



PUBLISHER AND EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Kristine Chin
(212) 591-7662
krisc@aiche.org

MANAGING EDITOR

Cynthia F. Mascone
(212) 591-7343
cynm@aiche.org

SENIOR EDITOR & ACTING EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Rita L. D'Aquino
(212) 591-7317
ritad@aiche.org

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Deborah Hairston
Boonsri Dickinson

REGULATORY:

William A. Shirley
(888) 674-2529
envtllaw@charter.net

PATENT LAW:

Henry Heines
mhh@townsend.com
Frank C. Eymard
frank_eynard@albermarle.com

PRODUCTION COORDINATOR

Karen Simpson
(212) 591-7337
kares@aiche.org

ART & DESIGN

Jesse Gunzell
(212) 591-8678
jessg@aiche.org

ILLUSTRATOR

Craig Carioscia

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING AND REPRINTS

Denise DeLuca
Mallon
(212) 591-7170
denid@aiche.org

AICHE

AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF
CHEMICAL ENGINEERS

THREE PARK AVENUE
NEW YORK, NY
10016-5991
www.aiche.org

AICHE

GENERAL INQUIRIES
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MEMBER ACTIVITIES &
SERVICES
(212) 591-7329

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

John A. Sofranko
johns@aiche.org

GROUP PUBLISHER

Stephen R. Smith
steps@aiche.org

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Welcome to Our Global Abode

I began my first international engineering project on January 27, 1986. A project team of French, Italian, and American chemical engineers gathered in a brand new laboratory building in Chauny, France to initiate a plant expansion. That evening, I had dinner with the family of the plant technical manager. I enjoyed observing the dynamics of a French household and struggled to understand what little I could of the conversation. It surprised me, however, that my English-fluent host offered no assistance with translation, but midway through the third wine, he came clean. "Monsieur Berger," he explained, "*vous travaillez vous travaillez maintenant en une industrie mondiale. Il vous faut apprendre à parler Français.*" In English, this translates as, "You now work in a global industry. You must learn to speak French."

The global language of business and engineering remained English, but I did manage a respectable level of technical French. By 1991, I had added a new project in Japan, and began circling the globe, flying from New York to Tokyo to Paris to New York, carrying three currencies and three kinds of subway tokens in my pocket.

My travels and my overseas communications were not the norm for chemical engineers at the time. But by the mid-1990s, when telephone service and high quality e-mail and document transmittal became available, many more began working with overseas teams. My travels enabled me to learn the critical skills that are needed to succeed in the global business environment. Aside from being proficient in the engineering discipline, one must speak proper English (refrain from using slang or idioms); respect the religion and learn the culture and courtesies of the people (e.g., how to exchange business cards, how to propose a toast, when to give gifts); appreciate their cuisine; learn at least a few polite words (hello, nice to meet you, please, thank you, good evening, etc.). Knowing the words needed to place an order in a restaurant (and other terms commonly spoken in that setting) is equally important.

By the late 1990s and in the early 2000s, overseas teams were coming to the U.S. to learn from the their American counterparts, and returned home to lead projects with support from the U.S. During this period, the number of American chemical engineers interacting with overseas colleagues increased significantly. Today, most multinational chemical companies operate R&D enters in China, India, Singapore, and other rapidly growing nations. On any given day, a chemical engineer may collaborate with other engineers in several global locations.

That certainly describes my day. On a recent Monday morning, my inbox contained business communications from Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Russia and the U.K., and that was after deleting all the spam. As Director of Technology Alliances and International Programs for AIChE, one would expect this to be the case. Maybe you are wondering why AIChE needs a Director of International Programs. The answer lies in the nature of our profession — we serve a global industry that impacts the jobs of many AIChE members, even if they never leave the U.S. Likewise, our overseas colleagues may never set foot on our terrain, but they want to network with their American colleagues through AIChE. Such global networking is facilitated by AIChE's new and enhanced web tools, such as virtual communities (e.g., SharePoint) and Knovel eLibrary.

For example, we recently welcomed 80 new AIChE members from Sinopec in Beijing, China, many of whom will be joining us in San Francisco for the Annual Meeting (Nov. 12–17). AIChE wants to be the Global Home for Chemical Engineers. And we are making it happen. Please join me in welcoming our colleagues to their new career home.



Scott Berger

Scott Berger, Director of International Programs and Technology Alliances and Director of AIChE's Chemical Center for Process Safety

