

A Course in

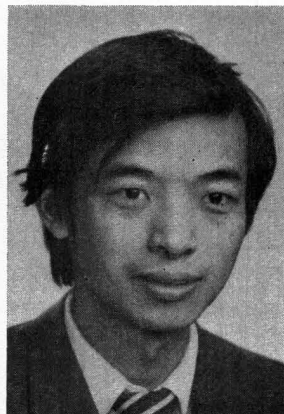
PROCESS SYNTHESIS

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PROCESS DESIGN CAN BE roughly subdivided into two steps: synthesis and analysis. A great deal of attention has been devoted to the mathematical analysis of process flowsheets, once the flowsheet has been specified. However, the creation, or synthesis, of that flowsheet is not very susceptible to the usual mathematical techniques, and has consequently received relatively less attention in chemical engineering teaching and research. The specification of the chemical and/or physical transformations as well as the selection and interconnection of equipment to implement these transformations to convert the raw materials into desired products on an industrial scale have been regarded, for the most part, an intuitive art.

This article describes a survey course on process synthesis which has been offered to graduate students and qualified seniors at Auburn University since Winter, 1976. The main objective of the course is to introduce to the student the basic techniques and practical applications of process synthesis, emphasizing the systematic generation of economical and energy-efficient process flowsheets. An additional goal of the course is to stimulate interest in process synthesis research among chemical engineering students.

Table 1 presents an outline of the course topics and lectures along with the pertinent references cited in parentheses. The course begins with an introduction to the important problem of optimal synthesis of multicomponent separation sequences, which is concerned with the proper selection of the method and sequence for separating a multicomponent mixture into its respective components. The general techniques which have been developed for solving this problem have included *the optimization (algorithmic) approach* involving some established optimization principles (topic 1), *the heuristic approach* based on the use of rules of thumb (topic 2), and *the evolutionary approach* wherein improvements are systematically made



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to an initially created feasible flowsheet (topic 3). The lectures emphasize the basic concepts of these approaches along with their strengths and shortcomings for applications to the optimal synthesis of multicomponent separation sequences.

In topic 4, the preceding synthesis techniques and their combinations are applied to an important process design problem related to energy conservation, namely the synthesis of energy-optimum and minimum-cost networks of exchangers, heater and/or coolers to transfer the excess energy from a set of hot streams to streams that require heating (cold streams). This synthesis problem is relatively well-defined and it has received the greatest attention in the literature. As a result, it is possible to clearly identify the characteristics of energy-optimum and minimum-cost networks and suggest the basic requirements of an effective approach to their synthesis. The lectures include a detailed discussion of the evolutionary block matching method developed at Auburn University and its recent extensions for the synthesis of complex networks, as well as the

practical applications of different techniques to the synthesis of energy-optimum and minimum-cost networks for industrial crude unit preheat recovery.

Topics 5 and 6 are concerned with the systematic synthesis of large-scale process flowsheets by the *decomposition (multilevel) approach* together with heuristic and evolutionary methods. Here, the synthesis problem is decomposed into a sequence of smaller and simpler problems (subproblems) which, when solved, generate the flowsheet for the original problem. It is solved by first establishing the sequence of reactions which best convert the raw materials into desired products (reaction path synthesis). The next subproblem is the species allocation and material balancing which involves the synthesis of material flow from raw material and reaction site sources to product, waste and reaction site destinations. During species allocations, the easiest set of separation tasks is sought. The third subproblem is the separation task selection and sequencing discussed previously in Topics 1 to 3. The fourth subproblem involves the specification of auxiliary unit operations which are necessary to achieve the design objectives (auxiliary task assignment). The last subproblem is task integration in which several unit operations are integrated for the reuse of energy and/or material. The lectures emphasize the applications of heuristic and evolutionary methods to the solution of each subproblem along with the overall coordination of the subproblem solutions in the systematic synthesis of large-scale process flowsheets for the manufacture of industrial chemicals.

Topic 7 presents a relatively new technique for solving process synthesis problems, namely, the *thermodynamic approach*. The lectures begin with a review of the thermodynamic availability principle and the second law analysis along with their applications to energy conversion and conservation and to process design and evaluation. The applications of thermodynamic principles to the synthesis of energy-optimum heat exchanger networks and to the analysis of energy consumption of separation processes are then discussed. The remaining lectures are concentrated on the development and demonstration of the thermodynamic approach as a simple and unifying method for the analysis and synthesis of different energy conservation (integration) schemes in distillation systems.

The course concludes with a survey of other

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process synthesis problems and solution methods, and a summary of the status of current research and industrial applications of process synthesis techniques (topic 8).

The course meets three times a week for fifty-minute lectures over a ten-week quarter. Although the book by Rudd, Powers and Sirola, *Process Synthesis*, Prentice-Hall (1973), is often quoted in lectures, a textbook which adequately covers the recent developments in process synthesis does not exist. Consequently, an organized set of course notes has been prepared for the students. These notes have been revised before each course offering since 1976 to include the latest literature. Class work is comprised of weekly homework problems and a comprehensive term paper. Typical subjects of homework problems and term papers are listed in Table 1.

