

# CHEG NOTES

NEWS YOU CAN USE FROM THE RALPH E. MARTIN  
DEPARTMENT OF CHEMICAL ENGINEERING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS



## FROM THE DEPARTMENT HEAD

Thank you for the warm welcome to the University of Arkansas and the Ralph E. Martin Department of Chemical Engineering. My first few months here in the department have been busy ones. Classes have resumed in-person attendance starting in the fall semester and we have been focused on the re-engagement of students after being remote for so long, not only in classes but also through our undergraduate and graduate student organizations, AIChE and AChEGS. In late October we were able to host a long-overdue Arkansas Academy of Chemical Engineers meeting and induction ceremony. Our Chem-E Car team competed at the national AIChE meeting and earned 4<sup>th</sup> place in the poster and car competitions! We have initiated a new mentorship program pairing students with CHEG alumni in mentoring circles, with terrific feedback from all involved on the valuable information being shared. The direction and growth for our teaching, research, and service programs is excited! I welcome your input and would love to visit with you and discuss the department.



**Dr. Keisha Bishop Walters**  
Department Head and Professor  
Kevin W. and Marie L. Brown Chair

*Keisha B. Walters*

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# STUDENT NEWS

## CHEM-E-CAR TEAM WINS FOURTH AT NATIONALS



The Ralph E. Martin Department of Chemical Engineering AIChE Chem-E-Car Team placed fourth in the 2021 Annual Student Conference Chem-E-Car Competition and fourth in the poster competition on November 7, 2021.

Jimmy Do, Ryan Robinson, Lauren Shepard, Brooke Schaffer, Kyle Key, Henry McCain, Grace Lucas and their hydrogen-fueled car placed fourth in both competitions out of 30 teams. There was less than half of a point separating them from the first-place team.

Previously, the U of A team placed third in the regional Chem-E-Car AIChE Competition, qualifying them for a spot in the national competition.



The Chem-E-Car Competition is an AIChE initiative where students design and construct a car fueled by a chemical energy source that can safely carry a specified load over a certain distance and stop. The program increases awareness of the chemical engineering profession while giving students hands-on experience.



"Chem-E-Car gives students an open-ended type of problem to be solved in a team environment," said Tammy Lutz-Rechtin, team co-instructor and safety coordinator for the chemical engineering department. "Students are encouraged to be creative and work as a team independently. For most students, this is their first real experience using process safety and applying their classroom knowledge. They design their car with engineering-based methodology, calculations and documentation. Students do the electrical work, mechanical aspects, control the chemical reactions and make it all fit in a large shoebox on a limited budget.

Most of all, they have a blast doing it." This is the first time the team has competed using a hydrogen-fueled car and the first time they have qualified for nationals.

"Chem-E-Car has made the biggest impact on my college experience," said Grace Lucas. "Participating in Chem-E-Car truly enhanced my problem-solving abilities and creativity unlike any other course I have taken. It also gave me the opportunity to meet various faculty members and fellow peers that I normally wouldn't have met. Chem-E-Car is definitely a highlight of my college career, and I am so thankful for the chemical engineering faculty for their support."

## START UP AWARDED \$1 MILLION GRANT FOR WATER CLEANING TECHNOLOGY



*Shelby Foster*

A University of Arkansas-based startup has been awarded more than \$1 million from the Department of Defense to use chemical engineering methods to remove explosives from water.

CatalyzeH2O, an engineering firm that creates nanotechnology and electrochemical solutions for clean water, was awarded a \$1.1 million Department of Defense contract with the U.S. Army.

The company was founded by Shelby Foster, a doctoral student in the Ralph E. Martin Department of Chemical Engineering, and Lauren Greenlee, formerly an associate professor of chemical engineering. Foster is the company's CEO, while Greenlee serves as a technical adviser.

The group's Department of Defense grant centers on designing a more efficient and less expensive system to remove explosives from water.

"We are looking to remove explosives from water at production facilities," Foster said. "Explosives are often kept in solution for safer handling of the compounds. However, explosives can also be found in both soil and groundwater after use." Foster said groundwater contamination can lead to health issues in impacted areas.

"The explosives will be detonated, contaminating the soil and surrounding ground," she said. "Rainfall will interact with the explosives in the ground and soil, leading to leaching of the compounds into the groundwater. The two explosives we are looking at removing are carcinogenic and often lead to other adverse health effects in mammals." CatalyzeH2O's method destroys explosives in the water supply, as opposed to current approaches that only remove the explosives. "The two current solutions on the market both take time and a large capital investment due to operational costs," Foster said.

