



Chesapeake Chapter  
**INCOSE**  
International Council on Systems Engineering

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March  
2011

## Feature Article



# How I was able to become part of the exclusive CSEP club

by Paul Martin

[Editor's Note: This article was written in 2007 but the lessons learned are still relevant for today.]

On March 23, 2007, at around 1:45pm, I clicked the "end test" button and then I confirmed that I did indeed wanted to end the test. Then I waited, staring at the blank screen. This is not as instantaneous as they made it sound. As I waited I thought about how much time and effort it took me to get to this place. Would it be enough? Will I be able to say to my peers "Hey, I'm a Certified Systems Engineering Professional!?" I was seconds away from finding out. To think I started this process 254 days (or 9 months and 11 days) earlier, back on . . .



**13 June 2006:** I e-mailed four of my colleagues who knew my background in System Engineering. Three were engineers and the fourth was my program manager. I did this several weeks before I started my INCOSE application. This was to (1) give them warning of what I was about to do; (2) make sure they were willing to do it and (3) get their contact information. Keep in mind, that once I submitted the application, my references only have **TWO WEEKS** to submit their recommendation. So I wanted to give them plenty of time to think about what they were going to say about me. Also I wanted to be sure I could get at least three. If any refused I would have to keep looking. When I e-mailed them I attached the recommendation instructions and form. I also related what activities I did back to the SE Roles located on the back of the instructions. Here's a sample e-mail:

Dear so and so,

I'm applying for a Certification as a Systems Engineering Professional with the International Council on Systems Engineering (INCOSE). Part of the certification process requires three references who can attest to my systems engineering acumen. So I thought of you and how you can explain my work in [place here Systems engineering function(s) i.e. Requirements Engineering] for [place here the activity you did i.e. the SpaceAge contract where I analyzed the customer comments against the system spec and went through the CM process in order to incorporate the changes.]

Attached are the instructions and form. They need a two week turn around, so before I submit my application and start the clock I wanted to make sure my references were agreeable and available to help me out. So let me know if you can. No pressure if you're uncomfortable with the request or, more likely, too busy. Just let me know so I can keep looking around.

Thanks for the consideration. Just let me know if you can or can't. If you can, please send me back your "reference information" for the application. Thanks again, Paul

**20 July 2006:** Fortunately, three of the four did respond in the affirmative. (I found out later one of the engineers was on vacation and got inundated with work when he got back.) Once I had my references, along with their addresses, I sat down to fill out the application. It had two parts:

1. The application itself -- where you supply general information about you, your education and, of course, your experiences at your places of employment. I just copied my resume (*which turned*

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Mark your Calendars with these upcoming events:

Wednesday 16 March 2011

Understanding the INCOSE SE Professional Certification Program

Paul B. Martin, CSEP -- Sr. Systems Engineer Serco-NA, Inc.

[>>download March flyer HERE<<](#)

The Chesapeake Chapter is always looking for volunteers to speak at our upcoming meetings! Please contact our Programs Director, [Mr. Donald York](#), if you would like the opportunity to speak or can recommend someone.

The Chesapeake Chapter of INCOSE is proud to recognize the following organizations for sponsoring our endeavors to expanding the understanding and appreciation of Systems Engineering in the local area:



*out to be a BIG mistake.*) Also the name and addresses/phone number of my references.

2. and the proof of my education. -- They do allow you to scan your college transcript or diploma. Which was fine for my Master's Degree from George Mason University. However, my diploma for BS in Engineering from Widener University was laminated into a 22x34 frame. I couldn't get it on the scanner so I took a digital picture, but it took several attempts to get the lighting, glare and shadows just right.

Finally ready, I sent in my application and digital images of my college transcript/diploma to certification@incose.org. I also got on the INCOSE website and paid my \$300 Certification fee.

Also on the same day I sent out e-mails to my references, again with the recommendation instructions and form. I filled out as much as I could for them. I also reminded them to e-mail the completed recommendation form electronically to INCOSE. Here's a sample e-mail:

Dear so and so,

I finally got my application off to INCOSE to get my certification as a Systems Engineering Professional. As I explained in my last e-mail, part of the certification process requires three references who can attest to my systems engineering prowess. I was thinking you could explain my work on [*relate your experience to "Systems engineering functions"*]

Attached are the instructions and form. To expedite processing, it is preferred that you submit your response to them electronically at certification@incose.org. They need a two week turn around so let me know if that's a problem.

Thanks for the help, Paul

**3 Aug 2006:** All my references sent INCOSE recommendations within the time required. I did have to follow up with a few reminder e-mails but they did come through for me. I sent INCOSE a note to say I had jumped through their hoops -- now what? They responded -- *Yes, your application and references have been sent to the review committee. Once it is approved, you will be notified as to how to take the exam.* -- Now all I could do is wait.

**23 Aug 2006:** E-Mail received -- *Hi Paul, written notice was mailed to you on August 14th. Unfortunately, your application was denied. I have attached a copy of the letter. There is an opportunity for you to appeal the decision.* -- Wow, didn't see that coming. Looks like I got more work to get this to stick. After reading the rejection letter and evaluating their reasons for rejecting me, it looks like I made a few major mistakes in my application submission -- one was asking my Program Manager for a recommendation (he wasn't a qualified reference) and another was I just cut and paste my resume without giving thought to the 13 SE roles. I also should have tried better to get references from further in my past.

