

The New International Newsletter on Chemical Education: A Prospectus

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The work of the Committee on Teaching Chemistry (CTC) of IUPAC transcends the subdisciplines of chemistry and international borders. Thus, CTC has always been interested in, and supportive of, a variety of devices—conferences, reports, newsletters, etc.—for the dissemination of its efforts and the efforts of others interested in chemical education. Unfortunately, the identity and location of the teaching chemists CTC hopes to reach fluctuates with time and conventional, paper-oriented dissemination practices often have been inadequate for the task. A very good example is the International Newsletter on Chemical Education (INCE), which, historically, was *the* vehicle for the communication of important information to the international cohort of chemical educators. Over the years, the conventional costs associated with print versions of the newsletter were controlled by a variety of methods; for example, editorial costs were borne by volunteers, some distribution costs were absorbed by shipping bulk quantities to national representatives who bore the responsibilities of distributing copies within their own countries; and attempts were made to seek lower printing costs in third world countries by special arrangements. But, eventually, the elements of cost could not be brought to acceptable levels within the CTC budget and the newsletter was terminated.

We propose here to reincarnate the INCE in an electronic format designed to make it accessible to the majority of the world-wide community of teaching chemists.

We recognize that a cohort of teaching chemists exist in areas of the world that currently are not served by the Internet, which, incidentally, also coincides with the areas that we had difficulties serving with the previous print version of INCE. CTC has constantly struggled with the problem of access to the print versions of INCE by the more isolated chemical educators of the world and we intend to continue to seek solutions to that problem with the proposed electronic version of the INCE. However, this is a proposal to modernize the creation, production, and distribution of a CTC organ for what we believe to be the majority of the teaching chemists of the world. Solving that problem does not necessarily solve the access problem of isolated teaching chemists. We do not intend to abandon them. Our guess is, however, that access to the Internet will continue to expand. Our objective here is to reinstitute the production of a viable CTC newsletter.

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Following is our proposed description of the new, electronic version of INCE. This view of the electronic version of the ICNE incorporates a core of features that were successful in the past, with additions that reflect a new, forward-looking journal; these suggestions are still in a formative stage.

PUBLICATION FREQUENCY

Our current plans are to produce INCE on a quarterly basis by involving CTC members in the process of gathering useful information for the INCE. Access to the electronic version of INCE will be through the existing CTC homepage.

READERSHIP

As with the printed version of INCE, we intend to aim the contents of the newsletter to teaching chemists at all levels and to school teachers of chemistry. In addition, we intend to include features that would be of interest to young people who were never served directly by the contents of the previous print version of INCE. Thus, our plan is to enhance the content of INCE in accord with the general thrust of IUPAC toward interesting more young people in chemistry as a part of its initiatives at improving the public understanding of our discipline.

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Initially, the new, electronic version of INCE will incorporate most of the more successful features that were present in the print version. For the sake of discussion, we offer the following descriptions.

Notice Board. This new feature, essentially, is intended to be a calendar of events—worldwide—of potential interest to chemical educators. Current information on recurring events such as the International Conference on Chemical Education (ICCE) will be available through the Notice Board. Where possible, access to such information will be made through links to the web pages of the organizers of these events, which should decrease the editorial effort expended on the Notice Board.

Reports. Each year CTC has access to numerous reports on curricular issues; symposia of interest to chemical educators worldwide, e.g., the chemical education symposium of the 8th Asian Chemical Congress and the Biennial Conference of the Division of Chemical Education of the American Chemical Society; the Chemistry Olympiad; etc. We anticipate that the reports generated by such activities could be obtained through links to the appropriate homepages (if such exist).

Facts and Figures. This is a feature designed to give the worldwide chemical education community information on national chemical education activities. CTC members are often privy to such details in their home countries and we would encourage their publication in the new ICNE.

Opinions and Essays. This is a feature designed to encourage the discussion and description of trends in chemical education as key people perceive them. We intend to solicit contributions from, e.g., editors of chemical education-oriented journals, the leadership of chemical education units in national societies; individuals developing important chemical education-oriented activities such as microchemistry, etc.

In addition, we will seek essays from Nobel Laureates and other “high profile” chemists aimed at a public understanding of chemistry or at young people. By such essays we hope to promote the field(s) of chemistry to citizens.

PRACTICALITIES

We intend to use, as before, the voluntary efforts of the creative members of CTC. For example, the Secretary of CTC should be in a position to contribute to—have access to—information for several of the features planned such as the Notice Board and some of the Reports items. CTC members should have easy entrée to national level information that should be disseminated and selected CTC members with good “connections” should have access to persons within, and external to, IUPAC who could produce interesting opinions and essays.

We propose that, at a steady state, “templates” would be available into which the information for the features could be fed and displayed electronically with minimal editorial effort. The quarterly versions of ICNE could, eventually, be archived on CD-Roms that could be distributed at low cost.

We intend to seek “front money” for the formative stages of the electronic journal sufficient for a two to three year development period during which time the “steady state” costs could be established. We anticipate that, at the “steady state,” the costs could possibly be borne by soliciting yearly (or quarterly) sponsorship by, for example, interested book publishers.