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Editorial

Gazing into the Future



Back in January 2002, *CEP* published a 16-page special on “An Evolution in Chemical Engineering,” and I asked you “Where are we headed?” Nearly three years later, I find myself pondering the same question.

AIChE is heading down the path of more emphasis on bio-engineering, while continuing its focus on safety and the environment. Take for example this year’s Institute Lecturer, Dr. Adam Heller, professor of chemical engineering at the Univ. of Texas at Austin, who is going to discuss his involvement in the development of a continuous glucose monitoring system in his speech, “Lessening the Pain and the Worry of Diabetic People” (June 2004, p. 57). Back in 2002, the Institute Lecture, “Biomaterials in Drug Delivery and Tissue Engineering,” was given by Dr. Robert Langer, the Kenneth J. Germeshausen professor of chemical and biomedical engineering at MIT. (The lecture is publicly available at www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/fulltext/108065861/PDFSTART).

Note that MIT’s Dr. Langer isn’t just a professor of chemical engineering, but rather one of both chemical and biomedical engineering, thus reflecting the natural relationship between one discipline and the other. Many universities have followed this trend by incorporating a biological component into their curricula, and even adding “bio” to their chemical engineering department names (see <http://bio.aiche.org/pdfs/Articles/Evolution%20in%20ChE.pdf> for a list). Perhaps this is what AIChE needs to do too. In addition to the newly established Society for Biological Engineering (SBE; <http://bio.aiche.org>), maybe we should change our name to AICh&BE — the American Institute of Chemical and Biological Engineers or adopt some other label that would reflect the changing nature of the profession. It would most certainly be indicative of what our members are doing. Nearly, 40% of the technical sessions at the upcoming Annual Meeting in Austin, TX (Nov. 7–12) will be bio-related, signifying that this subject is the focal point of today’s research and development, and tomorrow’s industrial growth.

Another trend we are seeing is the shift from process-development focus to one of product development. This is likely a function of more chemical engineers working in bio-related fields. Dr. Ed Cussler, Distinguished Institute professor of chemical engineering and materials science at the Univ. of Minnesota, discussed this in *CEP*’s Jan. 2002 special section, using examples, such as the pharmaceuticals Celebrex and generic Premarin. And, Dr. George Stephanopoulos, Arthur D. Little professor of chemical engineering at MIT, gave the 2003 Institute Lecture on this subject.

Other trends are sure to exist, and I’d like to ask you once again, where do you think we are headed? I’d also like to add, “What is the direction AIChE should be headed and are we doing enough?” Please email me with your thoughts at krisc@aiche.org.

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