

AIChE Student Chapter Issues

These questions were collected at the 2009 AIChE National Student Conference Chapter Presidents' Meeting and suggestions were given by the attendees of the 2009 Student Leadership Development Conference. Questions and suggestions were consolidated since many of the issues were the same for most universities.

1) We have problems getting the underclassmen involved.

- a. Hold social events specifically for underclassmen or have a seminar about internship opportunities rather than career opportunities.
- b. We have an engineering fun day where we invite them to come out play ultimate Frisbee, corn hole, etc. We provide food and a t-shirt. All faculty are invited – non-formal, and we also try to present what our chapter does during the year.
- c. Charge them with doing the Chem-E-Car, that way they can participate at regionals as well. Host a competitive event, providing students vs. professors. They get to learn about each other.
- d. Appoint/elect freshman and sophomore representatives to help plan events, spread the news about meetings, and find ways to get other freshman and sophomores involved. Allow them to have nearly complete control over events so they feel like it is 'their' event. This keeps them invested.
- e. Get them involved early by helping out with open houses for the department so you can talk to them very early.
- f. If you were involved as a freshman (or underclassman), relate to where they are coming from and plan an event meant just for them and publicize it.
- g. Start the 1st week of school when freshmen are looking to get involved and meet new people. Host a freshman and officers event so you get to know them.
- h. Additional suggestions, reference question 10, 17, & 18.

2) We don't really have any form of fundraising. Ideas?

- a. One of the student conference workshops talked about industry speed dating, a golf tournament, or anything annually that industry can come to expect.
- b. T-shirt sales, text exchange fundraiser, donut/coffee sales during finals, BBQ sales event
- c. Hold a 5k run/walk that is fun. It is a lot of work, but can make enough money to support the chapter all year. Our chapter works with our local runners club.
- d. Look for corporate sponsors for donations as well. Faculty or professors in your department may have connections to help you with this.

- e. We have a huge grill-out at the end of the year on campus. People like cheap burgers.
- f. Collaborate with other groups on campus to do an all campus fundraiser event (i.e. Battle of the Bands)
- g. Hold a raffle from either donated or discounted products.
- h. Additional suggestions, reference question 3 & 9.

3) How do we get people involved with fundraisers and raising money to help our student chapter? Everyone wants to do activities that we fund, but all fundraisers end up barely making money.

- a. Hold a semi-formal dance. You can rent out a bar with a DJ. Sell tickets for \$10, people can bring their dates. Hold it after classes are done and before finals. Great way to wind down!
- b. Make sure you are asking your university's student government for money as well as your department and the college.
- c. Additional suggestions, reference question 2 & 9.

4) Our chapter has problems increasing the percentage of our department involved with/ as members of AIChE. We have approximately 700 students in our department, but only about 200 are members of AIChE.

- a. One solution is to emphasize the benefits and rewards for joining AIChE. It can help you connect and network with people in your school now and after school when you are looking for jobs.
- b. Require students to sign up for a national AIChE account during class time. Have events only for registered AIChE members or raffle prizes to national members.
- c. I have found e-mail doesn't work. We present AIChE during the intro class.
- d. Additional suggestions, reference question 7 & 13.

5) Possible shortage of experienced officers for this coming school year. Many of the current officers are graduating and replacements may be difficult.

- a. Think about starting a mentoring program where seniors and juniors are paired with sophomore and freshman. Friendships start earlier.
- b. Assign small responsibilities to the underclassmen.
- c. Our chapter always has officer turnover dinners at the end of the semester after officer elections. During these, the old officer will explain/discuss responsibilities of the position to the incoming officer.
- d. Have an officer binder where you have all the paperwork from the previous officer and have an election in mid-spring and train them during that time (basically they become the officers, but they have the previous officer to ask questions to).

- e. Keep track of everything each officer does during the year to make sure the new officer knows what they will be doing. Having a constitution helps their roles be more clearly defined.
- f. Set goals for officers to meet and accomplish and document for future years.

6) How can we get students to sign up for national membership? Last year we have over 80 national members and this year we only have 44 members.