CatalyzeH2O's solution is a catalyst-embedded nanoporous material, known as a CNpM. The CNpM will be able to detect, sequester and remediate explosive materials in water. "The biggest advantage our CNpM has over other technologies is the ability to destroy the explosives in water," Foster said. "The most common treatment methods often rely on only removing the explosive from the water, but then you still have the explosive somewhere – either in a concentrated stream (membranes) or on the surface of the material (filter media)." Foster said the approach is more cost-effective than current methods.

"The only method that can directly compete with destroying the explosives is a biological remediation pond, but these are very large investments," she said. "Our technology will have a smaller footprint and price tag as compared to a biological remediation system. The CNpM will also require less of a capital investment than current solutions on the market."

Over the next year, CatalyzeH2O will focus on optimizing the manufacturing of its CNpM composite and testing it in different water sources. "We are focused on optimizing our manufacturing process and the composite over the next year," Foster said. "Once these two factors are addressed, we will begin to pilot our composite on different water streams. In tandem, we will begin laboratory studies on similar compounds often found in water in the industrial sector to be able to transition our composite into different industries."

# STUDENT SPOTLIGHTS

## ENGINEERING STUDENT SELECTED AS GATES CAMBRIDGE FINALIST

Isaac Hopwood, senior Honors Chemical Engineering student, has been selected as a Finalist for the Gates Cambridge Scholarship.

Gates Cambridge Scholarships were established by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to assist exceptional graduate scholars in studies impacting the global community.

“My professors and research mentors throughout the years have always pushed me to be the best scientist, researcher, and engineer possible,” said Hopwood. “I would not have become a finalist without the constant support of the Chemical Engineering department.”

Hopwood intends to work with the Rolls-Royce University Technology Center in Cambridge researching high-entropy alloys used to reduce emissions in European aviation.



## CHEMICAL ENGINEERING SUMMA CUM LAUDE GRADUATE



Kaida Sheets, Chemical Engineering Honors student from Fort Smith, earned summa cum laude distinction for Fall commencement 2021.

Her *Economic Feasibility of Mixed Plastic Waste Pyrolysis Using Twin Reactor System in Northwest Arkansas* Honors project with Dr. Michael Ackerson received first place in the Freeport McMoran Award for Innovation and Sustainability design competition.

Sheets found her project work valuable to her Circular Economy Internship at Eastman Chemical Company. “This project work was very useful to me as an intern where I used much of my plastic pyrolysis knowledge,” she said. “My research really helped me to jump right into their project and offer ideas.”

Following graduation Sheets will return to Eastman to work full time.

# CONGRATULATIONS CHEMICAL ENGINEERING FALL 2021

## CHEG Undergraduate Students

Saad Alatta  
Abdulaziz Aljamiah  
Ziyad Alqasoumi  
Talal Alruwaily  
Yelyzaveta Bachynska  
Jacob Barrows  
Anna Dear  
Brandon Dyer  
Elizabeth Gomez  
Mayani Hernandez

Carter Howie  
Alix Ineza  
Tylor Koenigsfeld  
Carol Rogers  
Greg Schwartz  
*Kaida Sheets – summa cum laude*  
Evan Simpson  
Melanie Smith  
Jackson Waldrum  
*John Zimmerman – cum laude*

## CHEG Graduate Students

Rogelio Garcia Fernandez, M.S.Ch.E., Research Advisor: Dr. Bob Beitle

Juan Marin, M.S.Ch.E., Research Advisor: Dr. Greg Thoma

Sergio Ivan Perez Bakovic, Ph.D., Research Advisor: Dr. Lauren

### Greenlee CEMB Graduate Student

Raquel de Castro, Ph.D., Research Advisor: Dr. Audie Thompson



Over \$2.5 MILLION in  
Research Grants & Contracts  
Awarded in Fiscal Year 2021

Jorge Almodovar

Jamie Hestekin

Greg Thoma

Bob Beitle

Tom Spicer

Ranil Wickramasinghe

**Despite Covid-related alternate work conditions, the Chemical Engineering faculty have been successful in securing new research funding. Over \$2.5M in new federal grants and industrial contracts were awarded in FY2021.**

# FACULTY NEWS

## TOM SPICER JOINS GLOBAL INITIATIVE TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE



A professor in the U of A Ralph E. Martin Department of Chemical Engineering has joined a global effort to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Tom Spicer has accepted a three-year term on the Managing Board of The Climate Solutions Community.