In closing, the author shares the suggestion of many chemical engineers that process design education should be more oriented toward synthesis, rather than the usual emphasis upon analysis alone. It is hoped that the detailed course outline and references presented in this article will assist other interested faculty in establishing similar courses in process synthesis and in bringing a better balance between analysis and synthesis in process design education. □

TABLE 1
Course Outline and References

1. Optimization (Algorithmic) Approach to Process Synthesis: An Introduction to Selected Optimization Methods and Their Applications to the Optimal Synthesis of Multicomponent Separation Sequences
 - 1.1 An Introduction to Optimization Approach to Process Synthesis
 - 1.2 Basic Concepts of Dynamic Programming (1, 2)
 - 1.3 Application of Dynamic Programming to the Optimal Synthesis of Multicomponent Separation Sequences (3-5)
 - 1.4 An Introduction to Branch and Bound Methods and Their Comparison with Dynamic Programming for the Optimal Synthesis of Multicomponent Separation Sequences (6, 7)
 - 1.5 Applications of Dynamic Programming to Other Process Synthesis Problems (8-12)
- Typical Homework:* Optimal Selection of Separation Methods and Synthesis of Separation Sequences for

Multicomponent Mixtures by Dynamic Programming

2. Heuristic Approach to Process Synthesis: Heuristic Synthesis of Multicomponent Separation Sequences

- 2.1 An Introduction to Heuristic Approach to Process Synthesis
- 2.2 Published Heuristics for the Optimal Synthesis of Multicomponent Separation Sequences (4, 13-26)
- 2.3 An Ordered Heuristic Procedure for the Optimal Synthesis of Multicomponent Separation Sequences (27)

Typical Homework: Applications of Heuristic and Ordered Heuristic Procedures to the Optimal Synthesis of Multicomponent Separation Sequences; Heuristics for Complex Multiple-Section Distillation Systems and Their Applications (22, 23)

3. Evolutionary Approach to Process Synthesis: Evolutionary Synthesis of Multicomponent Separation Sequences

- 3.1 An Introduction to Evolutionary Approach to Process Synthesis (24-26, 39-40)
- 3.2 Evolutionary Synthesis of Multicomponent Separation Sequences (24-26)
- 3.3 An Overview of Published Literature on the Optimal Synthesis of Multicomponent Separation Sequences (5, 11, 13-39)

Typical Homework: Heuristic-Evolutionary Synthesis of Multicomponent Separation Sequences; Optimal Synthesis of Separation Sequences in the Manufacture of Detergents from Petroleum

4. Optimal Synthesis of Heat Exchanger Networks

- 4.1 An Introduction to Optimal Synthesis of Heat Exchanger Networks (5, 11, 41-44)
- 4.2 Characteristics of Energy-Optimum and Minimum-Cost Heat Exchanger Networks and Basic Requirements of an Effective Approach to the Optimal Synthesis of Heat Exchanger Networks (44, 56, 60, 63)
- 4.3 A Simple and Practical Approach to the Optimal Synthesis of Heat Exchanger Networks (Evolutionary Block Matching Method): Minimum Area Algorithm, and Heuristic and Evolutionary Rules (44)
- 4.4 Further Topics on Optimal Synthesis of Heat Exchanger Networks
 - A. Determination of Minimum Utility Requirements by the Problem Table (56, 60, 63)
 - B. Synthesis of Heat Exchanger Networks by Temperature Interval Method (60, 63)
 - C. Systematic Evolutionary Synthesis of Energy-Optimum and Minimum-Cost Heat Exchanger Networks (44, 60, 63, 64)
 - D. Application of Evolutionary Block Matching Method to the Optimal Synthesis of Complex Heat Exchanger Networks: Temperature-Dependent Heat Capacities, Different Heat Transfer Coefficients Among Process/Utility Streams and Phase Changes of Process Streams (65)
- 4.5 An Overview of Published Literature on the Optimal Synthesis of Heat Exchanger Networks (5, 6, 11, 41-65)

Typical Homework: Optimal Synthesis of Heat Exchanger Networks for Industrial Crude Unit Preheat Recovery; Comparison of Algorithmic, Heuristic and

Evolutionary Methods for the Optimal Synthesis of Heat Exchanger Networks; Concept of the Degree of Freedom and the Shifting and Merging of Exchangers, Heaters and/or Coolers (63); Development of New Evolutionary Rules for the Synthesis of Energy-Optimum and Minimum-Cost Heat Exchanger Networks.

