Department *of* Chemical Engineering

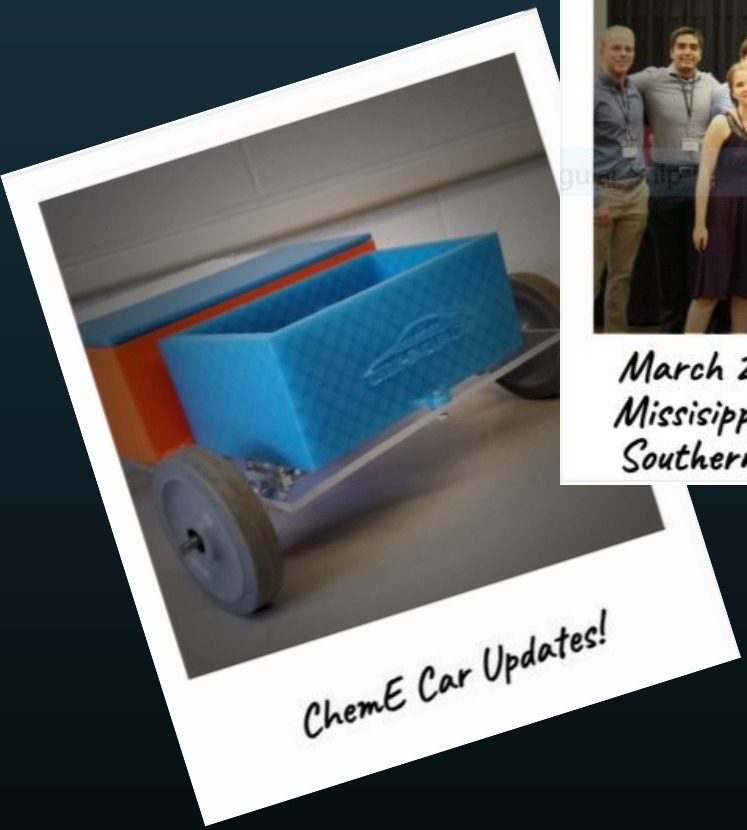
ChemE Corner

APRIL 5, 2019 | ISSUE no 1

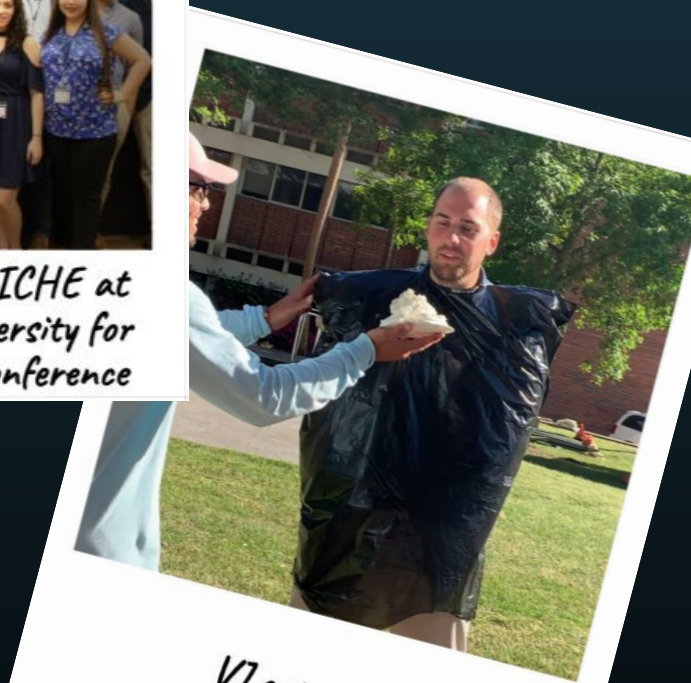
Introducing Dr. Whitney Stoppel

Highlighting Dr. Rivera

March 28, 2019 - AICHE at Missisippi State University for Southern Regional Conference



ChemE Car Updates!



VJ gets pied!

