February 2000

Department of Chemical Engineering Graduates
Michigan State University

Dear Friends of the Department,
Welcome to the “other side” of Y2K! I’m glad you made it. I don’t know about you, but I was really glad when all the media hysteria about this transition finally died down. Now there is a mini-crisis about the “Leap Year Bug” -- will computers make it past February 29, 2000 or is it the end of the world (yet again)!!? Worry, worry, fret, fret.

It seems that the media have decided that only bad news sells. However, I have noted that most chemical engineers are optimists. We expect good news rather than bad. It may be due to lack of imagination. My good wife claims that I don’t worry about anything and she attributes that to a lack of imagination on my part. I have to admit that she may be right. I probably have lost 4 hours sleep in my whole life worrying about things. So here is some more good news from your favorite department.

In a previous letter I told you that we had developed the first Internet-based Material and Energy Balances course in the country. I am happy to report that the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE) has given Dr. Alec Scranton (the principal developer of the course) and his coauthors the J. J. Martin Award for the most outstanding paper given in the Chemical Engineering Division of ASEE last year. Their award-winning paper was entitled “Teaching Material and Energy Balances on the Internet” and was based on this new course.

Alec is leaving the department to become the Department Chair at the University of Iowa, his alma mater. We will miss Alec, but will continue to have close interactions with him. In particular, Dr. Bob Ofoli will continue to work with Alec to develop and promote this Internet course. We expect the course will bring this department, and Alec’s new department, great visibility in the years to come. I believe there is plenty of glory to go around for both departments—told you I don’t worry. ☺

We have always had good students in this department and this year is no exception. Mr. Jason Fuller, now a senior student, was awarded the Goldwater Scholarship last summer, one of only 304 such scholarships in the entire country and the only one awarded to Michigan State student. The Goldwater Scholarship (named for the late Senator Barry M. Goldwater) is the premier undergraduate award in the country for students pursuing careers in science, mathematics and engineering. Three of the College of Engineering’s four nominees for this award were chemical engineers, not bad for a department representing about 10% of the College’s undergraduate population and about 1% of all undergraduate students at MSU.
Continuing our long string of National AIChe Student Design Contest winners, this year Mr. Casey Preston won first place in the individual competition for a process that separates dicyclopentadiene from other byproducts of plastic production. Mr. Joseph Avore and Mr. Andrew Campbell also won honorable mention in the team design competition. Our students have now won first place in the competition ten times in its thirty-two year history. (That’s considerably more than the number of bowl games we’ve won, although we always root for our athletic teams also. Go State!) We honored Casey and our other outstanding students at a reception held in Dallas, Texas as part of the Annual Meeting of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers. Our thanks to those of our alumni and friends who attended.

We are planning another dinner celebrating our department and the accomplishments of all of you, our alumni, on Friday evening June 2, 2000. More details will be forthcoming in the next few months. We hope you can come. The weather should be delightful and the campus will be in its full green splendor. As with our first such dinner, all you have to do is get here, the dinner is on us. I have the wonderful privilege of meeting many of our fine alumni as I travel around the country. Thank you so much for your warmth and hospitality. I am impressed by all you have accomplished and are accomplishing. For instance, one of our recent graduates, Ms. Amanda Meeks, has been instrumental in developing a new seat belt fabric that will “give” slightly in an accident so that the driver and passengers will still be safe, but much less bruised by their belts. Way to go, Amanda!

Our faculty will be trying to meet many more of you. It will help if we have your email addresses so that we can contact you quickly and bring you up to date rapidly on developments in the department. Would you please fill out the enclosed card with your current contact information and return it to us?

I have two other favors to ask you. We know we have great students here… but more potential employers need to meet these students. It would really help our students if you would also include the name and address of the recruiting contact at your company on the enclosed card and pass this letter (or a copy of it) on to them. Our Career Services people will then write the recruiting contact to see if your firm will come to State and look at our students.

Second, we are trying to find a full-time coordinator for our undergraduate teaching laboratories. We hope this person will provide deep “real-world” experience for the students and will also help them develop better communication skills. This might be an ideal position for a retired person—especially for one of our former students. 😊 An announcement describing this position is enclosed. Please feel free to bring it to the attention of your friends (or consider the position yourself)—and thanks very much for your help.

As before, please feel free to call or write me at any time. I would love to hear from you.

Best wishes,

Bruce E. Dale
Professor and Chair of the Department