineering, gain useful career advice, and attend informative workshops in addition to exposing me to hundreds of top engineering companies eager to hire undergraduate mechanical engineers like myself. Attending this conference was an encouraging step forward in my path to becoming a professional engineer. I was given the chance to share a hotel room with the section president of another SWE chapter across the nation which was an indispensable learning experience that has taught me several skills that I can bring back as a leader of this organization. For example, by the recommendation of several collegiate section presidents I networked with at the conference, our chapter of SWE is establishing two new semester Executive Board positions this year: Industry Coordinator and Conference Coordinator. Opportunities such as this one are what make my time at the University of Rochester worthwhile and memorable, and make me so proud to be a part of the Hajim School of Engineering. Thank you for your continued support of our endeavors.

-Meghan Patrick ‘18

The SWE national conference was an incredible experience for me, where I talked to various companies and graduate schools at career expo, attended talks about female leadership and empowerment, and bonded with other SWE members. It was inspiring to see both males and females, students and professionals, domestic and international students were actively participating in discussions about promoting diversity in engineering fields. My favorite talk was about diverse path to success of female leaders in tech, where six female managers and senior executives from Booz Allen Hamilton talked about how they achieved success in a male-dominant world in various ways. I learned that there’s no set formula for success, perseverance and passion are the keys to have both a successful career and a meaningful life. I will take my experience at the conference to my everyday life and involvement on campus, where I can encourage younger members (both in SWE and other clubs) them to study the subjects they love and participate in the activities that will help them grow in the future.

-Sophie Zhang ‘17

This National Conference was a wonderful experience for both me and the other women who accompanied me. It was an incredibly empowering experience to be surrounded and supported by so many successful women. Being in an environment of all women engineers was a shocking new experience, as up until this point I have only experienced that particular sense of unity within the SWE Rochester chapter. However, being at this conference and in the presence of so many professional women who are also passionate about promoting women in STEM has reaffirmed my reasoning for being involved with SWE and constantly fighting for equality technical fields. This conference has pushed me to want to pursue my professional career for not only myself, but also for all of the other women around me. It was also a great opportunity to meet employers and get contacts which I would have of never gotten. I am excited at the prospects ahead and what else I can gain from my SWE experiences.

-Marina May ‘17