The community is a new global organization created by the American Institute of Chemical Engineers that brings together the expertise of scientists and engineers to identify commercially viable solutions to mitigate, adapt and become resilient to the effects of climate change.

"I was both very humbled and yet very excited to be asked to be involved," Spicer said. "Chemical engineering has the opportunity to play an

important role in finding solutions to climate change, but this is a global problem that will require effort and change from everyone. I think many people like me see the dire need to change. Putting our energy where it will have greatest impact is where groups like the Climate Solutions Community can meaningfully contribute. I am looking forward to making positive changes for the future."

The community started in 2019 with its kick-off workshop at the institute's annual meeting and had plans to host more events in 2020, but those were postponed due to the pandemic. This year, the community plans to roll out educational materials, workshops, networking opportunities and more.

"The work being done by this group is incredibly important in finding viable engineering and government policy solutions to the immediate and long-term challenges society faces due to climate change," said Keisha Walters, Chemical Engineering Department head. "Dr. Spicer displays not only an excellence in his research and service but also an expertise in airborne environmental hazards. These attributes are reflected in his invitation to join the board of this organization."

## EBENEZER MIEZAH KWOFIE HONORED BY MCGILL UNIVERSITY



Ebenezer Miezah Kwofie, assistant professor of food systems sustainability and resilience, was honored with a 2021 Macdonald Distinguished Young Alumni Award by McGill University, where he earned his Ph.D. in 2016. Kwofie holds a joint appointment in Biological and Agricultural Engineering, Chemical Engineering and Food Science departments at UofA.

Named for McGill University founder Sir William Macdonald, the award recognizes outstanding contributions alumni have made in their professions in the same spirit of generosity and commitment to excellence as Macdonald.

Kwofie was recognized in a virtual ceremony on October 2, 2021.

## CHEMICAL ENGINEERING ACADEMY MEMBERS ESTABLISH MENTORING PROGRAM TO PREP STUDENTS FOR SUCCESS

A new mentoring program in the Department of Chemical Engineering pairs industry professionals with students seeking to develop professional skills and begin their transition from college life to the workplace.

Kicking off in September 2021, the program accepted 60 juniors and sophomores for the inaugural year to work with 36 mentors drawn from the Arkansas Academy of Chemical Engineers and alumni with five to 15 years of working experience. The students are grouped into 12 "mentor circles" that meet monthly.



*Kent McAllister, B.S.Ch.E '87, left, meets with his mentor circle as part of the chemical engineering mentorship program established in September.*

Students have embraced the new program and say the mentors' guidance is vital.

"My mentors have provided me with so much insight on life after college and how to make the transition post-graduation," said junior Andie Veeder. "Being able to ask people who were in my shoes at one point questions about my future has been an invaluable experience."

One of the program's strengths is that it's tailored to individual students' needs and perspectives, said junior Hector Apodaca Reyes. "It has been a joy, full of learning and mutual trust. I feel that we [my mentors and peers] were able to bond together and discuss many things on career framework, personal growth and technical decisions," Reyes said. "The program's aim is not to take a one-size-fits-all approach. It provides the tools and support for mentors to help mentees flourish in their own unique ways."

The program's founders, Mike Mourot and Kent McAllister, are members of the Arkansas Academy of Chemical Engineers, a nonprofit that recognizes outstanding chemical engineers and provides support for the Ralph E. Martin Department of Chemical Engineering. They worked with Professor Ed Clausen and Heather Walker, associate department head for the undergraduate program, to establish a steering committee that built upon a model established by the Department of Industrial Engineering.



*Participants in the newly established chemical engineering mentorship program meet for the first time Sept. 20 in the Honors College Lounge in Gearhart Hall.*

Mentoring is a passion for Chemical Engineering Department Head Keisha Walters. "I'm grateful to this enthusiastic group of mentors who are generously giving their time to make sure our students are well-prepared for their transition to working life and more likely to set off on a path to fulfillment and success," she said.

Mentors recently held a check-in meeting to ensure the program is on track and to provide a forum for sharing best practices. Student feedback was positive.

