Random Thoughts . . .

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

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The monthly Chemical Engineering Department faculty meeting is in full swing. They spent the usual half hour discussing the latest catastrophic budget shortfall and the urgent need to bring in more grants and more graduate students with NSF fellowships, and then they moved on to the upcoming ABET visit. A prolonged argument broke out about whether teaching students the Gibbs-Duhem equation counts as preparing them to be ethical and professionally responsible lifelong learners who understand contemporary issues and can work in multidisciplinary teams to solve global and societal problems. The argument ended unresolved. Chuck, the department chair, relayed a message from the department administrative assistant that unless the professors started cleaning up their messes in the faculty lounge they could start making their own coffee. Once the ensuing panic subsided, the meeting turned to New Business, and the critical issue on everyone's mind was brought up first.

Chuck: "OK, folks, let's take up Diane's proposition to change our name to the Department of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering. Diane, want to say something about it?"

Diane: "Sure. Everyone knows that biotech is the future, and the ones who know it best are the students…the freshmen are going more and more for departments that do biology, and graduate students all want to work for faculty doing bio research. Most Chem. E. departments have already put biosomething in their names and if we don't we're gonna lose out."

Ch: "Makes sense to me. OK, if no one else has anything to say, let's vote on it. All in favor of our becoming the Department of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering, say…"

Carl: "Hold on, Chuck. If you just say biomolecular engineering, people will think we're only about DNA and all that stuff, which is yesterday's news. Sam and I do a lot of biocatalysis and bioseparations, which are much sexier than all that gene stuff, but the students won't know we do those things here unless we make it explicit."

Ch: "You mean…"

Sam: "Yeah, let's be the Department of Chemical, Biocatalytic, and Bioseparations Engineering."

D: "Wait just a minute, buster—genes are a whole lot sexier than enzymes and chromatography, and we've got twice the grant support you guys do!"

S: "Oh, yeah—well who's got more CAREER awards, and what's more…"

Ch: "All right, all right—calm down. Tell you what—we'll just make the tent bigger and call it the Department of Chemical, Biomolecular, Biocatalytic, and Bioseparations Engineering. How's that?"

C: "Make it Biocatalytic, Biomolecular, Bioseparations, and Chemical—alphabetical order."

D: "That's the dumbest suggestion I ever…"

Ch: "OK, all in favor say…"

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Morrie: "Hey, what am I, chopped liver? I don't like to brag, but have you forgotten that I'm heading a $3 million artificial organ program with five graduate students..."

S: "Can you believe the guy who deals in artificial organs just asked if he's chopped liver?"

M: [Glares at Sam] "...five graduate students and two postdocs, and what about our cooperative agreement with St. Swithens Hospital? Biomedical engineering is every bit as important as those other bios around here…besides, we heal people and save lives—let's see somebody here top *that* for sexy."

Ch: "OK, OK…I guess we can't include three of our four bio areas and leave out the fourth…so, all in favor of renaming ourselves the Department of Biocatalytic, Biomolecular, Bioseparations, Chemical, and Biomedical Engineering say…"

M: "Ahem…"

Ch: "Right, right—the Department of Biocatalytic, Biomedical, Biomolecular, Bioseparations, and Chemical Engineering…"

Ned: "Look, you want to talk about sexy areas, you can't dream of leaving out nanotechnology—it's the hottest field in science…you just put nano in your proposal title and you can start looking for your check by return mail—we'll pull the students in here like a vacuum cleaner."

Ch: "I see your point—I guess if we don't have nanotechnology in our name Berkeley grads won't look twice at us. OK, so all for the Department of Biocatalytic, Biomedical, Biomolecular, Bioseparations, Chemical, and Nanotechnological Engineering say…"

N: "My mother always said to let the smallest one go first and you don't get much smaller than 10^{-9} meters, so it should be the Department of Nanotechnological…"

Ch: "Enough already—don't push your luck! Now, all in favor of…"

Ernie: "Whoa, Chuck—have you forgotten Mother Earth?"

Ch: "Say what?"

E: "Saving lives may be important, but nothing is more important than saving the planet, and the environmental engineering program in this department is second to none in its dedication to…"

Ch: "Yeah, yeah…and what could be sexier than saving Mother Earth?"

E: "Just what I was going to say."

Ch: "OK, but this is it, gang. My final offer to you is the Department of Biocatalytic, Biomedical, Biomolecular, Bioseparations, Chemical, Environmental, and Nanotechnological Engineering—take it or leave it. All in favor say…"

D: "You know, that's kind of an awkward name."

Ch: "Oh really—I hadn't noticed. So are you offering to drop Biomolecular to help us solve this problem?"

D: "Of course not—you can't begin to count the graduate students you'd lose by dropping Biomolecular. I was thinking, though—nobody here really does anything you could call chemical engineering, do they?"

E: "Hey, she's right…and we got rid of the last of our unit operations equipment in the undergraduate lab to make room for Ned's scanning electron microscopy experiment and Morrie's heart catheterization demo."

M: "Besides…students don't seem to have much use for chemical engineering anymore."

S: "That's for sure—the latest Roper poll had chemical engineering and pig lagoon maintenance tied for 247th place in job desirability rankings."

Ch: "Well, I guess that settles it. All in favor of becoming the Department of Biocatalytic, Biomedical, Biomolecular, Bioseparations, Environmental, and Nanotechnological Engineering say aye."

All: "Aye!"

Ch: "Done! I'll have Patsy order our new letterhead stationery immediately."

C: "Hey Chuck, dropping chemical won't cause a problem with ABET, will it?"

Ch: "Nah. As long as we can find someplace to slip in the Gibbs-Duhem equation, we're cool." ❐

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