- a. If you get a lot of participation at your chapter meetings, you could have a computer (or 2 or 3) set up in the meeting room and have members sign up as they enter for meetings. That will get at least the active members signed up. If you have computers in your class rooms, have professors require students to sign up during class time. Raffle off a small prize every month to a registered AIChE member.
- b. Use AIChE's website during the meetings, such as watching webinars, so the students can experience the benefits of national membership.
- c. Stress the benefits of joining AIChE – how it can help now and in the future. Make sure you advertise AIChE and meetings very well to get the word out.
- d. Stress the benefits and about how it has helped you personally.

7) We have issues Increasing student participation. The ChemE department is small so it is hard to get students involved. Since our resources are limited students don't see the beneficial things we do.

- a. Since the department is small, social activities such as bowling nights, volleyball games, and movie nights can get people closer together.
- b. Start other competitions that your chapter is more interested in.
- c. Personally talk to and invite students. Make an effort to talk to the people who signed up but don't show up often. If they feel like someone notices they aren't attending, they may come more often. Adding a personal touch always helps.

8) How can we increase the level of AIChE participation/contribution by the ChemE department?

- a. Foster faculty/student interactions. Host luncheons together – get the department to trust the students and vice versa. Host a fun event together where students compete against faculty.
- b. Try sending out e-mails to the faculty proposing various student-faculty activities and gauge what events professors will be most interested in. Some kind of lunch, where students can ask questions of a panel of faculty and upperclassmen.
- c. Try a jeopardy-like tournament or quiz bowl with faculty vs. students.
- d. Try to know their interests

- e. Every semester we have a picnic for all undergraduates and faculty. It's a good, laid-back way to get the students involved.
- f. Have professors present their research at Lunch-n-Learn for students.
- g. Hold a movie night that faculty could bring their families.
- h. Always go in person to invite faculty. It shows sincere interest and motivation.

9) Funding from our university has recently been cut and with a great increase in student interest at our big events like the conference, we are now running over budget. What kind of good fundraisers could we implement, and how should we go about looking for sponsors?

- a. Some fundraising ideas: t-shirt (other merchandise) sales, AIChE store with school supplies/food, textbook exchange fundraiser, BBQ with professors, bake sale and t-shirt sale where you hold a design competition at your school.
- b. Talk to faculty and professors in your department. Lots of them have contacts to people in businesses and companies that would be willing to sponsor you or donate money.
- c. Look for contacts in industry. Write them letters of what you would like to do with your chapter and that any help would be appreciated.
- d. Additional suggestions, reference question 2 & 3.

10) Freshmen tend not to have a lot of ChE classes and therefore don't want to come to meetings, etc. How can we tackle this problem and get them interested in our events?

- a. Delegate the freshman to oversee the Chem-E-Car and have the upperclassmen serve as advisors to them.
- b. Approach their academic advisors. Students must meet with them in order to register for classes, so ask them to help get the word out about AIChE membership and activities.
- c. Have representatives for each class level take on a role in the chapter so they feel they are involved and have a connection to the other members.
- d. Recruit upperclassmen to help underclassmen with tutoring, questions, mentoring, etc.
- e. Additional suggestions, reference question 1,17, & 18.

11) We've started a Chem-E-Car in the past, but it seems to fall on only a few students and they can't finish it.

- a. Talk to your department. Maybe you can have the Chem-E-Car team become an independent study. You can have proposals due and based on who is most enthusiastic those get to take the class to earn credits. When credits are involved, stuff gets done.

12) My chapter has trouble getting students involved in anything other than monthly meetings. We find that it is always the same 7 or 8 people participating in everything. How do we increase attendance at our social events?

- a. Offer free food. Often this is the only way to get good turn outs for AIChE events. Poll students during class to see what kind of social activities they would like to see happen. Appoint AIChE reps to constantly remind classmates about activities.
- b. Schedule events right after classes get out.
- c. Determine a way to reward people for attending events such as door prizes at general meetings, points or lunch for community service or t-shirts.
- d. Offer a variety of events from sports, academics, jobs, social and community service. Show that AIChE has a ton to offer and make them want to stay involved.
- e. Try to expand the executive board. If you can give people titles and responsibilities, they may be more likely to get involved.

13) Getting our students to sign up for national membership, even though we did a specific presentation on the benefits of membership is an issue for our chapter. Our members have not been signing up. We have 64 members paying local dues but less than half are national members.