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Letter from AIChE's President

by Gabriella Segovia

Photo: Whitney Schramm

I started at the University of Florida in June 2014. I knew I wanted to study Chemical Engineering; I just wasn't really sure I was going to make it ve ry far. A few months later, a friend of a friend introduced me to AIChE and became my first mentor, Danielle Lizarazo. She is now an alumni pursuing her career in Louisville, Kentucky. Danielle encouraged me to run for my first officer position at the end of my freshman year. This was one of the many moments

I remember that brought me to where I am today. Others, for example: when Alex Adams first asked me if I ever saw myself as President of AIChE my freshman year, or when Lindsey Mitchell invited me to join her at the President's Meeting at the 2016 National Student Conference, or even when Kevin Blackman talked me out of resigning from my AIChE responsibilities because I was struggling in Calculus 1! I can tell you with full certainty that I never thought I would make it this far at that time.

I held a few more officer positions throughout the years and finally here I am- UF AIChE Chapter President. I'm not going to lie; it's been pretty cool. I've had the opportunity to work with some of my closest Chem-E friends. I meet Christian Ore, our current Internal Programs Director, on my first day of Materials and Energy Balances. I met Jessica Partain at my first AIChE board game night, and now she's not only a close friend, but my right-hand woman as Vice President.

Even my mentees Paula Restrepo and Cole Korsogg sit beside me now at the "big table." I can't begin to explain how thankful I am for all those who pushed me this far and all those who continue to support me. I also can't begin to explain how proud I am of my friends and mentees for all they have accomplished in their careers and towards the improvement of AIChE. But most importantly, I have now words to express how dearly I will miss you all after I graduate this May.

To the 2019-2020 Officer Board: I have full faith that you will rigorously work towards the continuing improvement of AIChE and wish you great success on all your endeavors!

ChemE sophomores bond with peers, learn about industry

by Cole Korsog

Sophomore Retreat is an event that aims to connect second-year chemical engineering undergraduates with recruiters from various industries, as well as with their fellow peers. Students are able to learn about companies' culture and expectations for internships, co-ops and full-time hires.

This year, we held Sophomore Retreat on campus with speakers such as Argos USA, an international cement and concrete manufacturer, AGTC, a biomedical research lab that researches genetic diseases, and a panel of chemical engineer graduate students who are currently enrolled at UF.

After the info sessions with recruiters, attendees are encouraged to attend a reception at the Reitz Union with bowling, table tennis, billiards, and food catered from the Reitz's own catering service!

For many students, this is during the time that they are enrolled in their first chemical engineering courses at the University of Florida, so it is an important time for them to not only get exposure to industry and all the different opportunities they have as chemical engineers, but to also meet the peers that will be with them throughout their time at the university.

Nedgine Joseph said, "Going to Sophomore Retreat was honestly one of the best decision I have made during my college career. Chemical engineering includes a lot of different career pathways and I was quite confused about which path I should take. Sophomore retreat gave me the clarity and guidance that I needed by providing different perspectives entailed by both the industry and graduate school. I can confidently say that I now know which path to take."

"Sophomore Retreat was great, not only to get to know my fellow chemical engineers, but also to answer questions I didn't know I had," Steven Coll added.

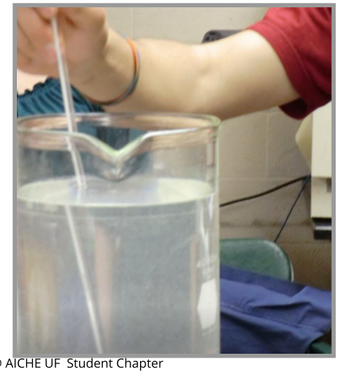
The event typically hosts 30 participants and 5 industry recruiters, however, with such success thus far, AIChE has set a goal to innovate and expand this experience for more members to enjoy!

Photo: Brian Kim

Team Blueberries from 2015 Sophomore Retreat.

Photo: Marcela Young

2015 Sophomore Retreat Officers.



Photos: Nicole Rizzo @ AIChE UF Student Chapter

2011 E-Fair Training

Engaging students at E-Fair

by Carter Boelke

UF's Annual E-Fair is part of a two week-long string of events dedicated to investing students from elementary school to high school in STEM curriculum. With an accumulation of ~1500 students across various academic institutions across Florida, this event enables AIChE to help raise awareness of how cool STEM—specifically engineering—can be. As the K-12 coordinator for AIChE, my experience in helping put together this event and seeing it come to fruition has enabled me to acquire numerous insights into this event's ability to foster what we need most in STEM: inspiring young audiences with aspirations to help innovate and grow STEM.

