

Why A Senior Chemists Committee?

GEORGE E. HEINZE, CHAIR, SENIOR CHEMISTS TASK FORCE

ACS MEMBERSHIP statistics provide convincing support for creating a Senior Chemists Committee. Almost 38,000 ACS members are more than 60 years of age; they constitute 23% of the membership and are the fastest growing demographic in the society. More than 18,000 of these members are still working and active in the profession. A large number of the others are engaged in part-time work (such as consulting, contracting, and teaching). Many of those who are not working are engaged in a variety of volunteer activities. ACS must not neglect this cohort of chemists—to do so would be an injustice to these individuals and would weaken the society.

Recently I attended the North Jersey Section's 2012 Awards & Recognition Dinner, which honored 35 50-year members and 26 60-year members. As their bios were read, it was obvious that these members are still very much interested in the profession. Thirty years ago, we didn't have enough 60-year members to include as a distinct group in the celebration. Times have changed. People are living longer and looking for opportunities to stay engaged, and ACS has to change to meet their needs.

During the ACS national meeting in Philadelphia this August, the Committee on Committees will present a motion at the ACS Council meeting to establish a Senior Chemists Committee as a joint board-council committee of the society. We believe the present Senior Chemists Task Force (SCTF) has demonstrated through its accomplishments the value—both to ACS and to its senior members—of going forward with this motion.

Some of the task force activities to date are the initiation in 2005 of the Senior Chemists Breakfast, an activity that sells out at each ACS national meeting, hosting along the way three Nobel Laureates and four ACS

presidents as speakers; the establishment of a semiannual newsletter for senior chemists that is distributed to all local sections and international chapters; the organization of and continuing support for senior groups in local sections, with a particular focus on ACS mentoring programs and career development initiatives, including development of instructional material in support of these programs; and the development of a very active national and regional meeting programming subcommittee that has presented 12 programs over the past three years. Each of these activities reached a large audience and would not have happened without SCTF's leadership.

SCTF believes that the proposed Senior Chemists Committee will be an essential resource for ACS to keep its senior members involved in the society. The committee will also strengthen ties to students and younger members who are looking for career guidance.

Some have reasonably questioned the rationale for another committee, and to be fair, I will list some of their concerns: ACS has a large number of committees; do we need another one? Is there some other means besides a committee to serve this significant group of ACS members? Isn't this group of seniors too numerous to have identifiable needs?

Good questions, but I think a committee focused on the unique needs of nearly a quarter of the ACS membership would be of high value to the society. The seniors of 2012 are not the seniors of 1982. A committee focused on responding to senior needs and, at the same time, organizing senior members to better serve their local communities and ACS, will be an efficient and effective means of maximizing the number of ACS members. A joint board-council committee is logical, because the committee will recommend necessary policy changes to the ACS

Board of Directors and implement actions and programs through the council.

SCTF believes that ACS is ready for a Senior Chemists Committee, and we offer a mission statement and a set of goals: "The Senior Chemists Committee is a group of highly professional, volunteer chemists whose mission is to enrich the educational, technical, and cultural lives of the ACS membership by ministering to and employing the talents of senior ACS members (over 50)." SCTF includes members under 60 in case they want to provide input to or use services of the committee.

THE GOALS for the committee, drafted by SCTF, are as follows:

- Sharing with ACS members of all ages a rich variety of personal experiences and expertise gathered over many years of professional service;
- Fostering interest and participation in the science of chemistry through community outreach, especially in grades K-12;
- Acting as science advisers and ambassadors for the purpose of cultural exchange at home and abroad; and
- Providing senior ACS members with challenging, diverse, and enjoyable professional experiences that enable them to contribute to the cultural experiences of their communities.

Among other activities, the proposed committee could provide a central governance organization that more actively involves senior members in ACS and offers programs at national and regional meetings and other venues that focus on the interests and accomplishments of senior members. It could guide local sections in starting senior chemist groups and ensuring they flourish. And it could help senior chemists share the rich variety of their personal experiences and expertise gathered over many years of professional service with other ACS members.

I urge you to support the establishment of the ACS Senior Chemists Committee by sending your comments to silvercircle@acs.org.

Views expressed on this page are those of the author and not necessarily those of ACS.



LINDA WANG/C&EN

People are living longer and looking for opportunities to stay engaged, and ACS has to change to meet their needs.