- a. We make our own simplified local chapter sign-up sheet, and present during their intro class and have them filled out during class. The secretary of our AIChE chapter takes the basic information and plugs it into the national database using their given e-mail address as the username and the phone number is their password.
- b. Use the AIChE website in your meetings to watch a webinar.
- c. Host an event and charge a fee, but provide computers and if they sign up as national members, the fee is waived.
- d. Go to the freshman classes and other classes and set up a computer. People will line up to add their information and you can address any issues that may come up during sign-up.
- e. Require membership for a big desired event (i.e. career fair, help with funding conference attendance)
- f. Additional suggestions, reference question 4 & 7.

14) We have problems scheduling speakers/hours at times appropriate for our students. No one wants to go on a plant tour on a Friday afternoon. How can our chapter work around this problem?

- a. Allow members to vote on good times and let them invite other friends/classmates to go on the tours so they can feel comfortable and have more fun rather than it seeming like an obligation.
- b. Have professors emphasize the learning experience that can be gained from going on the tours.

15) My student chapter has problems finding speakers to fill open spots. What is the best way to go about finding speakers to fill those spots?

- a. Ask students who have done local research/internships to have people from there talk. Personal connections are always better than e-mail tag.
- b. AIChE's ambassador program
- c. Ask faculty for connections
- d. You can have a social event- Alumni night – in which you bring alumni to talk to current students and to have mock interviews with them.
- e. Go to your career services department and try to connect you with important contacts.
- f. Contact your AIChE local section. They are well connected and willing to help.

16) No companies or plants are near my school. We have to cold call companies asking for money for specific events. Any suggestions on how we can connect with companies/organizations?

- a. Talk to any AIChE chapters near you and ask them about their connections. They could connect you with professionals and other industrial connections.
- b. Try not to contact companies to ask specifically for money. Try to let them know about events you are having. This works best with companies that have alumni.
- c. Career fairs – ask them to speak about their companies. They are more willing to participate if you confront them with how they'll benefit.
- d. Generate a database of alumni before they graduate. Send out an update/newsletter to alumni as a way to keep them involved and contact them.
- e. Use contacts people have from internships.
- f. Use a yearbook as a way to get information about where alumni are going. Contact them frequently.

17) My student chapter has high freshman involvement but we only retain a small fraction when they become sophomores. How can we retain members for multiple years?

- a. Motivation and prove to students to be a worthy chapter by great ideas and activities.
- b. Try throwing social events that will allow all freshmen to mingle with each other as well as with upperclassmen. You can have small parties or have ice cream meetings.
- c. When you have them as freshmen members, ask them what they want out of AIChE and what you can do to help stay involved.
- d. Additional suggestions, reference question 1, 10, & 18.

18) My student chapter has problems recruiting freshman. Our school is a commuter school and many freshmen do not see the point in joining AIChE activities. We are working on this aspect of our membership, but this becomes more difficult since they usually are on the other side of campus.

- a. Make a session for them at the school's orientation
- b. Have professors help advertise AIChE in freshman ChemE classes. It is much more effective for a professor to promote at group than to have students promote their own group. Some professors offer extra credit for attendance. Professors can help get students there; it's then your job to keep them interested.
- c. Make sure to promote/advertise each meeting/event with lots of catchy flyers and get professors to announce the events as well. Before the attendees get food, have a sign-up sheet and a computer so people can register in the beginning of the meeting.
- d. Show them the benefits of AIChE, share success stories, have professors come in and share importance of AIChE.
- e. Host an onsite luncheon with the seniors and commuting freshman.
- f. Additional suggestions, reference question 1, 10, & 17.

19) The officers who were chosen for a specific chapter position are not fulfilling their duties and are not coming to the meetings. They are also not really responsive when we try to communicate with them. How can we get them to fulfill their duties?

- a. Personally talk to and invite students. If they feel like someone notices they aren't attending, they may come more often. Adding a personal touch always helps.

20) Our members are always so busy with schoolwork, it is hard to gather together during the school week and during the weekend they are not willing to come to school for club activities.

- a. Depending on the school schedule, pick one weekly/monthly meeting time and stick to it. Those dedicated can build schoolwork schedules around it if they are aware.

21) My student chapter lacks a sense of ownership. Every ChemE in a department of 700 is automatically an AIChE member and all are invited to events. We have social gatherings, but people come with friends and leave with friends. We're so large it's impossible to target and welcome newcomers. How can I create a sense of belonging in AIChE?