AIChE's goal at E-fair was straight forward enough: to present scientific concepts to young minds. However, to put together presentations that are interesting enough to spark the interests of young minds while still containing enough simplicity for layman comprehension is a harder task than one can imagine. It requires careful consideration into what kind of experiments young minds of today's generation want to see, and even more importantly, just how much they want to learn. Because students of different ages find interest in phenomena of varying complexity, the outreach committee came up with a variety of experiments appropriate for such a wide range of age groups. These experiments included slime, bubbles, fake snow, nitrogen ice cream, ferrofluids, index of refraction, and something called elephant's toothpaste. Many of these experiments offered the perfect balance behind what STEM can offer and simply having fun. For example, bubbles—usually caused by a soap—are transparent globules that are seen all the time and are often taken for granted, despite their complex physical properties and concepts that they are associated with.

To elementary school students, bubbles are an exciting and rewarding way to introduce what kind of shapes and materials that can be manufactured by understanding the concepts behind STEM. To middle school students, bubbles are a well-known object with properties that are possibly not well-known. And lastly to high school students, bubbles are a great example of the importance behind surface tension and how it plays such a large role in forming the spherical shape.

Other important concepts can also be explained such as color formation and elasticity. Furthermore, due to surface tension, if two bubbles merge, the surface area of the new bubble will be minimized and can be calculated by a differential equation known as the Young-Laplace Equation. Ultimately, this simple (and inexpensive) choice of presentation is one of many experiments that we decided to include at E-Fair and we believe was effective in sparking an interest within students across a large range of grade levels.

So perhaps you may think bubbles are not the coolest experiment. In fact, our most popular experiment was exactly what you would expect: nitrogen ice cream. However, why can't all experiments be interesting to students? Perhaps redefining what is "cool" is a necessity for stimulating interest in topics that many people often find hard to comprehend and tend to give up on more easily. While part of our goal at E-Fair was achieved by serving nitrogen ice cream—portraying how the flow of heat from the warmer milk to the extremely cold nitrogen caused the solution to solidify and become ice cream—we would be doing the next generations of great minds a disservice if we ignored more important and arguably less obvious concepts that other experiments possessed. So, while performing experiments like nitrogen ice cream has its roles in reaching out to students to show the importance of STEM, perhaps sticking to the basics or as one 5th grader said, "the boring stuff, is not such as bad as you may think.

ChemE Car *(upper left collage): UF's ChemE Car team placed 5th at the AICHE Southern Regional Conference and is advancing to Nationals*

Pi Day *(left collage): On March 14, AICHE celebrated Pi Day with a pie eating contesting, pie baking contest, and pieing officers and professors. Dr. VJ Tocco and Dr. Ziegler got pied by the student that bid the highest.*

Southern Regional Conference *(right collage): AICHE attended conference from March 28 – March 30. Whitney Schramm and Jessica Partain presented research. The ChemE Jeopardy team made it to the semi-finals.*

Photos: Whitney Schramm and Pragati Patel

Dr. Whitney Stoppel investigating tissue regeneration in-vivo

by Kelly Bukovic

Beginning a new lab at a university is an ambitious undertaking. A successful Principal Investigator must be well established as a scholar, researcher, grant writer, and perhaps most importantly, a mentor.

Whitney Stoppel, Ph. D, is the Chemical Engineering Department's newest PI. In her term thus far as Assistant Professor at UF, she has successfully instated the Stoppel Lab and fostered the interest of several students in research and graduate studies. Dr. Stoppel has a contagious enthusiasm for her work – she continually encourages students to build a solid literary foundation and become well-rounded in the field of chemical engineering.

She has proven herself to be a strong advocate for challenging traditional biases associated with work in STEM; in particular, for women pursuing STEM studies. In discussion with Dr. Stoppel, insights into her educational background, experience, and career path revealed her inspiration and intentions for the Stoppel Lab and its future.

Where are you from and what is your academic history?

"I was born in Garden City, Kansas but grew up in Mandeville, LA. I went to Tulane University in New Orleans for my undergraduate degree, majoring in Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering, and minoring in mathematics and cell and molecular biology.

I attended the University of Massachusetts for my PhD in Chemical Engineering, advised by Dr. Susan Roberts. I defended my PhD in October of 2013 and started my postdoctoral studies in Biomedical Engineering at Tufts University in January 2014.

At Tufts, I worked with Dr. David Kaplan and Dr. Lauren Black, III. In July 2018, I started as an assistant professor in Chemical Engineering at the University of Florida."

