

First Anniversary for FIAP

Just one year after its inception, the Forum on Industrial and Applied Physics (FIAP) enjoys a powerful presence in the American Physical Society (APS). Many industrial physicists quickly joined—making it one of the society’s largest units, with more than 5,000 members. In addition, the forum launched a host of activities.

Before FIAP, most industrial physicists did not attend APS meetings, feeling that the agendas lacked relevance to industry and were dominated by academic concerns. However, the combined efforts of FIAP and the APS Committee on Applied Physics (CAP) increased the visibility of industrial and applied physics at this year’s general APS meetings—generating nine symposia that were tailored to the interests of FIAP members. These symposia concentrated on showing the wide range of alternative career paths that are available to physicists. In addition, FIAP and CAP sponsored symposia at meetings of the Acoustical Society of America and the American Vacuum Society.

Success in St. Louis

In March, APS’s meeting in St. Louis offered many symposia for FIAP members, including the popular “Physicists in Finance,” “Physics of Garbage,” and “Renewable Energy Resources.”

Perhaps most importantly, FIAP contributed to a variety of industrial-career programs at the St. Louis meeting. FIAP and the American Institute of Physics (AIP) collaborated on a series of informal gatherings called “Meeting Industrial Physicists,” where more than 250 attendees heard how physicists work in industry and what skills companies look for in potential employees. In fact, that program attracted so many participants that demand for informal groups exceeded the supply of speakers.

At APS’s program on careers, FIAP-sponsored speakers provided tips on desirable industrial jobs. For instance, Paul Peercy,

president of Semi/Sematech in Austin, Texas, described thousands of jobs in the burgeoning microelectronics industry. He said the continual increase in memory density of computer chips demands radically new solutions to electronic and materials issues—problems that perfectly suit physicists. That kind of information appealed to some of the younger job-seeking physicists. Although many of them seemed skeptical of industrial opportunities at the meeting's beginning, they attended many FIAP technical sessions later in the week.

Even FIAP's single near-disaster turned out well. According to the original schedule, FIAP's annual business meeting conflicted with an AIP-sponsored talk on employment by Mitchell Fromstein, chief executive officer of Manpower, Inc., the giant contract labor agency headquartered in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Last-minute negotiations produced a solution: Mitchell presented his talk at FIAP's business meeting. The schedule switch proved valuable, because Fromstein explained the value of physicists in business, saying that employers "like physicists because they catch on to the logic of the business world fast."

Keep in touch

To keep track of events, access the FIAP homepage (<http://www.aps.org/FIAP/index.html>). This page contains a schedule of upcoming FIAP events, links to more than a dozen major R&D career sites, and FIAP's latest newsletter. The first three issues included articles on a variety of topics, from perspectives on industrial R&D to new career paths for industrial physicists. This newsletter will provide tips on employment opportunities, including information about APS career workshops. In addition, it will help you keep up with FIAP activities, including election results and program plans. The editor of the FIAP newsletter, Neville Connell of the Xerox Palo Alto Research Center, invites your input.

The FIAP Web page also contains a speakers list featuring more than 150 indus-


trial and applied physicists, organized by field of expertise, location, and type of institution. This list serves as a resource for high schools and universities that want to hear about industrial research.

FIAP's future

FIAP plans more activities in the near future. The forum is poised to expand its symposia program, nominate its first set of APS fellows, and sponsor new awards for industrial and applied physicists.

In addition, the forum plans to launch the FIAP Employment/Careers Web site. This site will allow FIAP members to circulate their résumés confidentially. By the same token, employers will be able to advertise new jobs without getting a flood of less-than-relevant résumés. The forum hopes that this Web site will inform FIAP members of more job openings in a greater variety of fields.

You can make a personal contribution to FIAP's future. You can organize or participate in FIAP symposia and short courses. You can be a mentor on a local level or through society meetings, including the "Meet Industrial Physicists" programs. You could help with the development of FIAP's Web pages, become part of the forum's employment network, or be a lecturer on the list of industrial speakers. In addition, you could write an article on industry, R&D, or career development for the newsletter. The forum also needs nominations for APS fellows—an opportunity to recognize applications-oriented physicists.

Today's industrial physicists face tough issues in career development, employment, and professional recognition. To help your colleagues and yourself, consider contributing some time to FIAP. Start by filling out the forum's volunteer form, which can be found on the FIAP home page. Your participation will be welcomed. 

Len Brillson is a professor of electrical engineering and physics, and CMR scholar at The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.