

MOST

Active Society

NEW YORK, THAILAND AND MEXICO
SOCIETIES SUCCEED IN MEETING
DIFFERENT CHALLENGES

BY CHRISTINE MARTIN

NEW YORK

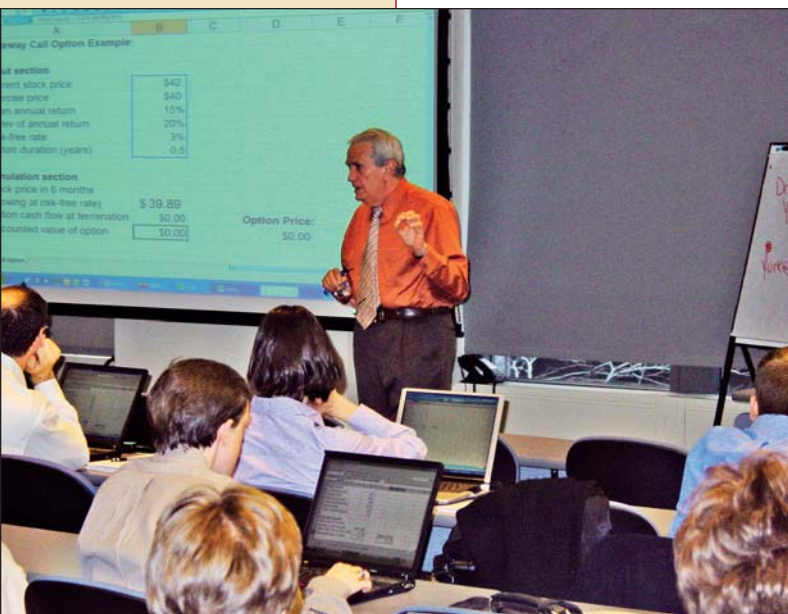
With more than 9,500 members, the New York Society of Security Analysts (NYSSA) is by far the largest CFA Institute society. Yet NYSSA's impressive size isn't what qualifies it to be a 2006 "most" society. What makes NYSSA a standout organization is its unwillingness to rest easy and coast by doing "just enough" to keep members satisfied. Rather, NYSSA continues to ask—and answer—the question: What more can we do?

"It's a challenge to meet all the needs of a very large and diverse group of investment professionals," says Alvin Kressler, NYSSA's executive director. "Yet, NYSSA leadership, staff, and volunteers are committed to continually innovating so that each NYSSA member can find a program or service of value to them."

This commitment is most visible in NYSSA's programming efforts. Eileen Budd, director of programming and education, reports that each year NYSSA offers roughly 225 sessions of programming, covering more than 125 educational topics.

Among these events are series of half-day and full-day courses, which NYSSA first offered about five years ago to meet the educational needs of its more experienced investment professionals. "We found that these members wanted practical, skill-building opportunities beyond the 90-minute presentations we already were offering at that time," says Budd. This effort has since evolved into a professional development curriculum developed by NYSSA staff that is offered in a year-round, multi-semester schedule.

Semester catalogs are mailed to NYSSA members, plus roughly 9,000 more individuals on the mailing list. "The hallmark of many of these courses is that attendees can return to the office and immediately begin applying the material," says Budd, who offers "Advanced Financial Modeling Using Excel," "Corporate Valuation Methodologies," "M&A



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Structuring,” and “Writing Marketing Materials” as examples of some of the most popular offerings. “NYSSA is a CFA Institute Approved Provider, and many of our courses are prequalified for PD [CFA Institute Professional Development] credit,” adds Budd. “It’s not uncommon for us to get attendees from outside New York.”

In addition to staff-run courses, NYSSA volunteer committees spearhead and organize conferences on such topics as financial reporting and private wealth management, as well as 90-minute “forums,” which are offered as breakfast, luncheon, evening, or brown-bag events and often are free to members.

Budd and Kressler note that the volunteer committees are vital to ensuring that NYSSA programming remains fresh and relevant. “Committees help us keep [a finger on the] pulse of what’s needed for our membership. They identify industry trends and address them in the forums,” says Budd. Forum topics sometime evolve into half-day or full-day courses offered in NYSSA’s PD curriculum. Courses on cash flow reporting and forensic accounting are examples. “A committee recently organized a presentation on credit derivatives, and our members want to know more about it. Consequently, the staff is developing a course, which we intend to offer next semester,” says Kressler.

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“We are also developing a series of educational courses that target senior investment professionals and executives in the financial services community, which is a group we feel has had limited professional development opportunities,” Kressler notes.

