

Overpopulation

The very word “overpopulation” is emotion-filled and can start an extensive discussion. You may wonder why the topic is even being considered in an editorial for an international engineering journal.

Overpopulation was the subject of a recent issue of *Science*, The journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (*Science*, 270, 1-204, Oct 6, 1995). To be specific, the subject was “Overpopulation of Ph.D.’s”—an analysis of the rate of production of Ph.D.’s in the United States.

The conclusion offered by that issue is that the rate of production of Ph.D.’s exceeds the demand by something like 20%; that new Ph.D.’s are taking postdoctoral programs at an alarming rate simply because they can’t find meaningful jobs. The cases cited involve Ph.D.’s in physics, as well as the most recent graduates in biology, molecular biology and chemistry.

In this the situation for our metallurgy and materials engineering graduates? Is there an excessive number of Ph.D.’s (as well as MS graduates) graduating from our American universities?

I don’t know. I really hate to admit it, but I really don’t know. I must admit that I have generally thought that our graduates in metallurgy and materials engineering always found jobs in the fields that they, as individuals, had chosen.

Some liked positions at government laboratories that in the USA, UK, France, Germany, Japan, China, etc., whereas others preferred to work in the several segments of private (profit-directed) industries, such as steel companies, aluminum companies, specialty materials companies, automobile companies, aerospace companies, electronics companies, etc. Still others chose the academic life; some in large research universities and others in smaller technical institutions.

Now I am really starting to worry about the lack of data we have on the employment situations of our metallurgical and materials engineering graduates; on their levels of job satisfaction; on their sense of intellectual challenge some years after receiving their Ph.D. degrees.

What do you think? Do you think a study is needed to determine if there exists an “overpopulation” of advanced graduates in our fields of metallurgy and materials engineering?

If you have an opinion on this issue, send your fax to me at ASM Headquarters; 216/338-4634.



A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John R. Ogren".

John R. Ogren