

## AIChE-Boston Begins Academic/Industrial Collaboration Program

Recently, the Boston Section of AIChE launched a program to bring together Chemical and Biological Engineering Chairs from 13 universities throughout New England and senior technology executives from the area.

### Department chairs work on cooperative solutions

Twelve Chemical and Biological Engineering Department Heads or their delegates from schools throughout New England met with Boston section AIChE officers at Tufts University on November 15. Christos Georgakis, professor and chair, Tufts Department of Chemical and Biological Engineering coordinated the meeting. Georgakis serves as the university coordinator and industrial liaison for the Boston Section, a newly created officer position.

"Our goal was to develop a forum where academic department heads can get to know one another, discuss common department-related issues, and develop cooperative solutions," says Rob Reintjes, AIChE-Boston Past Chair (2004–05), who pioneered the initiative with Georgakis and Larry Evans, founder of AspenTech and AIChE President-Elect.

Response was overwhelmingly positive. Local schools in attendance included: Yale, MIT, Tufts University, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, U Mass Amherst, U Mass Lowell, Univ. of Rhode Island, Univ. of New Hampshire, Brown, Univ. of Maine, Northeastern and Univ. of Connecticut.

The primary focus of the meeting centered on Chemical and Biological Engineering curricula reform. Stephen Fan, University of New Hampshire chair, said, "It was wonderful to see so many chairs in attendance and the discussion on curriculum was both informative and interesting. I look forward to our next meeting."

Hemant Pendse, University of Maine chair, described the meeting as "A very promising initiative, indeed. I was impressed with the possibility of direct industry involvement in the process of developing 'academic' leadership and management endeavors. We need such interactions."

The meeting also alerted the Boston Section of what role they could play moving forward. Reintjes adds, "Seven Boston Section officers attended primarily to listen and identify new ways for AIChE-



(Above) On Nov. 15, 2005, the inaugural "Department Chairs" meeting took place at Tufts University. Twelve chemical and biological engineering department heads or their delegates from schools throughout New England met with Boston section AIChE officers. (Below) The Department Chairs meet the Industry Executives on Feb. 24, 2006. Senior executives from 13 area companies including Genzyme, Millipore, AspenTech, Albany International, Artisan Industries and US Filter were in attendance.



Boston to better serve ChemE departments and students."

### Department chairs and industry executives share dialogue

In early 2006, Chairs and industry executives met together to exchange ideas for greater academic-industry collaboration. President-Elect Larry Evans chaired the meeting. Chau-Chyun Chen, senior technology fellow at AspenTech, observed, "The advantage of getting the department chairs together with senior chemical engineering executives is that over time, we will develop helpful connections and partnerships. The ChemE departments become real and meaningful resources to us in the industry."

Senior executives from 13 area companies including Genzyme Corporation, Millipore, AspenTech, Albany International, Artisan Industries, and US Filter were in attendance. Evans explains, "This was the first time we have had an extended discussion with such a large group of the New England department chairs and leaders of many of the companies in the

region who hire chemical engineers. It was interesting to see how many of the problems are common from private to public universities and from large departments to small departments. It was good to see that chemical engineering enrollments are on the upswing after a decline at most departments. Many department heads wanted reassurance from industry that there would be jobs for the increased number of graduates. Industry seemed to be very positive about the employment outlook."

### Ongoing initiative

Reintjes is optimistic about the future of this initiative. "Both the department chairs and the executive group have expressed interest in meeting again soon, tentatively in May. High on the agenda is exploring ways for AIChE-Boston to serve as a resource to help place students in coop and internship programs with local companies, and to establish a dialogue between technology transfer officers at each of the universities and the department chair/executive group."