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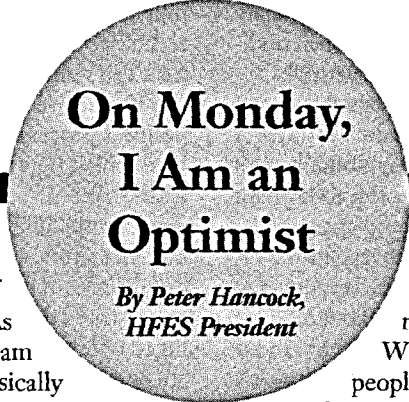
# Bulletin

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## CONTENTS

INSIDE HFES ..... 2  
 EA 2000 ..... 3  
 NEWS ..... 3

CALLS FOR PAPERS ..... 4  
 IN THE NEWS ..... 4  
 SHORT COURSES ..... 4  
 PEOPLE ..... 4



## On Monday, I Am an Optimist

By Peter Hancock,  
 HFES President

On Monday, I am an optimist. I come to work fired by the hope and expectation of doing something substantive and useful. As someone in human factors and ergonomics, I am given this chance because our area is intrinsically motivating and extrinsically important to society. In my laboratory, we are engaged in some intriguing experiments on accident avoidance maneuvers in which we have two drivers in separate simulation facilities but in a shared virtual world. The problem of how to bring these drivers into an accident-likely situation while giving only the bare instruction to "drive safely" has been a significant methodological challenge.

We have a number of innovative solutions to this problem and are now getting important data. I am enthused over this new window into the collision process. Perhaps we can find ways to improve avoidance behavior and save some individuals from the carnage of a major crash. It is a worthy goal, and it motivates me. I have some dedicated graduate students whose excitement mirrors my own. They have brought in some recent publications I have not had time to search out. They have new views on the data and ideas for additional work.

I envy them. I recall earlier days when I had the chance to comb through archives and contact fellow researchers, hot on the trail of some clue or piece of information crucial in the progress of a particular project. However, at present I have no such opportunity and think wistfully of sabbaticals or semester leaves when such endeavors can once again be pursued.

It is Wednesday, and I am a pragmatist. The e-mail has piled up alongside its snail-mail and voice-mail cousins. I am reminded of W. Somerset Maugham's comment that "when people say they have something urgent, it is most often urgent for them, not for you." There are several urgent things I have to do. I have budgets to complete, work plans to submit. I have changes to my curricula, mandated by accreditation agencies founded upon rationales that are hidden to me. I start to wonder about the human factors of forms and ask myself whether anyone has really taken a good look at what information is actually required and whether this is the way to obtain it. Sadly, it is my only human factors thought all day.

I have a meeting with a student who would like to know more about human factors. He has been in another program for some years, and only now, approaching graduation, does he realize that opportunities in that field are so scarce that the application process is more akin to a lottery than selection. He has obviously heard that there are jobs in our area, and now he's wondering whether one "quick course" could qualify him as a "human factors person." I try my hardest to be upbeat and indicate how some of his experiences might transfer, but it is a long shot at best. The student clearly doesn't want to spend another year looking even at basic human factors work; he just wants a job, and his current training is ill-suited to an ever-more pragmatic world. The one bright spot in my day is the arrival of a book I have ordered: *The Chapanis Chronicles*. My night's reading is assured.

By Friday I am a pessimist. I have finished *The Chapanis Chronicles*, buoyed by some episodes, depressed by others. I smile slightly at one point where Chapanis comments on writing the president's column for the society. Overall, I am left with the impression of a career often fighting against the tides of convention with events

*continued on page 2*

## 2000 Membership Dues Renewal

Please watch your mailboxes for dues renewal invoices, scheduled for mailing in mid-November. Dues for 2000 must be received by the HFES central office by **January 15, 2000** to ensure uninterrupted delivery of *Human Factors, Ergonomics In Design*, and the *HFES Bulletin*. The dues renewal packets also include a directory update form (address changes must be received by January 15, 2000) and a publications order form.