# ACADEMY NEWS

## CHEMICAL ENGINEERING NAMES FIVE NEW ACADEMY MEMBERS

The [Arkansas Academy of Chemical Engineers](#) (AACH E) has inducted five distinguished chemical engineering professionals as new members.

Clay Boyce, Ed Boyer, Paul Gathright, Phillip Baker and Tony Caston were inducted into the academy at the Arkansas Academy of Chemical Engineers 2021 Annual Meeting on October 29, 2021.

The Arkansas Academy of Chemical Engineers is a nonprofit organization that recognizes outstanding chemical engineers and provides support for the Ralph E. Martin Department of Chemical Engineering.

“The academy was very pleased to be able to gather and honor inductees this year after not being able to gather last year due to COVID-19,” said Tom Spicer, academy member and professor in the department of chemical engineering. “This group is representative of the national and international positive impact that graduates of our department have made and will continue to make. Their accomplishments and efforts are all very different, but each of our inductees has shown the leadership and drive to accomplish important goals and objectives to the ultimate benefit of others.



**Clay Boyce (B.S.Ch.E. 1994)** After graduating, Boyce worked for 12 years in the process design of syngas and hydrogen plants before moving into engineering management. In 2010, Boyce was a founding member and the process manager of JV Tyler Engineers, a new startup EPC engineering office. He later joined KP Engineering as the manager of process engineering, working there for five years. He worked for Lauren Engineers & Constructors before taking his current post as director of engineering of Texas operations at Samuel Engineering. He is a registered professional engineer in Texas, Oklahoma, Ohio, Alabama, Colorado and North Dakota, a member of AIChE, a life member of the Arkansas Alumni Association, and serves on the Advisory Board for the newly established Jasper Department of Chemical Engineering at the University of Texas at Tyler.



**Ed Boyer (B.S.Ch.E. 1986, M.S.Ch.E 1987).** Boyer began his professional career as a process control engineer at the Dow Chemical Company in Freeport, Texas. He then held various production related roles at PolyethyleneIV before transferring to Polyglycol Amines, where he assumed the role of production leader. Boyer relocated to West Virginia operations as part of the Union Carbide merger as production leader for the Triton and Chemical Mixing units. He became a Certified Six Sigma Master Black Belt for Engineering Solutions before moving to the Philadelphia area with the Rohm and Haas merger as responsible care leader for the Delaware Valley Hub. Boyer relocated back to Texas as responsible care leader for Seadrift Operations, and as of 2019, serves as a Global EH&S Expertise Principal, where he oversees the effective implementation of Dow’s Life Critical EH&S standards.



**Paul Gathright (B.S.Ch.E. 1990).** Gathright's career as a process safety leader has resulted from his experiences at Chevron Chemical, Mobil/ExxonMobil Chemical, Koch Industries, Cargill and Ascend Performance Materials. Following graduation, Gathright moved to Orange, Texas, as a product and application development engineer with Chevron Chemical. During his time as a member of the global process improvement team at ExxonMobil Chemical, Gathright developed a passion for driving improvements through process safety, which also reduced environmental impact and improved reliability and quality. In 2011, he became the director of process safety and led transformation of the process safety program to focus on value creation through reducing harm to people, the environment, and assets. Paul later joined Cargill as its global process safety leader for the oilseeds and refining divisions, providing direction and oversight to over 100 sites in six continents. Most recently, Paul accepted a position as the corporate process safety director for Ascend Performance Materials.



**Phillip Baker (B.S.Ch.E. 1982).** Baker began his industrial career in 1982 with International Paper Company as a process engineer in Mobile, Alabama. In 1985, Baker joined Potlatch Corporation as an assistant production superintendent at the company's pulp and paper mill in McGehee, Arkansas. After holding various positions in production and corporate management, in 1997 he became vice president of sales and marketing for Potlatch's Minnesota Pulp and Paper Division in Cloquet, Minnesota, and in 1999 was named senior vice president. He retired in 2002. In 2003, he embarked on a second career teaching AP chemistry, physics and physical science at Huntsville High School in Huntsville. Baker was named a Distinguished Teacher by the United States Commission on Presidential Scholars in 2010 and was recognized as a Distinguished Teacher by MIT in 2012. In 2013, Baker was named an Outstanding Mentor by the University of Arkansas Alumni Association and was recognized as a Distinguished High School Mentor by the University of Arkansas Department of Chemical Engineering. Over 40 of his high school students have gone on to engineering programs at the University of Arkansas, MIT, Northwestern, and others throughout the country.



