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"COMPUTING ETHICS: WORLD'S TWO LARGEST COMPUTER PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES JOIN FORCES IN INTERNATIONAL PROJECT"

Washington, DC, Rayburn House Office Building, Congressional Briefing, organized by Representatives George Brown (D-CA) and Edward Markey (D-MA), in cooperation with the National Computer Ethics and Responsibilities Campaign, (June 21, 1994) -- The world's two largest organizations of computing professionals, with a combined membership of more than one hundred and seventy-five thousand members (world-wide), have mounted a joint effort to establish internationally recognized standards for the professional and ethical conduct of software engineers. The Washington, DC based IEEE Computer Society (IEEE-CS), and the New York, NY based Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) recently established their joint task force on Software Engineering Ethics and Professional Practices (SEEPP) to "codify and document the software engineering profession's collective wisdom for resolving ethical conflicts," said Robert J. Melford, Computer Society Co-chair for the task force.

ACM Co-chair Dr. Donald Gotterbarn added, "this task force will focus both on 'Ethics' and 'Standards of Practice.' The latter will provide guidelines and recommended practices to help computing professionals meet their professional obligations to quality and higher care in difficult situations." Both Co-chairs went on to emphasize, "software engineering is a profession whose activities are trans-national; the SEEPP task force must also address cultural, organizational, and national characteristics that bear on a global definition of Software Engineering Ethics and Professional Practices."

The SEEPP task force is approaching the one-third mark of an aggressive eighteen month schedule to complete its work. Computing professionals from throughout the world are being invited to participate in the standards' development process.

Melford and Gotterbam explained that the task force is using "a recognized methodology for developing and documenting the profession's consensus, in an international venue." The methodology is derived from the IEEE Computer Society's extensive work in developing and establishing internationally recognized standards for the design, test, construction, and operation of computer hardware and software, and for the management of software engineering projects.

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ACM's recent work in developing and disseminating a Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct for its members also should be of great value to the task force. The task force has organized eight different Standards Working Groups, which are charged with addressing specific areas of ethical interest and concern.

Melford and Gotterbam stated that the working groups on Privacy, Security, Intellectual Property, Professional Competence, Professional Relationships, and Social Justice address "issues and principles." Gotterbarn explained that the eighth working group, Institutional Support, will address such things as how to establish and operate a "Hot Line" where software engineers could query recognized experts about ethical problems they were encountering. Both Chairman also noted that the task force could establish additional working groups to address other areas of concern if there was sufficient volunteer interest.

The SEEPP task force is part of a larger project, the Joint IEEE-CS/ACM Steering Committee for the Establishment of Software Engineering as a Profession. The Steering Committee has also established two other task forces: the first one to review academic curriculum; and, the second one to identify the body of knowledge and recommended practices. Dr. Mario Barbacci and Prof. Stuart Zweben are Chairman and Vice-Chairman, respectively.

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