Journal of Heat Transfer

Editorial

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A Letter to the Members of the Heat Transfer Community

Dear Colleagues,

Over the past few years we have noticed a worrying development that we fear is causing significant impact on the unity and cohesion that we as the heat transfer research and education community should be striving not only to maintain but to extend and strengthen. For years our community—those academic, industrial, and student scientists and engineers whose research falls under the umbrella of heat transfer—has functioned well with a reasonable degree of autonomy under the aegis of the ASME Heat Transfer Division (HTD). It appears now, however, that a new organization has sprung up within the community in the U.S., and it is our personal belief that the formation of this new organization has the net effect of fragmenting and dividing the community, particularly because of the emergence of a parallel conference schedule. We are particularly concerned about the impact that this schism in the community will have on younger scientists and engineers who are beginning their careers.

We all likely learned about ASME as undergraduates, becoming members either then, during our graduate education or when we became employed in the field. As we know, ASME has a long history—it is over 130 yr old, and our particular division is over 75 yr old. ASME serves a multiplicity of functions; it is the premier international society covering mechanical engineering and associated applied sciences; its members include men and women from around the globe; it promotes engineering education, the advancement of the fields in its purview, and functions as an arbiter of engineering standards. It is, as we all know, a true non-profit organization. This is an important point; it means that the decisions being taken by the society and the division are intended for the good of the community, not for the benefit of shareholders or corporate officers. ASME is large enough to touch almost every field that we in the heat transfer community are likely to collaborate within.

Those of us who have been active in the heat transfer field for a number of years have grown with and through participation in ASME, and in particular our heat transfer division. We have attended its conferences; organized technical sessions; published in its journals; socialized with our colleagues from around the world at our conferences, and as a result collaborated with many of them; watched with pleasure as we were introduced to rising stars; and lauded and recognized our most successful members. Young scientists and engineers have the opportunity to interact with more established people, as well as academics with practitioners from industry. We know and trust the standards which our research publications must meet, and this gives us confidence in the quality of the scholarship in our society's journals. Critically, we function in an open and democratic way; the management systems that are in place to coordinate activities are run by the membership—both junior and senior—and all who wish to contribute can participate. For these reasons—among others—HTD has flourished for over 75 years.

At the same time, we do not view ASME or HTD through rose-colored glasses; there are certain challenges that we, like any body of professionals, need to face directly and to address as and when they arise. But the solution to any perceived or real problems within our ASME or HTD is not to abandon ASME or HTD; we should try, as a concerned body, to solve any issues that arise in an open manner while following the bylaws of the society, or working internally to change the bylaws when necessary. Equally, while fostering diversity and competition for our affiliations within the community is to be lauded, we should not promote such diversity and competition to the extent that it suffocates HTD by establishing duplicative, parallel operations in an external entity. A good example of the kind of innovation which expands rather than detracts from the activities of HTD is the establishment of new conferences on emerging technologies or applied topics, or conferences that promote activities related to subspecialties within HTD that do not overlap to a significant extent with the activities of the society or HTD.

Those of us who appreciate what the society and HTD represent, and who have benefited from membership in it, should be proactive in assuring younger members of the merits of the society and HTD. We should remember that the goal is to benefit all in our community (and by extension society at large) without regard for financial considerations. We should encourage those who see problems within the society and HTD to seek solutions within the organization, and to recognize the impact of their actions if they simply abandon it and setup parallel operations elsewhere. Our sincere hope is that this letter will serve to unite the entire former HTD community as one; we believe that continued separation will simply widen the rift, confuse younger practitioners, and weaken our community as a whole.

We hope we can progress forward for at least another 75 years with a productive and flourishing ASME Heat Transfer Division. We should certainly embrace new ideas without establishing new competing societies and conferences that duplicate and weaken the old. Let's work together under the umbrella of ASME to build a much stronger HTD.

