Prior to the 25th annual conference in Puerto Rico, birthday letters for AIAEE were solicited from the membership in an effort to document what the organization has meant to its members. As shared in the request, a content analysis of the letters was conducted to determine major themes in an effort to preserve the history of AIAEE. Seventeen letters were analyzed, yielding 15 categories, along with a “top 10” illustrating what is loved about AIAEE. We dedicate this article to those visionary leaders, who over 25 years ago came together to create AIAEE...Thank you!
25. **History of AIAEE:** A few letters were from individuals who were involved with the organization from the very beginning.

Robert Martin states,

I participated in a meeting 25 years ago during which the idea of AIAEE was created. This was a small group of people having an interest in forming an international organization or possibly adding to an existing organization a special interest group on international agriculture. We met in a small, cheap hotel room on the outskirts of Kansas City, Missouri, in March, 1984. After considerable discussion the idea for a new organization was developed. The early days of AIAEE had us meeting at the National 4-H Center near Washington, D.C. so we could have access to national leaders in international agriculture.

Steve Jones was working on his PhD when he first heard about this new organization. “I was able to attend the 1984 Kansas City organizational meeting. Thanks to the leadership of Bill Thuemmel, Dave Riley, Don Meadors, and others, AIAEE was born out of this meeting.” His wife, Rose, organized the first Chevy Chase meeting while working at the University of Maryland. “The first reception consisted of an ice chest/cooler that we bought on the way to the national 4-H Center and filled it with wine and beer. We still have that cooler.”

James Christiansen recalls, “It doesn’t seem possible that it has been 24 years since I participated in the meeting held during the Workshop on Programs of Agricultural Education for Africa (USAID and Government of Cameroon) in Yaounde, Cameroon on July 25, 1984 at which the initial structure, constitution, policies, and operating procedures for AIAEE that had been developed several months earlier were worked on, modified, and expanded to be presented to the members at the next meeting of the newly formed Association.”

Wade Miller adds, “Some people thought there was no need for such an organization because there was time on the schedule of AATEA for extension and sometimes international issues. However, a number of people indicated that they did not feel that was enough. They wanted an organization of their own...It is 25 years later: AATEA has changed to AAAE and AIAE has changed to AIAEE. Both organizations are going strong.”

24. **Relevant and Scholarly Research:**

The history of the organization was rooted in the discovery of new knowledge. Letters documented the beginnings of the research conference and its proceedings.

Wade Miller shared that “people brought copies of their papers with them and you could assemble your own set of proceedings if you wanted them.” He went on to say that “research papers were welcome if they had practical value.” Jack Elliot added that “back then conference proceedings were assembled at the conference by the graduate students. All authors were asked to bring 100 copies of their paper. The association would buy us pizza and we would collate all of the proceedings the evening prior to the research portion of the conference.”
Ana Kazan remarked that AIAEE is “relevant, demanding, and one of high academic and network value.” Glen Shinn offered that “AIAEE reaches across the field of study to connect scholarship, professional practice, and indigenous knowledge.” Kristin Davis noted the benefits of scholarly outlets that allowed her work to be “highlighted internationally through the journal and conferences.”

23. Graduate Student Membership:
Several letters mentioned that members started attending the organizational meetings as a graduate student due to encouragement from faculty such as Barbara Ludwig, Larry Miller, Jan Henderson, John Richardson, Robert Agunga, Frank Brewer and others.

James Lindner mentioned that he “never envisioned that this simple and encouraging invitation would result in a lifelong pursuit, but it has.” Ana Kazan came to the conference right after completing her Master’s degree at The Ohio State University. “My advisor, Dr. Robert Agunga, encouraged me to submit a paper about my thesis, and there I was, in some Washington D.C. suburb hotel.” Kristin Davis commented that “my advisor pressed me to attend, although I was not excited about it. However, once I got there I realized it was a good venue for networking, presenting results of research, obtaining new information, and growing professionally.”

Sabrina Tuttle attended her first AIAEE meeting as a 40 year old grad student. “We all piled into a van for the six hour drive from College Station to Baton Rouge.”

Jack Elliot reflected on his participation in the inaugural meeting when he was a PhD student: “The trip from Columbus, OH to DC was made by van with a group of graduate students and Dr. Henderson. Not sure why she volunteered to be with [us] for all those miles, but sharing a hotel room on the way with 4 other graduate students bonded us for all of eternity.”

David Lawver (president-elect) was another faculty member who was recruited to drive a van of graduate students from Lubbock to the conference in Baton Rouge in 2001 by his department head, Matt Baker.

Adewale Alonge shared, “I can still remember the excitement of getting on the Iowa State bus with other graduate students from Ames and driving to Washington, DC and making my first presentation in front of a large international audience.”

Based on these letters, perhaps faculty who drive vans to allow graduate students to attend is the best recruitment strategy!

