Attracting Chemical Students To Our Industries

THE AUTHOR OF THIS EDITORIAL had the good fortune to get off to a flying start in the chemistry of drying oils. While a sophomore and junior at Lehigh University in 1928–29, I looked over the shoulders of J. S. Long and many of his graduate students while cleaning gels out of their flasks and beakers. I even had the honor of making a few gels myself when I selected the esterification of eleostearic acid with pentaerythritol as my undergraduate thesis in chemical engineering. It didn't take any effort at all to make the decision to take a position offered by my company in 1930 to carry out research and development on alkyd resins.

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The first paragraph sounds like an autobiography rather than an editorial, but actually your author wishes to convey the message that many college students are influenced by their teachers and the chemistry of certain fields before they step out into industrial careers.

The idea therefore occurs to me that we of the American Oil Chemists' Society could use our Short Courses for an additional purpose. Besides functioning as orientation and instruction courses for junior chemists in industries connected with the refining or use of vegetable oils and products derived therefrom, the Short Course could be used to teach college level juniors and seniors-to-be something about the oils and fats industry.

We hear on all sides that there will be a scarcity of technical men in the future. Many plans are now being formulated and carried out by progressive technical industries to influence future high school graduates to prepare for a technical education in college.

Assuming that we get more technical students in college, are we going to wait four years for them to matriculate and graduate—and then hope we can gain our fair share in a competitive market by offering higher salaries, better insurance, incentive, and retirement plans? I think not. Instead we must kindle a desire in a percentage of the students, somewhere between high school and college graduation, so that they will want to work in industries connected with oils and fats when they graduate.

IT IS NOT the particular job of colleges to give the students a full understanding of what industry in general expects of them and what they can plan to do in certain industries when they graduate. However we hear of arrangements to give high school and college teachers industrial jobs during the summer months to supplement their earnings as well as to give them an idea of how chemists actually work in industrial laboratories. But it is my opinion that this approach is only scratching the surface of a complex problem, the most important facet of which, we believe, is to kindle the desire of students to work in a certain field before they graduate.

The students themselves are trying to find the formula for finding the industry where they can settle down and carve a career. Some in desperation make plans to work a year or two for companies in selected industries before they make up their minds.

Probably the best system devised to date for giving students an understanding of selected industries is the "co-op" method of training adopted by some engineering schools. But the number is so minor as barely to make a ripple on the pool of technical graduates each year.

We have had a short course program every year, except one, since 1948. Let's keep them up and modify our objective to include students who might be interested in fats and oils and the application of chemistry and chemical engineering in this field.

Perhaps we could start off with publicity about the Short Courses directed to the bulletin boards of the various colleges. The short courses could be held immediately after most colleges close or just before they reopen in order not to interfere with summer jobs.

If the first year's experience did not result in attracting many students, we could offer the course at a reduced fee, or with the help of contributing industries, free. Several years' experience should soon tell where to draw the line.

It is sincerely hoped that our Society can take this germ of an idea and mold it into a plan and program which will be of benefit to, and reflect prestige on, our Society and industry.

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