To address these issues:

1. I asked two additional references to provide recommendations, to replace the Program Manager from my original application. A few years back I left my Government job as a NAVSEA systems engineer to become an official "belt-way bandit." Everyone I worked with at NAVSEA had retired or moved to different positions. Having no way to contact them I originally stuck to peers at my present work place, where I've been for almost three years. However, it was now more important than ever to find someone from NAVSEA to attest to my over 15 years of SE activities there. This required some real Internet detective work. I finally found old NAVSEA comrade and called him up in Colorado, where he retired. We had great time catching up and, thankfully, he was more than willing to help.
2. I completely revised "Section 5 Experience" part of my application. This was at the suggestion of the rejection letter. For each job I mapped my experience to the 13 SE roles. For each role and experience I put the number of months I worked that area. This helped when I filled out the optional summary table because I just added up the number of months for each SE Role I worked.

**28 Aug 2006:** I sent in my appeal application to INCOSE. After a few days they said -- *I received your appeal. I have not received information from your references yet, so I have not proceeded. Any idea when I should expect to receive that information?* -- This led me to prod my friends on the references.

**11 Oct 2006:** Talk about a comedy of errors. I lost a week when I mistyped my NAVSEA friend's e-mail address. By the time I realized my mistake my friend was off to a family reunion for a week. Looks like retirement is just a busy as working. When he got back we had several exchanges about his write-up. Finally he sent in his recommendation but it took another week to notice that my friend had mistyped INCOSE's e-mail address. By now I couldn't get a hold of him, he was on another trip. When he got back he apologized and resent it. Today INCOSE informed me -- *I received [the recommendation] today. I will now forward your appeal information back to the committee. I will notify you once they have reached a decision.* -- This is taking longer than I planned but I'm getting closer.



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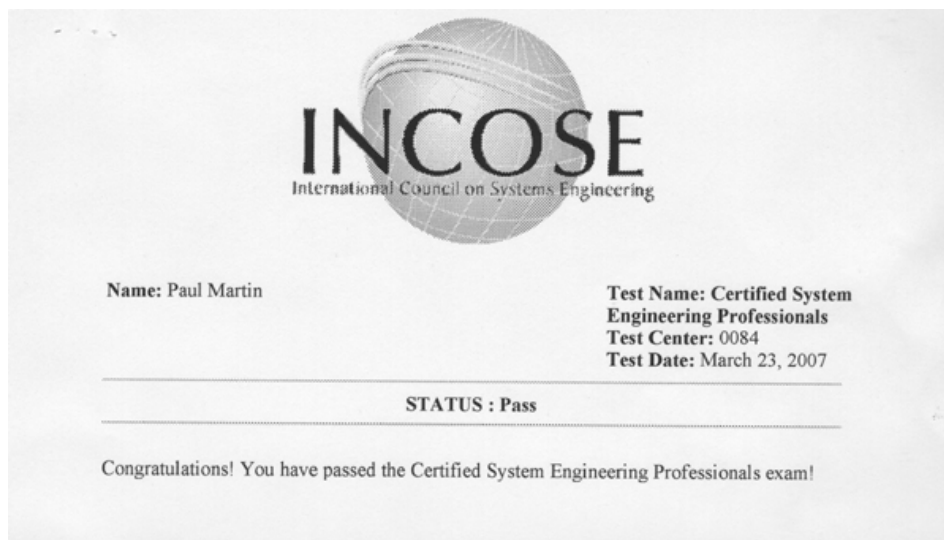
**07 Dec 2006:** Oh happy Day. The INCOSE e-mail I've been waiting for has come. -- *Your application for certification as a Systems Engineering Professional has been reviewed by the Certification Program Office and your education and work experience have been determined to satisfy the minimum standards for certification. The next step is for you to take the Certification Examination through Prometrics. If you pass the exam, you will be certified as a Certified Systems Engineering Professional.* -- The ball is officially in my court.

**23 January 2007:** OK, I have the ball but up to this point I didn't even dribble the thing. I guess I should confess I am a family man, with a beautiful wife and six wonderful kids. So December and January was filled with family matter ... a one week trip Christmas trip with the whole family to visit my wife's sister in Tampa Fla; a nieces wedding; a murder mystery party for my oldest daughter's 18th birthday; and a concentration on taxes and FAFSA to help my daughter with her college ambitions. However, things have now calmed down sufficiently enough for me to at least look at the ball in my hand. A few days ago a very pleasant surprise came within my e-mail inbox. The latest INCOSE newsletter had an article about a Tutorial on the INCOSE SE Handbook in Preparation for SE Certification. The teacher was a friend from my days with NAVSEA -- John Clark. What are the odds? The Tutorial was every Friday from 12 -1330 for 11 weeks. John was using teleconference technology and provided slides before hand. My plan is to take this class and then take the exam. With this in mind, I went to <http://www.prometric.com>, following the step by step instructions given in the 07 Dec 2006 INCOSE e-mail. I scheduled the test for March 23rd.



**23 March 2007:** I indeed called into the class every week and for the last week I re-read the handbook. I arrived at the Prometric test center around noon. They would only allow me to take my reading glasses and driver's license into the testing area. Everything else went into a locker. They gave me 2 hours to answer 120 questions. I took a hour and 45 minutes. Some questions were easy, some were hard, some didn't make sense, and I found all of them where awkwardly worded. I did the best I could and hit the "end test" button. The moment of truth had arrived. Seconds ticked by. A screen came up which announced: **I PASSED!**

Man, what a relief. The test was hard enough that I wouldn't have been surprised if I failed. But I PASSED! I am a Certified Systems Engineering Professional. At that time it looks like I was one of about 177 people on the planet with this designation. It was definitely worth the time and effort.



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For any comments or suggestions about this newsletter please e-mail our [President, John Lewis](#) or our [Communications Officer, Paul Martin](#). We value your feedback.

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Thanks in advance.**

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