

WICE: Promoting the Role of Women in Communications Engineering

Interview with Octavia Dobre, Chair of WICE Standing Committee

By Stefano Bregni, Vice-President for Member Relations, and Octavia A. Dobre, Chair of WICE Standing Committee

This is the eighth article in the series started in September 2014 and published monthly in the *Global Communications Newsletter*, which covers all areas of IEEE ComSoc Member Relations. In this series of articles, I introduced first the seven Member Relations Directors (Sister and Related Societies; Membership Programs Development; AP, NA, LA, EAME Regions; Marketing and Industry Relations) and then the Chairs of the Women in Communications Engineering (WICE) and IEEE Young Professionals (YP, formerly Graduates Of the Last Decade, GOLD) Committees. In each article, one by one they present their activities and plans.

In this issue I interview Octavia A. Dobre, Chair of the IEEE ComSoc Standing Committee on Women in Communications Engineering (WICE). Octavia is an Associate Professor with Memorial University, Canada. She is a Senior Editor with *IEEE Communications Letters*, and

an Editor with *IEEE Transactions on Communications* and *IEEE Communications Surveys and Tutorials*. She also serves as Vice-Chair of the Signal Processing for Communications and Electronics Technical Committee and Vice-Chair Americas for the Technical Committee on Cognitive Networks.

It is my pleasure to interview Octavia and offer her the opportunity to outline her current activities and plans for ComSoc WICE.

Stefano: Hello Octavia! I am particularly glad to have the chance to interview you here and to offer you this opportunity to present the activities of the IEEE ComSoc Standing Committee on Women in Communications Engineering (WICE). At the beginning of my term as VP-MR, I indicated women among the five strategic directions to pursue in Member Relations to ensure innovation

and balanced growth of ComSoc. Therefore, your Committee is key to this goal. Would you recall its history and mission?

Octavia: In 2014, WICE became a Standing Committee of ComSoc, after being an Ad-Hoc Committee for three years. The dedication of its former chairs – Heather Yu (2011), Sarah Kate Wilson (2012), and Shalinee Kishore (2012) – made this possible. WICE’s mission is to promote the visibility and roles of women communications engineers and to provide a venue for their professional growth. We hope that many ComSoc members will get involved and contribute to the mentoring and promotion of women communications engineers, as well as to increasing their membership.

Stefano: Due to a number of historical reasons, women are significantly under-represented in most engineering disciplines, including communications. What’s more, for a long time there have been even fewer women in visible leadership positions. Therefore, our challenge in WICE is working to improve balance and to grant true equal opportunities to both genders, in ComSoc and in our professional world of communications engineers. How is the WICE Committee facing this challenge? What have been its main activities in 2014?

Octavia: A mandate of WICE is to promote women communications engineers. Certainly, this cannot be done without the support of professional women leaders, as well as the entire ComSoc community. WICE has been fortunate to have such support. However, there are also challenges. One of them is to

have a larger number of dedicated volunteers, which would allow us to initiate additional activities. We have spread the word about WICE through Facebook, LinkedIn, and the WICE website, as well as speaking directly with attendees at Globecom and ICC, in order to attract more volunteers.

In 2014, we organized the Second Women’s Workshop on Communications and Signal Processing, where we presented the Best Poster Presentation Award to a junior participant for the first time, and additionally presented the WICE Awards for the first time.

Stefano: Awards are well appreciated to acknowledge publicly outstanding contributions to the profession and ComSoc.

Octavia: To recognize the ComSoc members who bring outstanding contributions to the profession and WICE, starting in 2014 we will present three annual awards:

- Outstanding Achievements Award for exceptional technical work in the broad field of communications engineering.
- Outstanding Service Award for a distinguished record of service and excellent leadership within WICE.
- Mentorship Award for strong commitment to mentoring WICE members, significant positive impact on the mentees’ education and career, and advancing communications engineering through mentees.

The first-time recipients of the WICE awards were Prof. Andrea Goldsmith (Stanford University) for the Outstanding Achievements Award; Prof. Sarah Kate Wilson (University of Santa Clara) for the Outstanding Service Award; and Dr. Larry Greenstein for



Prof. Andrea Goldsmith receiving the WICE Outstanding Achievement Award (2014).



Prof. Sarah Kate Wilson receiving the WICE Outstanding Service Award (2014).

the Mentorship Award. These awards were presented at the WICE meeting held at IEEE Globecom 2014, in Austin, Texas.

Stefano: And what about Women's Workshops?

Octavia: In July 2014, WICE organized its Second Women's Workshop on Communications and Signal Processing at Princeton University. The event was a success, representing not only a unique opportunity for both junior and senior women researchers to interact about the new developments in their fields, but also an excellent possibility for mentoring and networking. There were 33 participants from the USA, Canada, Turkey, UK, UAE, and Sweden, among which 19 were junior attendees. The junior participants had poster presentations, while the senior participants gave invited talks. A best poster presentation award, sponsored by ComSoc, was presented for the first time. Different workshop attendees shared their personal stories, related to both career and family, which are available as interviews on the ComSoc Beats website (<http://beats.comsoc.org/>).

Stefano: You mentioned that you aim at achieving a wider participation of women in ComSoc activities by direct advertising and via the social media.

Octavia: Our members are informed about the WICE activities and events through the WICE website, Facebook, and LinkedIn, as well as through the mailing list. Last year we created the mailing list, which has more than 4,000 subscribers already. If you are interested in becoming a member of WICE, please subscribe to our mailing list. Information about that is provided on our website (committees.comsoc.org/WICE).

Stefano: This year we attempted to launch a new initiative, which attracted utmost interest by everyone: child care at ComSoc conferences. Regrettably, we experienced some difficulties which hindered our plans. Would you please summarize what is the current situation?

Octavia: We believe that providing child care at ComSoc conferences represents a valuable service for our members, both male and female. For this reason, we discussed with IEEE the possibility of launching the program through a pilot project at ICC 2015. Recently, IEEE advised that the attendees should contact corresponding services directly. Hopefully, in the future offering such a service to our ComSoc members will be possible.

Stefano: You are also working to promote highly-qualified participation of women among candidates for distinguished positions in ComSoc.

Octavia: Another initiative is to nominate outstanding WICE members for the Distinguished Lecturer Program. An announcement about nominations will be sent to our members via the mailing list. We also aim to increase the number of IEEE Senior and Fellow members from the WICE community, by nominating suitable candidates.

Stefano: What is your final call to ComSoc members?

Octavia: When different voices are represented in a group, everyone benefits. ComSoc recognizes that diversity is essential to the technical community and to the greater society. WICE welcomes participation from all ComSoc members. If you are interested in contributing, we would like to hear from you.