

AMIA president's column: AMIA's corporate relations activities



As I discussed in a recent president's column,¹ the roots of AMIA's founding and early identity were largely academic, with an emphasis on informatics and computer science research, both basic and applied. Yet, with the passage of time, yesterday's research has evolved into standard approaches and tools. Today's clinical computing products often reflect research that was carried out in academia or other investigational settings 10, 20, or 30 years ago. Similarly, today's research and development work will be reflected in products a decade or so in the future. This observation emphasizes the ongoing importance of basic and applied research, to fill the pipeline with the ideas and methods that will define the systems of tomorrow.

With the evolution of the field, AMIA has necessarily evolved as well, and now embraces a much more diverse membership and, accordingly, different member expectations.² There is a greater emphasis on applied research and practice, health information technology policy, broad workforce development, and the increasingly successful and mature world of commercial health information technology. In this column I would like to focus on AMIA's increasing interactions with the corporate world and our major efforts to identify and nurture synergies at that interface.

AMIA, its members, and the biomedical informatics community have much to contribute to industry and much to gain from healthy relationships with the companies that work in diverse areas such as electronic health records, computerized provider order entry, mobile health, translational bioinformatics, consumer health, public health, and clinical research. First, many of our student members complete their informatics training and move into industry for their careers (eg, in corporate R&D, marketing, consulting, management, and the creation of startups). With training grounded in the AMIA community, often at institutions that are members of our Academic Forum, these graduates appreciate the intellectual environment that AMIA offers through its meetings and publications and want to stay involved. We are working hard to ensure that our student members who choose careers in industry will still see value in maintaining their association with AMIA. We also need them on committees and in leadership roles to provide balance in the organization.

The AMIA community also publishes papers, gives talks, and promotes policies that affect industry and in some cases drive product development and the incorporation of research results into products. Thus the corporate community looks to the informatics field for ideas, methods, and in some cases

licensable software, that positively affect the evolution and design of commercial products. In addition, those in academia often derive satisfaction from seeing their ideas and research products reflected in real world systems that positively influence patients and the quality of healthcare.

Our individual and corporate members from industry also have much to contribute to those AMIA members who derive much of the motivation for their work from real world examples and problems identified on the 'front lines' by their corporate colleagues. These synergies benefit AMIA members of all types and help to explain why the organization has sought to nurture stronger ties with industry. Members from industry also offer key insights that complement those of our members from academia, industry, government, and healthcare. For example, three of our members from industry played pivotal roles on our vendor contracting task force that produced an influential report that was published in *JAMIA* earlier this year.³

AMIA's leadership decided to create a new staff position in 2010, seeking to respond to this need for improved and synergistic ties with industry as well as the growth of our membership by individuals from within the ranks of commercial companies. Many of you will have already met Jonathan Grau, our Vice President for Corporate Relations and Development, who joined us in May 2010 and has built a robust and growing corporate relations program in the intervening months. He joined us at a time when there were already new activities underway to strengthen our corporate ties, including the introduction of an 'Industry Day' on the Monday of our Annual Symposium (including specially designed sessions in a single track), beginning in 2009. We had also created an Industry Advisory Council (IAC), initially chaired by two of our active members from industry, Steve Labkoff and Dan Foltz. Building on this momentum, Jonathan helped us to create an even larger and more successful Industry Day at the 2010 meeting, to be reprised again in 2011. The sessions have been well attended, especially by students and recent graduates who are seeking information about career options in industry.

Equally important, Jonathan has built a redesigned corporate membership program (see AMIA's new web site for details) that clarifies the value proposition for companies that are considering joining AMIA. Ours is a professional society, not a trade organization, and we have a vibrant but modest exhibit program at our meetings. The emphasis of our industrial relationships has been on intellectual exchange, policy discussions, and interactions with both our students and our member thought leaders. The new program has several categories of involvement by companies, varying with size, types of products, and the organization's major goals in building a relationship with AMIA. Thus, although we have generic descriptions of the various types of relationships available, the final design of a corporate membership is individualized to the company's specific needs and concerns. Furthermore, many organizations have appreciated the flexibility that a single annual membership fee can deliver. Custom benefit packages can include event sponsorship and advertising and help cut down on repeated requests for payments during the course of the year. Jonathan

The purpose of the *Messages from AMIA* section is for AMIA to communicate and involve its current and potential members in AMIA. The messages on these pages reflect the goals and direction of AMIA's board of directors and leaders only. These pages are designed to inspire members and readers to connect with the association on strategic objectives and activities. We hope you will find them a useful tool for keeping connected to AMIA leadership. We welcome your thoughts and feedback.

Messages from AMIA

Grau has become the point person for developing and maintaining these corporate ties and is now a recognized and respected spokesperson for AMIA and its membership. He has successfully increased the number of corporate members, thereby enhancing the membership in IAC and the strength and quality of its meetings and growing programs.

It is important to emphasize that AMIA's new programs to enhance our corporate relations are meant to broaden our scope and interactions while we maintain our traditional emphasis on informatics science and the evolution of the scholarly discipline. It is a sign of the growth and health of our field that our mission has broadened to include applications, informatics practice, and the industry that has developed to take biomedical and health informatics to the marketplace, with opportunities for our ongoing input in that process.

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