

Let's Talk STEM with Dr. Calvin Mackie Enters the Hidden World of Actuary Science, Exploring its Vast Impact on Society

Fascinating conversation with two Society of Actuaries members on how to become an actuary, their role in various industries and how to improve diversity

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With two special guests from the [Society of Actuaries](#) (SOA), the new episode of the Let's Talk STEM with Dr. Calvin Mackie podcast highlights the important role that actuaries and mathematics play in American society and the dire need to increase the number of Blacks in a profession that is a mystery to many people.

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Jamala Arland

Joe Wurzburger, SOA Managing Director in Strategy and Innovation, and Jamala Arland, a former Chair of the SOA's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee, explain how to become actuaries and their impact. Both are SOA Fellows, the highest designation earned through exams, training and other requirements. Arland acknowledges their diversity challenge: there are less than 250 Black actuaries around the world.

“It is a very small number,” says Arland, who is from Barbados. She said it can be “very challenging” to join a profession and then look around and not see anyone who looks like you. Another barrier, she says, is the lack of awareness about the profession. “The word acuate, it's not necessarily a part of somebody's vocabulary on a regular basis. Then the lack of awareness of what can you do with the application of mathematics.”

Arland discusses SOA's efforts to help members and candidates feel fully included and have equitable opportunities. She also cites the rewarding experiences she enjoyed in the insurance industry. "I worked at insurance companies for the majority of my career," she says. "I've done a lot of really cool things. I've done things related to developing cool new, innovative insurance products. I've done things related to analysis of stock market increases. I've done analysis related to the impact of pandemics even before we were in the middle of a global pandemic."

Wurzburger adds: "There is no one size fits all actuary, right? There are so many different kinds. Actuaries are

business professionals who make or influence decisions affected by risk. The cool thing within that is for people who want to use math as a foundation to make a social impact. Those decisions often safeguard things in society that people value most."

Further, he maintains that actuaries contribute to Americans' quality of life by helping people age with dignity, access affordable healthcare, provide financial protection for their homes, enjoy retirement, etc. "There are actuaries at the heart of all of those issues and helping to make decisions so that (people in our) society can live better."

Dr. Mackie, founder of STEM Global Action (<https://stemglobalaction.com/>) zeroes in on the role actuaries play in determining insurance payouts, citing the frustration in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina and other natural disasters. "I would be remiss if I don't ask you (about) the role actuaries play informing insurance companies about the possibility and predictability of risk," Dr. Mackie says.

Responding, Wurzburger notes that "where hurricanes are so frequent and the destruction so horribly widespread ... all those considerations are factored into the analysis that would be done to kind of consider" if the risks are insurable.

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ABOUT STEM GLOBAL ACTION

In 2013, Dr. Calvin Mackie founded STEM NOLA, a New Orleans non-profit committed to expanding STEM education, particularly in communities of color. His goal is to make STEM

LET'S TALK STEM
WITH DR. CALVIN MACKIE

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STEM
GLOBAL ACTION
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FEATURING SPECIAL GUESTS

JAMALA ARLAND
Chairperson of the SOA's Diversity
EQUITY AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE

JOE WURZBURGER
Managing Director of Product
Development & Innovation
SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES (SOA)

education available in ALL communities. In July 2021, Dr. Mackie launched STEM Global Action, a campaign and network of affiliates that pursues STEM education for children, parents and communities. His initiatives have impacted more than 100,000 students, 20,000 families and 5,000 schools across the U.S., and in five countries. Dr. Mackie holds a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics from Morehouse College, as well as a Bachelor's, Master's and Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering from Georgia Tech. An archive of Let's Talk STEM with Dr. Calvin Mackie is here: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL_UPXIrgkzwsXFiefgOpgYIUNzD-T3iaw The STEM Global Action website includes:

STEM Global Action Today (<https://stemglobalaction.com/stem-global-action-today/>), a newsletter with comprehensive articles on some of the most important issues related to STEM, and takes readers into the lives of STEM educators and their extraordinary students, who will be the STEM leaders of tomorrow.

STEM Global Action Data Center <https://stemglobalaction.com/stem-data-center/>, a one-stop resource library for studies, reports, video presentations and news coverage about STEM.
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