



AIChE Minority Affairs Committee

GE — When did you become more involved with the global organization?

OYEKAN — I became involved with the global organization starting in 1981. It was due to the fact that I became a member of the New Jersey Section when I relocated to Piscataway in New Jersey. In that AIChE local chapter, I met a colleague who encouraged me to participate in AIChE at the national level. I started out in the Group 16 programming area. That is in the Fuels and Petrochemicals Division programming committee. I led the programming work for petroleum refining, Group 16A. Later, I became the F&PD programming committee chair and some years later, the F&PD executive committee chair and that is how I spent my first 8 years in F&PD/AIChE.

GE — I'd like to get your perspective on what the climate was like for minority members or underrepresented AIChE members in chemical engineering during that era.

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GE — If people are not familiar with the Minority Affairs Committee, what would you like a general AIChE member or a young chemical engineer to know about it? How can they participate?

OYEKAN — It is open to all. The meetings typically take place on Mondays during the AIChE Annual and Spring national meetings. There are many ways in which they can help. One is, on the membership renewal forms, there's a tick-off spot there to donate money specifically to support the Minority Affairs Scholarships. They can also participate in the outreach program and see if they can be of assistance there.

Another is to support deserving underrepresented engineers to move up in AIChE leadership. We've had an excellent example of that with Otis Shelton, and his leadership was quite effective with respect to stability and growth for the Institute. We have many more promising people who could go up the ladder all the way to the president of the Institute. Those minority leaders should be given opportunities to contribute at the leadership levels.

GE — as we wrap up, what is the most significant change you've seen over the past 25 or 30 years for underrepresented groups within AIChE?

OYEKAN — I am very, very heartened, and impressed, by the developments that have taken place in the past 35 years, since I came onto the national level here. Very impressed by the fact that women have played a major role in all aspects of our Institute, which we did not have before. Very impressed with the fact that minority members are recognized within the Institute — Chinese American and African Americans, and we'd like to see more of this take place. These have been really fantastic developments. They also call to mind the fact that we truly are a global Institute that caters to the interest of all. And I think the past years have shown that we truly do that. We have now had several female presidents, and one African American president, and we've had Chinese American presidents of the Institute. All of this bodes well for the future of the Institute, and suggests that we are in line with the changes that are occurring globally — that we are interfacing with different cultures. And I think that AIChE stands as one of those global organizations.

GE — And, finally, where would you like to see AIChE and the Minority Affairs Committee in the near future?

OYEKAN — The minority scholarship program will continue to be a critical outreach to minority individuals, to assist in shaping a better future for them. More than just for the Institute, I'd like to see us doing a lot for our society — for the economy of the U.S. We know that