What sparked your interest in biomaterials?

"As a high school student, I thought I wanted to be a doctor because I really liked biology. I also babysat for a child that was undergoing cancer treatments and I found the treatments to be woefully inadequate and I thought that by being a doctor, I could help.

However, I also really liked and excelled at math, so in a typical high school guidance counselor fashion, it was recommended to me that I

Photo: www.che.ufl.edu

Dr. Stoppel , assistant professor, at the University of Florida

major in engineering. While taking my engineering courses, I realized that I really enjoyed the ability to describe the world around me, but continued to want to do this from a biological perspective with the goal of helping patients.

During the summer between my junior and senior year of undergrad, I was a summer REU student at UMass Amherst in the Institute for Cellular Engineering program.

In this summer program, I learned how to apply fundamental chemical engineering concepts (mainly transport and kinetics) to real biological problems in plant biology.

This, combined with my experiences in Dr. W Godbey's lab at Tulane where I learned mammalian cell culture and Dr. Brian Mitchell's lab where I learned how to make materials, led me to have an interest in cell-material interactions that still persists today.

Through my PhD in ChemE at UMass Amherst with Dr. Susan Roberts, I honed my cell culture skills and learned how to quantify biomaterial properties and the relevance of these properties to cultured cell responses *in vitro*. For this work, I was able to interact with Dr. Surita Bhatia (Chemical Engineering) and Dr. Alfred Crosby (Polymer Science), improving my ability to work as a team and communicate my ideas across disciplines.

For my postdoc position, I wanted to be able to take these concepts one step further and understand how material properties can influence cell or tissue response *in vivo*. Working in the Kaplan and Black labs, I was able to take a system from start to finish, looking at the properties of a material, the response of cells cultured *in vitro*, and the response of a tissue following implantation. These experiences have shaped and molded the current hypotheses my lab investigates today."

What motivated you to become a professor at UF?

"I knew I wanted to be a professor a few years into my PhD program and have taken a few calculated career and training steps over the past few years to try to prepare myself for this job.

There are many reasons that UF is a great place for me. First, the other faculty here at UF- both in engineering and across campus- have been very supportive. I have reached out to people in a variety of departments for a variety of things and everyone has been so positive and helpful. Having a happy and supportive work environment is important. So in short, the people.

The second reason that UF is a great place for me to start my independent career is that UF has a medical school and a veterinary school right on campus, along with an active Myology Institute (muscle biology institute). For my lab's long-term goals, the potential to find a clinical collaborator across the street is very helpful. Not many institutions are able to house all of these departments on one campus."

What has been your favorite part of teaching so far?

"Watching students make connections between fundamental concepts and real-life problems. I really enjoy the mass transport component of ECH 3264 as well as the end of the class, where the students demonstrate that they can make up and then solve their own problems."

As a new PI, what has been the biggest challenge you've faced?

"As a new PI, there are a lot of challenges, but I think the biggest challenge has been moving to a new place. At every stage in my education and career, I have had to move to a new city or town and make new friends, while leaving my friends, family, and support network behind. The biggest challenge when moving is rebuilding that support network, which is a critical for encouraging relaxation and finding balance after a really bad day or stressful week."

What have you enjoyed the most about setting up a new lab?

"My students. I have a lot of enthusiasm for the projects and the science my lab is working on. I love that my students have this same enthusiasm and excitement.

In addition, when starting a new lab, the PI has a lot of freedom in choosing what science and hypotheses to pursue. I really enjoy being able to pursue the science that interests me the most."

Photo: www.twitter.com/stoppellab

On January 12, Stoppel Lab boiled silk cocoons. The silk is going to be used to form scaffolds.

