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## Comments on Inorganic Chemistry

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### EDITORIAL

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## EDITORIAL

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**JOHN P. FACKLER, JR.**

Editor In Chief

With this the first issue of *Comments on Inorganic Chemistry* for 2009, you will note several new names have been added to the Editorial Board. However, there is also a name missing. The inorganic community lost two outstanding inorganic chemists in December 2008, Alan M. Sargeson, long time Editorial Board member to this journal, and Robert Bau at USC, an expert x-ray crystallographer. Alan Sargeson was a good friend and an outstanding scientist who had a very gifted mentor in Francis P. Dwyer. Bruce Foxman, who was a postdoctoral with Alan Sargeson, and Andrew Zanella have nicely described a bit of Sargeson's career in this issue. A nice obituary for Robert Bau is available the February 2, 2009 issue of *Chemical and Engineering News*.

Sargeson and the Dwyer School taught us how to effectively remove metal ions from solution by encapsulation with new ligands that bond through several ligand sites. This was an "interdisciplinary effort" greatly strengthened by collaboration with the organic chemist Francis Lions. As a young chemist, I had an opportunity to meet Lions and also to listen to Dwyer, and like many youngsters in the redeveloping field of inorganic chemistry, was very saddened by his premature death. Alan was an exceptional Dwyer protégé who kept Australia at the forefront of this new coordination chemistry.

I mention the mentoring of Dwyer, who died in 1962 but still was included in the publications of Bryce Bosnich until 1966, because his impact on the development of coordination chemistry through his students, such as Alan Sargeson, was profound. Today we are again entering an educational crisis period. There is a great need for more funding to

ensure opportunities for graduate student and postdoctoral support, and the training of quality math and science teachers.

Mentoring is very important in the development of science. Many of us have had superb mentors who helped us develop our careers. It is important that young people with an interest and love for chemistry continue to be given excellent opportunities to be mentored by gifted chemists. To quote a friend of mine who recently chaired the Board of the American Chemical Society, James D. Burke, Ph.D.:

The current status of technical recruiting in the U.S. looks grim. Accumulating anecdotal data suggest a lurking disaster for postdoctoral scientists and finishing doctoral students in STEM disciplines who are now seeking permanent employment. Few job opportunities are currently available for them in industry and universities. And that prospect may extend over the next few years because of the dismal economic climate. . . . Moreover, many state and private universities are retrenching faculty recruiting significantly. (Personal communication)

Burke and I are both Career Consultants with the ACS. We recently attended a workshop to examine the current situation and to look at career opportunities for chemists. One thing is certain; technology will play an important role helping job seekers locate suitable options. The ACS now offers a free electronic visual "interview" to members, which can be critiqued by a Career Consultant if the candidate desires to have this done. But this helps only when there are jobs. As Burke writes,

There is an emerging concern that many postdoctoral and graduating doctoral scientists will go unemployed. If significant unemployment persists, we fear that out of frustration, many highly talented scientists may lose heart and abandon their hopes of productive careers in science and technology. Additionally, many undergraduate students in STEM disciplines may set aside altogether their dreams of pursuing promising careers in research and technology and instead seek other, more predictable careers. The result will be major gaps in the technical pipeline, putting the nation's competitive future at risk. (Personal communication)

Clearly immediate attention is needed to refill the technical pipeline, providing funding for improved Science, Technology, Engineering, and

Mathematics Education Coalition (STEM) particularly in our middle and high schools. We also need to keep capable graduate students and postdoctorals actively pursuing their dreams under the guidance of good mentors while they are having difficulty finding permanent employment. Fortunately the situation isn't all bleak. There appears to be considerable increased support for STEM activities in the government stimulus package recently approved by Congress and signed by President Obama. Hopefully it will be used in ways to keep quality scientists coming into the STEM disciplines.