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My Journey through NSBE and IEEE – Leadership (Application)

One of the best things I did over my college stay was being an active member as well as a student leader of prestigious global organizations like IEEE, NSBE, ASHRAE, and Color Stack. But I will be reflecting on my experiences in Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) and National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) as they stand out.

Starting from the NSBE experience, I first heard about it from a senior Electrical Engineering student, also my mentor, named Hayat. She was a board member while we were freshmen, and she used to tell me how important it is to be an active member. But what actually caught my attention was when I saw her NSBE national convention reflection post on LinkedIn. I was like, yeah, that's what I need attention, opportunities, and a place to shine. Then I asked how to join and started to shadow them, and around May 2023 I submitted my application essay showing how passionate I was and was able to be elected as the Treasurer. I trusted my math background to handle the role, but I was unsure if I could actually raise funds and grow the chapter. But thanks to our President, Motunrayo Ajayi, we grew the chapter from having only 5 board members and general members to around 50 by the end of the academic year. We as a team learned a lot of leadership skills through trial and error. Luckily, during that time I was also the event organizer for ASHRAE, so I was getting experience from both sides. I learned how to manage the RSO901 account income and expenses and built a budget management tool which is still being used by the current board members. This role showed me how much financial responsibility and organization matter in leadership, since clear budgeting directly impacted how successful our chapter could be.

At first, I was overwhelmed by the responsibilities of Treasurer balancing spreadsheets, organizing events, and motivating members. I made mistakes early on, especially with managing expenses. For example, some board members wouldn't upload receipts on time or would reimburse costs without notifying me, which left me scrambling to figure out why the numbers in my calculations didn't match our account balance. That experience taught me that transparency and accountability are not optional in leadership, they're essential for trust.

Though during my first year of serving NSBE as Treasurer we increased our members, we weren't able to make it to the Fall Regional Conference (FRC) and had fewer connections with the Regional and National chapter. At the time, this felt like a big failure because I worried, we were falling behind other chapters. But this challenge also forced me to look for other growth opportunities. That's when I found out about the NSBE-TCPC Collegiate Mentorship Program (2023–2024). The program ran from Nov 2023 – Apr 2024, and I got a mentor who helped me engage in Company Insight Sessions to understand organizational cultures, gave me a mock interview, helped me develop negotiation tactics for salary negotiation, and also helped me acquire prioritization and time management skills in a seminar. Every month I met with her, and we both filled out a check-in form that helped us track and report my progress. I was finally able to receive a certificate on a Gala night at the end of the academic year.

Another highlight of the year was that, though we struggled a bit, we were able to take 11 students to the national conference in Atlanta, Georgia. The Honors travel grant really helped me cover my expenses, along with additional support from our department and CSET. It was my first big conference with almost 20,000 student attendees, and I was shocked and amazed at the same time seeing that I was competing with all these smart students across the U.S. It was also my first exposure to all the big U.S. tech companies, it felt like a dream come true to me seeing company representatives from Google, Microsoft, Nvidia, and so on. I was also lucky to do an onsite interview with HP. It was a

solid experience, but eventually that position didn't work out as I was told I was too young for the role since they were looking for juniors. That rejection was tough, but I realized setbacks don't define me preparation and persistence do. Luckily, I had an offer from Tektronix earlier, so I was safe for the summer.

After the conference, we did a post-conference event and shared our experiences with our general members through a panel discussion. I shared my learning that this experience taught me resilience and confidence, because even though I didn't get the HP role, I learned how to present myself professionally, network with top companies, and trust that preparation creates future opportunities. The panel discussion overall boosted our membership from around 10 board members to 50 members, a very remarkable number for a small chapter like Mankato. We also held an election this time, and I was able to win the Treasurer position again for the second time. So, I left for summer break knowing I had another opportunity, happiness, but also more responsibility.