**Tony L. Caston (B.S.Ch.E. 1986, M.S.Ch.E. 1990).** Caston joined Eastman Chemical Company as a process engineer at the Holston Defense Corporation site in Tennessee. He completed thesis work in thermodynamics and distillation calculations while employed in Kingsport, and under advisement of Dr. James Couper, Col. William Myers, and the late Dr. Jim Turpin. During his 34-year career with Eastman Chemical, he specialized in process control, garnering experience from process engineering, manufacturing and maintenance roles. Career accomplishments included projects to automate batch specialty chemical processes for explosives and photographic chemicals. Other contributions included a decade of management of the maintenance for instruments, valves, and relief devices for the Tennessee Eastman site and contribution to the Processing Industry Practices (PIP) consortium as a member of the Process Control team. Caston is a licensed Professional Engineer in the State of Tennessee.

# ACADEMY UPDATES

The Arkansas Academy of Chemical Engineers (AACChE) held their annual Induction Ceremony on October 29, 2021. New members are Paul Gathright (B.S.Ch.E. 1990), Clay Boyce (B.S.Ch.E. 1994), Phillip Baker (B.S.Ch.E. 1982), Ed Boyer (B.S.Ch.E. 1986, M.S.Ch.E. 1987), and Tony L. Caston (B.S.Ch.E. 1986, M.S.Ch.E. 1990).

AACChE launched a new Mentorship Program during the Fall 2021 semester with great success. The program will also be in session during the Spring 2022 semester. The mentors are U of A CHEG graduates drawn from both the academy and outside the academy. There is always room for more mentors, and inquiries are appreciated. Please contact Kent McAllister at [kent.mcallister@comcast.net](mailto:kent.mcallister@comcast.net) .

The **Arkansas Academy of Chemical Engineers** is a nonprofit organization that supports the students, faculty, and staff of the Ralph E. Martin Department of Chemical Engineering and also recognizes department graduates who bring honor to their chosen profession. Members must hold a degree in Chemical Engineering from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville granted at least twenty years prior to election. Please contact AACChE Secretary Dr. Tom Spicer ([tos@uark.edu](mailto:tos@uark.edu)) at the University of Arkansas if you are eligible and interested in joining the Academy.



*Academy members at the 2021 annual banquet and induction ceremony.*

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# IN REMEMBRANCE OF SAM CHAFFIN



Sam Chaffin, two-time graduate of the UofA and longtime member of the Arkansas Academy of Chemical Engineers, passed away November 19, 2021. He was 85.

He is survived by his wife Charlie Cole Chaffin; son, Cole, of North Little Rock; daughter, Marty Maier (David), of Crossville, Tennessee; grandchildren, Phoebe Chandler (Lindsay), of Springdale; Emily Bain, of Charlottesville, Virginia; Gracie Bain (Ross), of Fayetteville; Parker Bain (Casey), of Denver, Colorado; and Laura Lane Rose (Brandon), of Durango, Colorado; great-grandchildren, Scarlett Rose, Vincent Chandler and Cole Chandler; brother, Thomas Chaffin, of Lake Jackson, Texas; and sister, Amenda Meadows, of West Monroe, Louisiana.

Chaffin graduated from the UofA with a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering in 1959 and a master's degree in industrial engineering in 1960. He founded Eagle Material Handling of Arkansas. He was also a member of the Arkansas Academy of Industrial Engineering.

## GIVING

The pace of change in the field of chemical engineering requires investment on a continual basis to provide for exceptional professors and students, laboratory space, and state-of-the-art equipment. Private support plays a vital role in the future of the Ralph E. Martin Department of Chemical Engineering and provides necessary funding that allows us to strive for excellence in our students, faculty and facilities.

You can make outright gifts to the department in the form of cash, securities, corporate matching gifts, real estate and personal property. Gifts of all kinds may be designated for immediate or current use or as a long-term investment through an endowment. To learn more, visit

[chemical-engineering.uark.edu/alumni](https://chemical-engineering.uark.edu/alumni).

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Follow along with news and announcements on our [Facebook](#) page!

The [chemical engineering alumni LinkedIn group](#) is a great for connecting with other alums as well as sharing professional updates and job opportunities. The [department's LinkedIn page](#) is another great place to keep up with updates from faculty and students.

Twitter users can follow along with chemical engineering announcements by following [@CHEG\\_UARK](#).

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