

## Student Category

### Issue:

The Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta (APEGA) is requesting the *Engineering and Geoscience Professions Act* (EGP Act) General Regulation be amended to remove one of the student categories of membership.

### Background:

There have been no significant updates to the *EGP Act* for 30 years, and in that time, the practice of both engineering and geoscience has changed significantly, as has business, industry and society in general. Changes to the legislation are required to ensure the protection of public interest as well as public and worker safety. One of the necessary modernizations to the *EGP Act* General Regulations includes the removal of one of the student categories (referred to as special student category), which was created in 1981 to provide a pathway for non-degree holders to obtain a license to practise engineering or geoscience. Individuals with only two years of post-secondary education are eligible to apply to APEGA for registration as a Professional Engineer or Professional Geoscientist (P.Eng. or P.Geo.). However, without degrees in engineering or geoscience, they are typically deficient a large number of courses and are enrolled as special students and assigned exams.

The APEGA Board of Examiners (BOE) may assign up to 24 exams in engineering and up to 30 exams in geoscience for these individuals to fill the academic deficiencies. These exams are administered internally by APEGA.

Individuals who complete all of the prescribed exams are deemed to have met the academic requirements for registration as a P.Eng. or P.Geo. However, very few (less than 5%) of these individuals complete the required examinations. The vast majority either voluntarily withdraw or are withdrawn by APEGA for failing to make satisfactory progress towards licensure. Of those few that do complete the requirements, the process takes many years.

New pathways to practice were introduced in the *Engineering and Geoscience Professions Act* in 2009 with the introduction of the Professional Licensee (P.L.) and Professional Technologist (P.Tech.) designations which makes the special student category unnecessary.

Under these P.L. and P.Tech. designations, individuals with two years of acceptable post-secondary education related to engineering or geoscience can obtain a licence to practice within a defined scope in engineering or geoscience and contribute to their professions, the province and serve the public interest. These new designations allow these individuals to get licensed sooner and to work to their full potential sooner.

These individuals may also qualify for registration with other professional organizations better suited to their qualifications such as professional biologists or professional chemists. In October 2015, APEGA Council passed a motion to endorse the recommendation to eliminate the special student category. Through input into the legislative review process, participating APEGA members and permit holders overwhelmingly supported the removal of the special student category. There will be no risk to the public or the engineering and geoscientist professions by removing the special student category. The change will enhance transparency, efficiency and accountability by ensuring licensed Professional Engineers and Professional Geologists receive academic training at recognized post-secondary institutions.

This special student category is unique to APEGA. No other province or territory in Canada has this category nor do other Alberta professions (architects, physicians, veterinarians, accountants and lawyers).

Pros:

- It is in the public interest that individuals who wish to be licensed as Professional Engineers or Professional Geoscientists should receive their academic training at a recognized post-secondary institution that offers appropriate lectures, laboratories, projects and related learning methodologies. It is neither APEGA's role nor mandate to act as an educational institution. Eliminating the category would support APEGA's role of focusing on protecting public interest as well as public and worker safety through regulating and providing leadership to the engineering and geoscientist professions.
- Eliminating the special student category would not negatively affect an individual's ability to earn a livelihood, the change will ensure students with an interest in the engineering and geoscientist profession have options. They can :
  - Obtain a license to practise a specific scope of engineering or geoscience through the P.L. and P.Tech designations.
  - Continue their studies at a recognized post-secondary institution.
  - Seek registration with other professional organizations, such as professional biologists or professional chemists.
- Those individuals currently active in the special student category will have the opportunity to complete their examination assessments within a reasonable time period.

Cons:

- Some individuals may be disappointed over the loss of a route to full licensure without an engineering or geoscience degree.

**Situation:**

On March 23, 2016 Council adopted an amendment to the General Regulation eliminating the special student category.

Per the requirements of the Act, at its AGM on April 22, 2016, APEGA members voted to approve the wording of the amendment adopted by Council.

This decision along with a copy of the specific amendments proposed, were sent on May 13, 2016 to the Minister of Labour, requesting the Government proceed with the amendments to the General Regulation. Minister Gray replied on July 29, 2016, referring the request to ministry officials for further discussion.