Nearly all of NYSSA’s educational events are open to members and nonmembers alike. “It serves to widen the dialogue,” says Kressler, who points out that NYSSA’s mission statement directs the organization to serve the needs of *all* professionals involved in the investment decision-making process. He also notes that NYSSA is working to make its programming increasingly accessible through webcast and iPod technologies.

NYSSA also strives to “do more” for members outside the classroom, through networking and career development opportunities. This year, NYSSA staff and volunteer committees hosted several unusual events—sake wine and organic food tastings, golf, and bowling. On 31 July 2006, NYSSA representatives rang the closing bell of the NYSE to kick off a committee-sponsored simulated trading session, which served as both a hands-on learning experience and a networking event.

The idea behind many such events, says Kressler, is to “attract members from across the industry who might otherwise not have a chance to interact.” Presently, NYSSA is also exploring the idea of forming a Toastmasters club, which Budd says could serve as both a networking opportunity and chance for NYSSA members to develop presentation skills.

“Doing more’ for *future* investment professionals is an important NYSSA emphasis,” says Kressler. He cites NYSSA’s Investment Challenge as one example. Last year, 11 universities competed in the eight-month program, in which leading industry professionals teach business and finance students how to research and report on a publicly traded company. Many other CFA Institute societies have adopted the idea since NYSSA initiated it, and the challenge is soon to become a global contest among society challenge winners under the auspices of CFA Institute.

NYSSA’s recent accomplishments are particularly notable in light of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. Despite losing its World Trade Center office space, NYSSA has managed not only to rebuild what it lost (it recently moved into a permanent facility) but also to expand member resources and offerings. Clearly, NYSSA hasn’t yet peaked. It is likely to remain a “most” society for many years to come.

THAILAND

When the CFA Society of Thailand was established in 2003, its founding members hit the ground running. Their ambition and resourcefulness helped to quickly entrench the society within the Thai investment community. Today, merely three years later, the Thailand Society is as robust as any long-standing CFA Institute society and worthy of recognition as a 2006 “most” society.

Founding president Chanitr Charnchainarong, CFA, said that from the very beginning, the Thailand Society recognized it would need to secure external support to accomplish its primary goal of promoting the CFA Program in Thailand. Accordingly, the society aggressively sought partnerships with key industry players, such as the Thai securities and exchange commission, the Stock Exchange of Thailand, the local securities analysts association, and local firms.



“We approached many different organizations, firms, and regulators to ask for their help,” Charnchainarong recalls. “Basically, we explained why having a CFA society is a good thing for the local investment industry and Thailand. But, we said, if you want this for Thailand, then you must help us to get started.”

The society’s campaign for support has been hugely successful. Charnchainarong says, “Our partners provide all the facilities for various events and meetings. They even pay for our coffee breaks.” Providing meeting space is no small gesture, either, because society-sponsored speakers typically attract more than 300 attendees.

How does a society of 105 members consistently pull off such impressive attendance? Again, the society’s resourcefulness is a factor. Several times a year, the society books high-profile speakers from around world, the cost of which is covered by the CFA Institute Speaker Retainer Program. The society also varies the subject matter. In the past 18 months, Thailand Society presentations have addressed risk management, corporate governance, and private wealth management. “We try to touch all the various players in the entire ecosys-

tem of the capital market,” Charnchainarong says. “This way, we’re not just promoting the CFA Program; we are promoting the usefulness of the Thailand Society for all players.”

To advertise these events, the society conducts a targeted direct-marketing campaign generated from an extensive database it has developed through its partners and sponsors. It also appeals directly to industry executives and leaders. “We send the message that our programs are of value, not just to the individual analyst or fund manager, but to the corporate side too, and they believe it,” says Charnchainarong.

The Thailand Society also cleverly capitalizes on the success of such high-profile events. “We line up press engagements with magazines, newspapers, and television for the speaker, and one of the society directors helps to translate the interview into Thai. The media coverage helps us to promote our organization and the CFA Program indirectly,” explains Charnchainarong. “Consequently, the local consensus is ‘this is a Thailand Society event, so it must be good.’”

Another initiative the Thailand Society has taken with the help of its supporters is the translation of CFA Institute publications into Thai. Presently, the society is facilitating the translation of *The Corporate Governance of Listed Companies: A Manual for Investors* (available at www.cfa-pubs.org) developed by the CFA Centre for Financial Market Integrity. Society volunteers are helping to proofread the translated version, and the organization also is working with the CFA Centre to subsidize the cost of printing. “Together with the regulators and the stock exchange, we’re planning to officially announce the translation in November,” says Charnchainarong.