5. Decomposition (Multilevel) Approach to Process Synthesis

- 5.1 An Introduction to Decomposition (Multilevel) Approach to Process Synthesis (66-68)
- 5.2 Optimal Synthesis of Chemical Process Flowsheets Based on Task Assignment and Integration (69-70)
- 5.3 Strategy for Task Assignment to Make Up the Differences in Process State Variables (69, 70)
- 5.4 Heuristics for Task Integration to Simplify the Initial Process Flowsheet (42, 69, 70)
- 5.5 Multilevel Approach to Process Synthesis with Multiple Performance Indices (70, 71)
- 5.6 An Overview of Four General Approaches to Process Synthesis: Optimization (Algorithmic), Heuristic, Evolutionary and Decomposition (Multilevel) Approaches (5, 11)

Typical Homework: Synthesis of Complete Process Flowsheets for the Manufacture of Industrial Chemicals such as Vinyl Chloride from Acetylene and Ethylene (72) and Nitric Acid from Ammonia (73) by Task Assignment and Integration

6. Heuristic and Evolutionary Synthesis of Chemical Process Flowsheets

- 6.1 An Overview of Heuristic and Evolutionary Synthesis of Chemical Process Flowsheets (38-40, 74-76, 81-82)
- 6.2 Heuristic Synthesis of Initial Process Flowsheets
 - A. Heuristic Approach to Reaction Path Synthesis (77-79)
 - B. Heuristic Synthesis of Material Flow from Reaction Paths (77, 80)
 - C. Heuristic Approach to Separation Task Selection and Sequencing (4, 13-27)
 - D. Heuristic Approach to Auxiliary Task Assignment and Integration (42, 69, 70)
- 6.3 Evaluation Functions and Evolutionary Rules for Modifying the Initial Process Flowsheets (82)
 - A. Evaluation Functions of a Given Process Flowsheet
 - B. Evolutionary Rules for Minimizing the Redundancy in Process Flowsheets

Typical Homework: Heuristic and Evolutionary Synthesis of Complete Process Flowsheets for the Manufacture of Industrial Chemicals such as Octanes from Butanes (83)

7. Thermodynamic Approach to Process Synthesis

- 7.1 An Introduction to Thermodynamic Approach to Process Synthesis
- 7.2 An Introduction to the Thermodynamic Available Energy (Available Useful Work) and the Second Law Analysis (84-91)
 - A. Some Background on Thermodynamic Laws and Efficiencies
 - B. The Second Laws Efficiency and Thermodynamic Available Energy

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- 7.3 Thermodynamic Availability Analysis and Its Applications to Energy Conversion and Conservation and to Process Design and Evaluation (85, 86, 92-102)
- 7.4 Thermodynamic Availability Analysis of Heat-Ex-

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- change Process and Its Applications to the Synthesis of Energy-Optimum Heat Exchanger Networks (44, 60, 63-65, 103)
- 7.5 Thermodynamic Analysis of Energy Consumption of Separation Processes of Relevance to the Synthesis of Energy-Efficient Separation Processes (14, 104-106).
- 7.6 Thermodynamic Availability Analysis of Distillation Systems and Its Application to the Synthesis of Energy Conservation (Integration) Schemes in Distillation Systems (107-109)
 - A. Thermodynamic Availability Diagram for Representing Distillation Systems (107)
 - B. Minimization of the Available Energy Loss Through Energy Integration (107-109)
 - C. Approximate Minimization of the Available Energy Loss on the Temperature-Enthalpy Diagram (107)
 - D. Synthesis of Energy Conservation (Integration) Schemes for Multicomponent Distillation Systems through Systematic Manipulations on the Temperature-Enthalpy Diagram (107)
- 7.7 Analysis and Synthesis of Energy Conservation (Integration) Schemes in Distillation Systems
 - A. Multieffect Distillation (Cascade Columns) (14, 110)
 - B. Use of Feed as a Reboiling or Condensing Medium (14)
 - C. Heat Pumps (14, 105, 106, 111, 112)
 - D. Intermediate Reboilers (Interreboilers) and Condensers (Intercondensers) (14, 104, 106)
 - E. Combined Use of Heat Pumps and Intermediate Reboilers/Condensers (113, 114)
 - F. Distillation with Secondary Reflux and Vaporization: SRV Distillation (115-117)
 - G. Heat-Exchange Integration (Use of Heat Exchanger Networks): Decomposition Approach to the Optimal Synthesis of Heat-Integrated Multicomponent Separation Sequences (10, 31-33)
- 7.8 Applications of Thermodynamic Approach to Other Process Synthesis Problems (9, 12, 40, 50, 118, 119)
Typical Homework: Synthesis of Energy Conservation (Integration) Schemes of Multicomponent Distillation Systems
 8. A Survey of Other Process Synthesis Problems and Solution Methods: Current Trends in Research and Developing Prospects for Industrial Applications
- 8.1 An Introduction to Fault Tree Synthesis of Chemical Processes (120-126)
- 8.2 An Introduction to the Structure Parameter Approach for Solving Steady-State and Dynamic Process Synthesis Problems (127-133)
- 8.3 Current Status of Development and Applications of Process Synthesis Techniques: Research Needs and Opportunities
Typical Homework: Comprehensive Term Papers on Such Topics as (1) Ordered Heuristic Procedures for the Optimal Synthesis of Multicomponent Separation

Sequences; (2) Heuristic Synthesis of Reaction Paths for the Manufacture of Industrial Chemicals; (3) Heuristic and Evolutionary Synthesis of Large-Scale Process Flowsheets; (4) Applications of Thermodynamic Principles to Process Synthesis; and (5) Analysis and Synthesis of Energy Conservation Schemes in Distillation Systems.

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