## Fellows Nomination Packets

If you are interested in nominating a colleague for HFES Fellow status, please contact the central office for forms. Nominations are due **February 1, 2000**. See details in the October issue of *HFES Bulletin*.

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that are ominously similar to some I have experienced. Perhaps, I speculate, these are common to many human factors professionals. Clearly in academe, we have yet to find full respectability. Although we have our preeminent institutions, many among the human factors faculty hang on precariously to other discipline-based departments that view our area with a more or less favorable eye. As our work grows more obviously important to society, there is danger that such success is viewed as problematic by such traditional divisions. Where is our natural home in the university?

Our immediate past-president, David Woods, has challenged us not to be those who "sweep up after the parade." This day I feel they have denied me even the broom! Although I think, with Dante, we can only see the heights from the depths; today I am deep. I had hoped that one way in which we could channel our influence was through design and the design process; however, that hope has not reached the stage of fruition I had expected at the present time. I think dark thoughts, especially about my own poor contribution and continuing prevarication. Perhaps those who smile knowingly and incant "that's the way things are" are right. Perhaps we cannot change things.

I work my sad way home carrying unopened letters from the week. I open one such letter. It is a remarkable document written by a colleague who has died recently as a result of a progressively debilitating disease. It is full of luminary wisdom. It talks of the importance of life; it raises the mind's eye from the minutiae of the moment to talk of things as they are and of things as they can be. This from a man who can never know them. It talks incisively about possible futures and again emphasizes what I have forgotten as the week progressed: Technology is the most powerful force that shapes our world today, and those who mediate between humans and the technology they create hold the keys to that future. Although as an individual I can have only one small part, I exhort you as the president, as a fellow professional, and to many I hope as a friend - we are engaged upon an important enterprise. There are and always will be naysayers, but never let us lose sight of our purpose.

# Bulletin

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I am excited to be president. It will get me out of bed every Monday for the next year. I hope in future columns, in which I have a little more time for contemplation, to articulate some of the ideas that, alongside our strategic plan, can permit us a more powerful voice in our collective future. To that end, and briefly, I believe we must look much more carefully at the ergonomics and human factors of the pedagogical process that, despite recent technical innovations, has not changed fundamentally for more than 150 years.

I believe we must also look at the human factors issues of the political process. What do we have to say about representative hierarchies, now that barriers of time and space are so malleable in the face of communications technology? Surely this is a macroergonomic question. We also need to look at the politics of human factors, a thorny issue indeed. Finally, we must evaluate our place with respect to the traditional media and more recent media-based developments. Far too many people who have never heard of human factors and think "ergonomics" is a misspelling are doing work in what we would consider our area - many associated with societies spawned originally by HFES.

I want my last words of this column to be ones of thanks. I am already deeply indebted to the members of the Executive Council and our central office staff, who have, with great patience, been so kind and helpful to me during this last year as I got to "know the ropes." And my special thanks go to David Woods, who always made instructive episodes out of each of the respective topics that came up throughout this past year. If I can match his achievements, I will feel that both I and the Society will have a good year.

## INSIDE HFES

### New Video Series Needs Editor

By David L. Post, Chair  
HFES Communications Subcouncil

The HFES Executive Council recently approved a new video series, "Pioneers in Human Factors and Ergonomics." The intent is to capture interviews with individuals who have made significant contributions to our profession. The plan calls initially for producing two videos each year.

The Communications Subcouncil is seeking an editor for this series. The editor will serve a two-year term and select two or three associate editors. Responsibilities include soliciting nominations for people to be interviewed; selecting candidates and interviewers; approving proposed interviewees, topics, questions, and venues; and ensuring the product's final quality. The HFES Communications Department will manage the logistics, editing, and production. The editor is paid a \$200 honorarium each year.

If you would like to be considered for the editor's position, please send a résumé or curriculum vitae and statement of interest to Communications Director Lois Smith, HFES, P.O. Box 1369, Santa Monica, CA 90406-1369; fax 310/394-2410. Applications