

EDITOR'S NOTE: A controversy is brewing on the design content of the curriculum. The questions are 1) how much design should be required, and 2) how does one define "design"? In order to air these important questions, CEE is publishing the following two papers. Additional comments are solicited from our readers.

ChE views and opinions

ARE WE PARTICIPANTS OR VICTIMS?

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THIS CONVERSATION, or something like it, took place at the San Francisco AIChE meeting among a group of distinguished professors and department chairmen of research universities.

"They are making a mess at accreditation (or choose one from: AIChE, NSF, ACS, ASEE, NAE, etc.). They are just a bunch of bean counters who do not understand that we should have innovations and diversity. And besides, who are they to tell us that our program is below standards? Have they ever managed a first-rate department themselves?"

"Why don't you do something about it, suggest changes, organize a group, get involved?"

"I am much too busy with my students and papers. Somebody else should do it." (i.e., somebody else not as good as we are, say a politician who cannot hack it in research and teaching.)

"But these are our own organizations that we depend on. If we won't fix them, who else would do it?"

"We can send them an ultimatum, that if they do not shape up, we will quit."

"We need to send them a detailed blueprint on how to reform their rotten organization. And if they cannot do it, we will have to start a new organization to administer accreditation, to set up new rules, to train new visitors, and to evaluate results. That would be even more work than reform from within."

"Of course not, that would take too much time and effort."

"You are mad enough to complain, but not enough to do something constructive—like volunteer for service. Shouldn't we take the time to fix up our own organizations? No one else would have the knowledge or motivation to fix them to

our specifications."

"But that would be politics."

"For instance, the AIChE Council of 17 contains only two professors. The accreditation committee and the ad hoc visitor list have very few professors from research universities. We believe in a trial by a jury of peers, and our peers are other research universities. If we will not sit on juries, we cannot be tried by a jury of peers—who understand us and are sympathetic to us. We should run for AIChE Council, or volunteer for ad hoc visitor in accreditation."

"I am much too busy, and I am not interested in politics."

"But politics affects us, and it has us riled up. If we are above politics, would we rather be victims or participants?"

"Let us go to the Exxon suite to drown our sorrows."

The moral of the story is that it is better to be mugged than to participate in government, or isn't it?

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