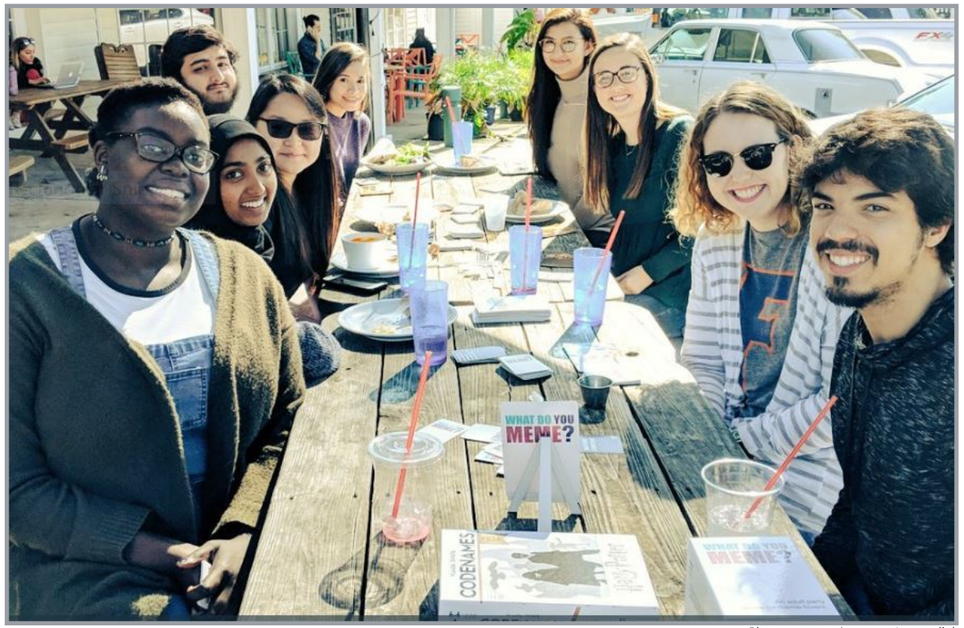


Photo: www.twitter.com/stoppellab

Stoppel Lab members have brunch at Root & Pecker on December 7.

Photo: Kelly Burkovic

Caroline Hamric (left) and Kelly Burkovic (right) prepare first batch of adult extracellular matrix (ECM).

What advice would you give to students interested in pursuing graduate studies?

"As evidenced by the wide variety of research topics I have investigated throughout my career, the actual project you pick for your PhD is not as important as finding a supportive environment that will help you grow as an engineer.

Not every PI is the best match for every student. You should look for a lab where the environment is stimulating and you feel like you can communicate effectively with your advisor. While the general science and engineering in the lab should interest you, finding the perfect project isn't going to happen and, usually, projects take new and unpredictable directions anyway. Thus, you need an environment that can help you be the best you and that motivates you to grow and mature throughout your degree."

Describe your current research project.

"The Stoppel Lab is focused on developing solutions to problems regarding the generation of natural biomaterials for future clinical applications. Experimental research explores the mechanical and transport properties of elastic materials, aiming to determine a predictive set of material characteristics that have a known function in the body. We aim to harness the power of the immune system to alter the way that these materials integrate following implantation, providing a new strategy for classifying materials for clinical applications. Two main approaches used in our research are described:

Material design and *in vitro* characterization: Natural materials and polymer composites derived from biopolymers such as silk fibroin, alginate, or decellularized extracellular matrix can be combined to form a variety of material shapes, architectures and mechanical properties. In turn, the format for the biomaterial can have a significant impact on cellular function and biological processes. We aim to determine specific material properties and compositions that consistently alter or direct cell function through time-dependent analysis of cell-material interactions. Experiments, such as small molecule release kinetics, degradation rates, and changes in extracellular matrix composition can be evaluated using ELISAs, rheological techniques, and proteomics to evaluate the potential for a specific material formulation to successfully direct healthy tissue regeneration. These materials have applications in soft tissue repair, with an emphasis in our lab on materials for skeletal muscle or liver tissue regeneration.

Quantifying biomaterial performance *in vivo*: Understanding complex interactions between the immune system, local stromal cell populations, and implanted biomaterials necessitates spatiotemporal analysis of biomaterial degradation and neo-tissue formation in its place. We aim to quantify how biomaterial composition and structure alter the rate of degradation and the composition and strength of new tissue that replaces the material. On-going efforts aim to understand how secondary disease, such as diabetes, plays into the kinetics of degradation and tissue formation."

MY PROJECT

As a part of this project, Caroline Hamric and I are investigating decellularization techniques to optimize the quality of extracellular matrix (ECM) collected from fetal pig tissue. Decellularization refers to the process of removing cells and genetic material from tissue to isolate ECM scaffolds.

The ECM is an important factor in cell proliferation, differentiation and function, and mitigates the adverse immune system response to the implantation of biomaterials *in vivo*. While decellularization techniques for adult tissue are well established, there is little research into effective methods for the comparatively fragile fetal tissue. The aim of our project is to successfully decellularize porcine fetal tissue whilst maintaining its mechanical and chemical properties for use in biomaterials.