By garnering the support of industry leaders for its various initiatives, the Thailand Society has managed to communicate to potential CFA candidates the message that earning the CFA charter is valued in Thailand. Interestingly, passing Level I of the CFA exam has long been required by Thai regulators to practice as an analyst or a fund manager. But the society’s growth—and the entrenchment of high standards of ethics, integrity, and professional excellence within the Thai investment community—depends on more and more Level I candidates completing the CFA Program. The society sponsors several events during the year to support CFA candidates in this effort.

Notably, says Charnchainarong, Level III pass rates have picked up dramatically since the society’s establishment. In 2006, 60 candidates from Thailand passed the CFA Level III exam (in 2004 and in 2005, the number was 23), and most of them will be awarded CFA charters. And a record Level I enrollment is expected in 2007.

Clearly, the Thailand Society—with its strategies for promoting the CFA Program, its resourcefulness, and its resultant success—is a society with a “most exciting” future.

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MEXICO

A most impressive display of resolve and follow-through has earned the CFA Society of Mexico recognition as a 2006 “most” society. At the beginning of 2006, the society’s predecessor, the Mexico Society of Financial Analysts, was nearly defunct. Yet with encouragement from CFA Institute staff and leadership, a group of determined, like-minded CFA charterholders in Mexico initiated a remarkable rebirth of the organization.

“A group of about 20 CFA charterholders convened in March to discuss the future of the society and the CFA Program in Mexico,” says Roberto Barrera, CFA, the society’s newly elected president. “This group is very proud [of the CFA designation], but its value is not recognized here in Mexico,” he explains. Although the CFA Program has had a presence in Mexico since the early 1990s, only 46 investment professionals in Mexico hold the designation and a mere 53 CFA candidates sat for the Level I exam in June 2006.

To rectify the problem and boost awareness of the CFA Program and charter in Mexico, the participants at the March meeting came together to start a society almost from scratch. Barrera recalls, “You could feel their energy.”

Barrera and his colleagues quickly mobilized. The new organization legally regrouped as the CFA Society of Mexico (CFASM) so as to clearly align itself with the principles and objectives of CFA Institute. Officers were elected in early April, and the bylaws were amended. Committees also were formed. Once the society operating structure was established, the leaders created a business plan to guide the society’s development over the following 18 months.

Chip Deale, head of Society Services at CFA Institute, notes that the Mexico society’s business plan is a “superb model for other societies—no matter how big or small or how established—to operate by. It lays out every detail that a society needs to have figured out to be successful—beginning with a vision and mission to establishing objectives, timelines, and a budget.”

The business plan was sent to roughly 100 investment professionals in Mexico with an invitation to participate in the society. Barrera notes that although most of the recipients of the plan are CFA charterholders, many are investment professionals from other countries who are working in Mexico and have affiliations with other societies. No matter, he believes; the society needs their help. The cover letter accompanying the plan made the plea, “Do not lose this opportunity. Do not spare us your talent!”

The society’s plan successfully stirred up interest. Since its forming in April, membership has jumped from 30 to 42. And an active core of volunteers has already begun executing the society’s highest priority: increasing CFA awareness.



Pictured from left: Roberto Barrera, CFA, president of the CFA Society of Mexico; Laura Gamero of the *Diario Monitor*; John Viault, CFA, head of the Committee of International Relations; and Rodolfo Campuzano, head of the Committee of Government Relations.

Over the summer, CFASM members met with high-ranking officials from the securities and exchange commission, the pension fund system, and the local association of broker/dealers, all of whom subsequently expressed an interest in promoting the CFA Program. “Incredibly, leaders of the *Comision Nacional Bancaria y de Valores* [the Mexican securities and exchange commission] were not even aware of the CFA Program. I was completely surprised,” notes Barrera. He proceeded to provide the commission leaders a list of global regulatory agencies that employ CFA charterholders. “We want them to see the opportunity the CFA Program presents to their own organization.”

The society held its first conference in September and is planning its first gala dinner for December, with Martin Werner as the guest speaker. “Werner is the former under-secretary of finance of Mexico and now the managing director for Latin America with Goldman Sachs,” says Barrera. “He is well known in our investment community, and we expect him to be a big draw.”

CFASM leaders are keenly aware that membership growth and the society’s future depend on its ability both to recruit and to support new CFA candidates. “Our Level I pass rates are lower than the international average. If we can reach a critical mass of 100 or 120 Level I candidates—and I think we can—we will be able to sponsor a course in Mexico to provide better preparation for the exam,” Barrera says.

Deale, who remains in contact with the revitalized society and is impressed by its drive, is optimistic about the leadership’s goals. “The CFA Society of Mexico is not merely talking about what needs to happen,” he says. “They are putting in the effort, and they expect to see results.” **■**

Christine Martin is a freelance journalist who writes for a variety of professional and trade publications.