

## Panel session helps internationally educated

BY JENNIFER COOMBES

International engineering graduates can have a more difficult time finding their career footing in Ontario than their Canadian-educated counterparts, but there are ways to make integration easier. Such was the message at a well-attended panel discussion hosted in October by PEO's Etobicoke, Toronto Humber, Mississauga and North Toronto chapters.

Four internationally educated professional engineers were invited to share their experiences—triumphs as well as bumps in the road—in developing their Canadian engineering careers. All were able to offer strategies and valuable advice to up-and-comers attempting to land their first engineering jobs in this country.

Nabil El Khazen, P.Eng., a consulting structural engineer educated in Lebanon, left a job in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, to emigrate to Canada. Two hundred job applications and 200 rejections later, El Khazen finally got a job as an assistant to a junior draughtsperson, making one-eighth of his Abu Dhabi salary. Despite the apparent setback, he recognized the opportunities available to him in Canada and worked his way up through the ranks very quickly.

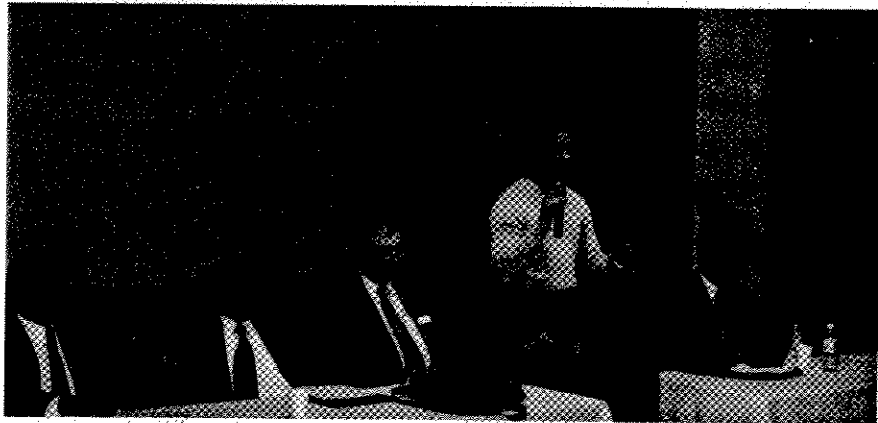
He offered two pieces of advice. First, be prepared to start at the bottom. In terms of employment, “nothing is too menial” is the advice he gives to friends and family. Second: Recognize the culture you're in. “What works in Havana doesn't work in Toronto, and what works in Toronto doesn't work in Havana,” El Khazen says. “Speak the language and respect the differences. With these principles, you can be parachuted anywhere in the world and you will be successful.”

Tapan Das, PhD, P.Eng., an electrical and electronics engineer, came to Canada from India via England. He has worked as a technical manager, director and vice president of engineering at Nortel, Lucent and SGNTT and has expertise in developing all manner of

electronics, including integrated circuits, telecommunications, wireless technologies, TV, WiFi, and VoIP. He agrees it is vital to immediately learn and adapt to the work culture and interpersonal relationships of the host country. For example, he discovered, “In England, if someone says ‘I would do that,’ it really means ‘you should do that!’” In job interviews, he says, candidates should make eye contact with their interviewer. He says that in many eastern cultures, the tendency is to look down. He also encourages the interna-

the first months, I wasn't customizing my resume and I got a poor response.” His advice is to “tailor your resume for each job, focusing on your experience related to that job. Put yourself in your employer's shoes.”

Rakesh Shreewastav, P.Eng., a project engineer with the ministry of transportation and a newly appointed PEO Councillor, considers his international training an asset not a barrier. Born in Nepal and educated there and in Russia, Shreewastav was initially a bit discouraged and disappointed with his experiences in Canada.



Four internationally educated engineers shared their successes and failures in developing their engineering careers in Ontario at a panel session organized jointly by four PEO chapters. Left to right, Moody Farag, P.Eng., manager admissions, PEO; Tapan Das, PhD, P.Eng.; George Senkiw, P.Eng., chair, Etobicoke Chapter; Samir Pathak, P.Eng.; Rakesh Shreewastav, P.Eng.; and Nabil El Khazen, P.Eng.

tionally educated to find someone in their organization to look to as a mentor and to learn from.

Das' parting advice: “If you have a belief, pursue it against all odds. A lot of people will be against you, but a lot of people will support you as well.”

Samir Pathak, P.Eng., a young chemical engineer from India, worked as an engineer in his native country for a couple of years, but wasn't interested in a life that meant doing the same thing day in and day out. He worked in the UK before immigrating to Canada. Getting a job in Ontario, however, proved a challenge: “In

His advice to those looking to integrate quickly into Ontario's engineering profession is to take advantage of the resources available to you from professional engineering organizations such as PEO and the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE), and have confidence in yourself. Shreewastav says, “Network and be determined. A positive attitude makes a difference.”

Following the guest speakers, Moody Farag, P.Eng., PEO manager of admissions, and Peter DeVita, P.Eng., representing OSPE, answered questions concerning the licensing process.