To begin our investigation, we have used standard decellularization protocols to collect ECM from adult porcine skeletal tissue. This involved the implementation of 1% sodium dodecyl sulfate solution as a detergent to rinse the genetic material from the tissue, leaving behind the ECM scaffold. The success of this process in skeletal tissue is qualitatively discernable by the variance in color from pink to white, as seen in the figures below. We decided to undertake this process prior to attempting protocols on fetal tissue to analyze the criteria of a successful decellularization. In the upcoming weeks, we will be attempting decellularization with Triton X-100 and CHAPS as detergents on fetal kidney tissue.

Dr. Rivera empowers students through mentorship, engineering education

by Pragati Patel

Photo: www.che.ufl.edu

Dr. Rivera, lecturer, at the University of Florida

I want to take the time and opportunity to celebrate this incredible woman. She is a chemical engineer, affiliated faculty, a lecturer, advisor/mentor and more importantly a mother, a wife, and a daughter. She has a Ph.D. in chemical engineering, five publications, and 7 or more awards. She was recently awarded by Herbert Wertheim College of Engineering as an Undergraduate Advisor/Mentor of the year 2018-2019. She is the advisor of the AIChE UF Student chapter. She started the ChE process designing workshop and she says that ChE process designing team is her dream, she wants the University of Florida to know how incredible chemical engineering students are. This shows itself that how dedicated, ambitious and motivated she is. Any Idea who am I talking about? If still no, then let me introduce you to Dr. Sindia Rivera-Jimenez.

Can you tell me more about yourself?

"I was born and raised in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Like many students, I was recommended by the academic counselor to be an engineer after showing abilities in chemistry and physics. I was part of the Chemistry Olympiad Team at my high school and an active member of the Honor Society so she figured that engineering would be a right path. My mom is a retired science teacher, and my dad spent most of his life unemployed. My mom knew that a good education was the only way to move my life forward. She was right. "

How did you end up doing Chemical Engineering and then Ph.D.?

"Puerto Rico was blooming with the pharmaceutical industry. That's how I decided to study chemical engineering. I completed an environmental engineering certificate thinking that I was going to work in the Environment department a pharmaceutical plant. I finished a Co-op in Abbot Labs and did great work in their Environmental Division. I enjoyed so much the experience, however, after 6 months I felt like I wasn't challenged. The pharma industry is highly regulated so there is so much we can change about the process. I decided to start doing research to see if that was an option. I loved the opportunity to create new materials and test them out. I also did a Research for Undergraduate Experience (REU) at the University of Delaware under Jochen Lauterbach supervision. From that experience, I had my first publication and presented my work at AIChE. I knew that doing a Ph.D. was the right path for me. You can be creative and contribute to the advancements engineering field. I am very proud that I finished my Ph.D. with a healthy marriage, two babies, many friends that became family, five publications, and support by various fellowships. Many times, it was hard, but my family was my strength. I have a supporting husband, mom, and mother-in-law. "

How and why you decided to teach at UF?

"It wasn't easy. I moved from Puerto Rico in 2012 because for our family, it was the best decision at that point. However, I came without a job, but with a lot of grit and perseverance. I was hired at Santa Fe College as a full-time faculty to teach chemistry. The opportunity changed my life. It was there where I fell in love with teaching and mentoring students. To become a better teacher, I decided to participate in various professional development for faculty that included online education and curriculum in STEM. Even that I was stable and happy, I missed my engineering side so much. In 2016, I had the opportunity to go back to engineering when I was hired as the assistant director of the Integrated Product and Process Design program (IPPD) at UF. In 2017, I became a lecturer at the Institute for Excellence in Engineering Education and an Affiliate Faculty at ChemE. My dream job teaching ChemEs. "

Photos: www.instagram.com/profa_rivera

Dr. Rivera's is an advisor for design team (left), American Institute Chemical Engineers (AICHE) (center), and Integrated Product and Process Design (IPPD) (right).

How and why did you get involved with AIChE as advisory faculty?

"In 2017, the opportunity was offed to me, and I didn't hesitate. I am part of AIChE National since 1999. This organization has provided me with EVERY possibility to grow. I was the president of my student chapter for one year and contributed to the logistics of the ChemE car. Becoming an academic advisor for AIChE and the ChemE Car was something natural for me. Somehow I feel that I am giving back to AIChE by helping and advising the UF chapter. "

Who do you look up to for the inspiration and motivation in women? When and where a woman supported you who was other than your family?

