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USING THE WORKS OF NEVIL SHUTE IN ENGINEERING EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Developing the ability to write simply but effectively, some understanding of the interrelation of engineering and society, exposure to some of the ethical aspects of engineering practice and an understanding of the difficulties that can arise when working with others in teams are important aspects of an engineering education. They can be dealt with to some extent in separate specialized courses but generally the best results appear to be achieved when they are dealt with in various ways, in several conventional engineering courses. One of the reasons that many engineering students seem to have difficulty writing effectively is that they have done very little reading on their own. It is here proposed that many of the aspects of engineering education mentioned above can, to a limited degree, be dealt with by introducing a study of some of the literary works of the author Nevil Shute into the engineering education program. Nevil Shute was born in England and studied engineering at Oxford. After graduation he worked in the aircraft industry becoming best known for his work on the R100 airship. He started his own aircraft company called Airspeed Ltd. Airspeed went on to design and construct a number of well-known and successful aircraft. Shute published his first novel in 1926 and in the late 1930's he left Airspeed and devoted himself to writing on a full time basis. He served in various ways during the Second World War including the design and development of secret weapons. In 1950 Shute moved permanently to Australia. Shute wrote 25 books including an autobiography entitled *Slide Rule*. Although most of Shute's novels do not deal directly with engineering, they are all written in a style – simple but very clear and very engaging - that clearly shows the influence of his engineering career and many deal in some way with our responsibility to society and to others. The book that most clearly deals with engineering is perhaps the novel *No Highway* that deals with the experiences of an engineering researcher who is forced to face the implications of what his research has revealed. This novel and Shute's autobiography can be used in an engineering education program. For example, discussion of Shute's experiences in industry as described in *Slide Rule* can be used as the basis for studies in the nature of the engineer's role in industry and society. Other ways in which Shute's books can be used in engineering education are discussed.