- a. At each event make sure to break into smaller groups. Choose the groups so that people are mixed into a new group. Have an activity with this group. More or less force them to meet others.
- b. Encourage students to sit with others they don't know at meetings. Find some way to ensure this happens and a sense of community/belonging will develop.
- c. Pick class leaders, with such a large chapter, many recruiters or leaders are needed to get the word out about AIChE.

22) Our chapter has recently changed from a semi-active chapter to a very active chapter. How do we increase attendance at events which we have not held in the past (i.e. information sessions, plant tours to new companies, etc.)?

- a. Start new things even if there are only a few people interested. Once it is over and people say it was helpful or fun, more people will do the next time you host a similar event.
- b. Get the companies to provide free food – that usually gets the attention of a lot of students.
- c. Make sure to advertise new events in several different ways. Students are all busy and they don't always check e-mail that comes their way. Use word of mouth.
- d. Usually attendance is low for several reasons. Try to figure what the problem and sort it out. For example: Juniors don't have classes on Monday/Wednesday/ Friday. So events should occur on Thursday and Friday.
- e. Use Facebook and place flyers all over the department. Elect representatives to spread information to people in their grade level.
- f. Create survey for to see why they are not coming to the events.
- g. Try to get a variety in the officers of AIChE. If there are people who have different groups of friends or are in different years they can pull more people onto the events.

23) How can we get the chapter more involved with community service and giving back to the community?

- a. Try to integrate a fun activity along with the community service project so that you get to have fun too.
- b. Contact the standard community service organizations (Habitat for Humanity, etc.) to start a basis of community service activities. Expand to other organizations once you begin to develop lots of interest/participation in a project.
- c. Helping the elderly of your town is very nice (i.e. yard work) and you could even take in donations to help with fundraising.

24) More than half of our industry presenters have been oil companies, as they have the financial backing to sponsor meetings. A large part of our membership is interested in other industries. How can we get other industries to present to our chapter?

- a. Consider collaborating with either other engineering organizations on campus that may already have events in place (SWE, ASME, fraternities, sororities, etc.) or your career services organization.
- b. Get help from recent graduates who many be working in non-oil companies. Also work with any recruiters who come to your school.
- c. Use alumni to help. See if your school keeps up with the alumni contact information and see if they are in industries that you would like to contact.
- d. Encourage members to join AIChE's Divisions and Forums as they provide insight as to what fields and careers are available to Chemical Engineering majors.

25) It has been a challenge getting the executive board to work together. Past presidents have tended to take the bulk of the workload, and the organization would work more efficiently and effectively if the work was split up.

- a. Sit down with the executive board and reassess what the responsibilities of each officer are.
- b. Reformat the executive board to fit your chapter's needs and learn to delegate certain responsibilities to the proper person on the executive board. If people are having trouble meeting at a certain time, use tools like doodle.com to ensure that everyone can meet.
- c. Reinvent board positions. Have many positions – one for everything that needs to get done and delegate. Make sure the president is leading and not just doing.

26) My chapter has difficulties recruiting freshman and sophomores to get involved with AIChE. We don't declare concentrations until the end of our sophomore year, so the chapter has no idea who is a ChemE until then. How can we draw in undecided freshman and sophomores and integrate them into our activities?

- a. Hold a ChemE brunch/picnic and invite all of the undeclared freshman/sophomores who might be interested in ChemE (or who are just curious about it). Have declared ChemEs there to talk to them about the major and AIChE and get them interested in the major. Hold ice breakers and engage them to make them feel comfortable.
- b. Advertise – don't just put Chemical Engineering on flyers. Do fun chemistry/math/engineering activities that might allow people to know if ChemE is even for them.
- c. Hold a contest to design something simple (car battery, etc.) and have the juniors and seniors help the freshman and sophomores so they get some idea of what they can do with the ChemE degree.

27) My student chapter has problems integrating seniors in our activities. They usually say they don't have time for the activities or trips we organize, so they don't take part in them.

- a. Organize an event or trip around the senior's schedules. Materials for all senior classes usually are due at the same time. Try organizing something by working with the professors.
- b. Seniors are worried about two things: graduating on time and finding a job. See if you can work those into your trips/events a little more.
- c. Make it a short time commitment. Plan an event to start when a senior class ends, provide food and then the seniors will come. Plan around them.