"This is a hard question. My inspiration changes as I change. At different stages in my life, many people, both men, and women have inspired me to become better. My mom was my first inspiration. During a short conversation, Paula Hammond (Now MIT's ChemE Chair) gave me permission to think that I could become a doctor. She remains my inspiration to this day. During my Ph.D., I was lucky to have other graduate students that were parents and that help me to navigate the balance between work and parenthood. In Santa Fe, Mapi Cuevas and Beatriz Gonzalez, Puerto Ricans too, reminded me that I was a great teacher and that the accent will slowly fade away. At UF, my inspiration is those other female professors that are showing to the world that it is OK to work in the same place as your husband and both have a successful career. "

What is your advice that you would like to give young women like me, to get to a leadership position?

"Have a growth mindset (popularized by Carol Dweck). Knowledge is something that changes and can grow over time. In my experience, if you have a clear goal of who you want to become, then plan professional development and work activities to attain that goal, it is what drives higher achievement in your career. As we change, our goals change so be flexible. Also, do something on the side that makes you happy. Besides being a faculty, I love to be with my family and do creative things. I have a bullet journal that I use to keep track of my busy life but also is a space for me to be creative. "

What do you love about teaching and mentoring students?

"I love seeing that my students do better than I did. I enjoy teaching and mentoring because it is fulfilling. Teaching and helping students is something makes me happy. "

Did you feel any struggle or that you had to work harder than men to get the same position just because you were a woman?

"It is a hard question to answer for me. I grew up in Puerto Rico and went to school there. At the University of Puerto Rico, in the chemical engineering department, 70% of the students were female and there were a lot of women as a faculty as well. So I did not feel that way or thought about this matter much. Also, we had a big LGBTQ community so a lot of my male friends were gay. When I moved to States things were a little different. But luckily I had the right people around me in male and female, who encouraged me and taught me new things. Which made me feel empowered. "

ChemEs learn to optimize real-world processes

by Matthew Soohoo

Photo: www.instagram.com/profa_rivera

On the first day of the design workshops, students learned about real world design problems and constraints. They were lead by senior peer mentors in teams to work on their first design challenge.

At the University of Florida chemical engineering department, the core curriculum are brought together in one senior course, ECH 4644 Process Design. The course is taught by Dr. Rivera, where students are tasked with designing their own chemical process in teams of five to seven people. While it can be stressful and rigorous, it can be very beneficial for learning and teamwork.

To help undergraduate students prepare for the upcoming course and to learn more about interesting chemical engineering topics, Dr. Rivera has begun a series of design workshops looking for 1st, 2nd, 3rd year, and transfer student in order to accomplish these goals and more! Some of Dr. Rivera's additional goals of the workshop are to create a stress – free and creative environment for students to learn, increase teamwork, professionally network, learn additional skills for use in engineering societies or internships, and to build confidence.

The design workshops are two hour sessions held in the New Engineering Building Room 101 every Thursday from 10:40am to 12:35am The workshops are 10 weeks long and started on February 7 and will continue through the spring semester until April 11. At these sessions, undergraduate students are assigned to a chemical engineering mentor to help assist them with their online videos and to lead weekly challenges. The main contacts for the chemical engineering design workshops are Dr. Rivera (AIChE Design Team Faculty Advisor and Faculty Lead), senior chemical engineering student Deanna Alford (Chemical Engineering Unisim Curriculum Developer), and senior chemical engineering student Zachary Tveraas (Chemical Engineering Design Team Captain).

Each design team workshop session involves that students watch instructional videos independently, to prepare for the tasks in each workshop. To fully participate and get the full experience, each student was expected to download VBA which is the computer software to design these processes. In addition, during each design team workshop, weekly design challenges and exercises are led by the mentors allowing students to work together and collaborate to accomplish the task first! Some of the chemical engineering topics covered in the design workshops are reactors, pumps, heaters, coolers, mixers/tees, economics, and optimization of these processes. At the end of the series of workshops, the undergraduate students participating will present their final design project, an oral presentation, and mini-report. This is an amazing opportunity to advance and promote chemical engineering.

Merchandise

Contact Nathan Garcia to purchase one today!
treasurer.ufaiche@gmail.com

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