Going into the new academic year we weren't the underdog RSO anymore, people had expectations for us. Over the summer we met twice, created a sponsorship package, and started sending it out. We secured our very first sponsor, Kato Engineering (Nidec), with a \$3,000 contribution, which boosted our motivation. This taught me how to advocate for our chapter and approach industry partners with confidence. But it wasn't easy drafting sponsorship proposals was something completely new, and I faced several rejections before finally landing Kato Engineering. That persistence showed me that leadership is about staying consistent even when the results aren't immediate. We also introduced a merit system and took active members to both the FRC and National Conference. Speaking of conferences, we broke records again: we went to the FRC conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, taking 7 students to represent our school for the very first time. I also had another onsite interview there, which was another solid experience. Later, we took 25 students to the National Conference in Chicago, another milestone, 14 more than the previous year. I was also fortunate to receive a scholarship award

at the Minnesota Chapter's Gala Night, and our organization won the Outstanding RSO of the Year, which was the icing on the cake.

While NSBE helped me grow in financial and organizational leadership, IEEE gave me opportunities to develop my technical and professional leadership. I first learned about IEEE during my first semester from a random email I got from Jeni, our department office administrator, saying there was this event called Tutoring session where all engineers and like-minded students gather to do homework and assignments and help each other, seniors helping youngers. I just decided to go. It was a Wednesday evening, and when I reached the door, my shyness took over and I was scared to join. I felt like I couldn't be included in the circle, but then one of the sophomore students, now a master's student named Hamede, saw me standing at the door and came and said, "please join us." Since then, I have never left. It wasn't just an organization; it was a community where I felt I belonged.

I attended all the events and learned a lot, and at the end of the year I also got the chance to go to the IEEE EIT Conference where I presented my undergrad research work and even got an award for it. Sophomore year I became more active too, though I still hadn't joined the board yet. My application stood out and in January I got the opportunity to go to the Rising Stars Conference as just a sophomore while most of the other attendees were juniors and seniors. I learned a lot from the conference how to be a good leader, which specific area of my major to focus on and it pushed me to step outside my comfort zone, motivating me to join the board the next year so I could apply what I learned. In May I competed for the Secretary position and won. That's when I started to really showcase my leadership skills.

That year some of the board members weren't as active as the previous years, so me and the event organizer (now Vice Chair), Ekwem, basically carried IEEE the whole year. We hosted all the traditional events including the weekly study nights (I changed it to biweekly because of funding, and

since then it has stayed biweekly) and all the other events as well. I got to see how hard it is to host a career fair, but I was able to successfully host the 2025 IEEE Internship and Career Fair with more than 75 companies and 400+ attendees, the highest in all categories. I handled the promotions and logistics, and at the end of the year we won the 2025 Outstanding Program of the Year Award for hosting the career fair. This taught me how to manage complex logistics, communicate with industry professionals, and stay organized under pressure skills that I know I will carry into my professional career.

Also, this year I was honored to receive the 2024 Region 4 Outstanding Student of the Year, receiving my award at the Region 4 & 6 Joint Conference in January 2025 in San Francisco, CA. That was the pinnacle of my college career. I got the chance to meet the previous and current IEEE presidents and also the IEEE Rising Stars Conference director and a lot of senior members, and I learned from their experience. I also met leaders from UC Berkeley and universities from Hawaii. What a nice 3-day stay in the Bay Area!

Then because of the pressures I have been getting from my peers, professors, and even from my inner self, I decided to run for the president position. I pitched and got full votes for being the Chair of the IEEE Mankato chapter. And now it's been around 5 months. Over the summer I did several planning calls with my team, and after classes started, we recently did 3 tablings and our first biweekly tutoring session was a success. We have planned several events, workshops, and career fairs to benefit all the students in our department as well as the whole CSET. Now as Chair, my next step is to work on delegating more effectively and building a strong foundation for the chapter, so the future leaders don't face the same struggles I did.

This year, I intend to win RSO of the Year again as President. I also want to take more freshmen and juniors to the Rising Stars Conference, host resume workshops and mock interviews, and mentor at

least five students. My goal is to prepare them as future leaders and ensure there is a strong replacement for my position when I leave.

Overall, my leadership journey through NSBE and IEEE hasn't always been smooth sailing. I've faced challenges with time management, financial oversight, and motivating peers, but each challenge forced me to grow. These experiences have shaped my leadership philosophy: true leadership means persistence in the face of setbacks, creating opportunities for others, and building systems that will outlast you. I know these lessons will stay with me in every future role I take on.