

Who Should Belong to AIMBE

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“Our perception is that AIMBE is primarily an academic and research-oriented organization.” This is what I was told by an officer of one of our constituent societies, and it stung more because his society members were mostly practitioners. I suppose an academic and research society is fine for academics and researchers, but we have lots of those societies in our field. AIMBE, to me, should be more.

AIMBE is not the American Institute for Academic Biomedical Engineering. It is, instead, the American Institute for Medical and Biological Engineering, founded to serve the needs (especially public policy needs) of a broad constituency comprising biomedical engineering research and education, biological engineering, biotechnology, medical and industrial practitioners, and all others with a substantial and continuing interest in the broad field of medical and biological engineering.

Have we lost touch with our roots? Maybe a little bit. When AIMBE was first established, we worried about including MDs in our Fellows and in our Board of Directors. I haven't heard even a smidgen of this concern in recent years. We have also lost touch with some of our member societies, especially those outside the biomedical engineering mainstream. I have tried to rectify this a bit by contacting each of our societies and talking about improving relations. There are other societies that should be brought into the fold to make AIMBE a more effective umbrella for the broad field of medical and biomedical engineering.

Oh, and did I mention industry? I belong to two practitioner societies and five others largely populated by academics. There isn't an academic society that isn't concerned with bringing in more industry folks. AIMBE is doing somewhat better than most of these, and that indicates that AIMBE has not yet contracted into an organization of academics and researchers, but we must be energetic in our efforts to keep from doing so. We have been extremely fortunate to have had some very dedicated industry leaders who have seen value in AIMBE and who have kept the Industry Council alive. People like Al Potvin, Dane Miller, Paul Citron, and Vince DeCaprio come to mind. If only we could multiply their numbers. . . .

The point of all this is that AIMBE is an organization with a complex set of goals and objectives. It is needed because we have to synergize efforts related to our common interests. We need energy and dedication from all of engineering related to medicine and biology, including academics, practitioners, and industry. And, whether our immediate goal is to influence public policy to remove barriers to innovation, or to compile information about employment opportunities, or to enhance technology transfers from lab to industry, representation from each of our constituencies is necessary to make AIMBE effective. I hope we can all agree on that.