22. JIAEE: The first journal editor was Jack Elliot.

He elaborated: “Beginning the journal was a labor of love. The original journal white paper team of Satish Verma from LSU, Bill Seiders from University of Illinois and [me] (then at Michigan State University) presented our work at the first AIAEE meeting held west of the Mississippi River in 1991 at St. Louis, MO. Wade Miller from Iowa State and Anne Fox from Oregon State were added to the team to form the first journal editorial board. The first issue of volume one was distributed during the 10th anniversary of the association. Jack Elliot added that “some of the original strategies such as publishing the outstanding research..."
presentations have been modified as the journal sought to improve its prestige within the journal world.”


Adewale Alonge stated, “The beauty of AIAEE conferences is how we have always managed to get the right balance between work and fun.” It is interesting to review the conference locations and themes over the last 10 years. Just for fun, look through your old files and reminisce…

2000 – Arlington, Virginia - “Partnerships with the Private Sector”
2001 – Baton Rouge, Louisiana - “Emerging Trends in Agricultural and Extension Education”
2006 – Clearwater Beach, Florida – “International Teamwork in Agriculture and Extension Education”
2007 – Polson, Montana – “Internationalizing with Cultural Leadership”
2008 – EARTH University, Costa Rica – “Global Entrepreneurship: The Role of International Agricultural & Extension Education”
2009 – San Juan, Puerto Rico – “Twenty-Five Years of Strengthening International Agricultural and Extension Education Worldwide”

Jack Elliot stated that “hosting the 1998 AIAEE conference in Tucson, AZ allowed the organization the opportunity to have a successful meeting away from the East and Midwest. In fact, it gave the group confidence that it could and would travel with enough numbers outside of the continental US. Even though the first international meeting the following year was in the Caribbean, it changed us forever.” Looking toward the future, it is interesting to note that the next 3 conferences are slated to occur outside of the US.

20. Service: Many of the letters noted the role that service had played in their involvement in the organization. Just from the letters received, members had served in various roles related to the research conference: poster and paper presentation judges, discussants, paper reviewers, scholarship chair, hosting a conference, and conference chair. Additional letters mentioned service to committees such as membership, constitution and bylaws, and resolutions. Those who responded had also served as officers on the executive committee or as journal editors.

Wade Miller added that “individuals who have a service mentality should be attracted to this organization of people for a long time to come.”

19. Welcoming: Authors of the letters that were submitted agreed with

Wade Miller that the organization’s “environment was welcoming, nurturing, and friendly. All
members were on an equal basis and everyone’s ideas were valued.”

Pete Vergot added that spouses also felt welcome at the conference with special thanks to people like Cheryl Vergot who made sure that other spouses actively participated and met new friends.”

Larry Miller reflected that “the early meetings held at the national 4-H Center in Chevy Chase MD were particularly warm, meaningful times for all involved and I fondly recall the long van rides, filled with conversations, in transit.”

David Lawver had “never felt as welcome as I felt when I attended my first conference” and hope that others new to the organization will feel the same way.

18. Rewarding: Various letters mentioned that their involvement in AIAEE had been rewarding.

Bob Martin reflected, “the greatest thrill for me has been in helping graduate students attend and participate in AIAEE.”

Sabrina Tuttle shared that “It was very rewarding to be with a group of folks that had worked so hard all year on various publications and finally we were rewarded at the conference through the wonderful networking, socializing, learning and touring during our time there with AIAEE.”

Some of the letters specifically mentioned the importance of receiving awards or recognition for their participation in AIAEE.

As shared by Steve Jones, most of this is attributed to “meeting the many wonderful people who are part of AIAEE who really care about making the world a better place through agricultural development.”

17. Interacting with Colleagues: An organization is only as good as the people who are in it. Thus, the conference was compared to a “high school reunion each year;” a time to “immerse myself in the camaraderie of my fellow students and the so admired professors.”

Wade Miller recalls that “conversations took place late into the night; not just during organized sessions.”

Pete Vergot added that the conference provides an opportunity for “meeting people and making friends from across the world.”

Kristin Davis similarly stated that her “fondest memories are times with friends, interacting professionally as well as socially at interesting places around the globe.”

Larry Miller noted that “AIAEE provided me with a whole new network of colleagues who had values similar to mine. I most value the friendships that were developed over the years, often with persons who first attend as graduate students and later as professors, leaders, deans, etc.”

David Lawver added that “AIAEE involvement has provided the encouragement to get out of my comfort zone. I accompanied a doctoral student to Kenya and Uganda in 2005 to supervise collection of his dissertation data. I don’t know that I would have had the will to do this without the interactions I had with veteran international development colleagues in AIAEE.”
Michael Angstreich summed “…the guidance, friendships and cooperation provided by AIAEE have enhanced my professional life immeasurably.”

16. Collaborative Partnerships: Many members mentioned that various projects resulted from interacting with colleagues around the globe.

James Lindner stated, “working with David Dolly, Wayne Ganpat, and others in Trinidad and Tobago on the adoption and diffusion of farmer field schools and other community farming projects has been incredibly rewarding and would not have been possible without my participation in AIAEE. You never know where a Trini burger and a float down the Llano River will lead you…for me it has been a great trip.”

Wade Miller noted, “this organization became a mechanism to meet other people with similar interests who were also engaged in a number of other related endeavors. This group did not just ‘talk’ about the issues; it was made up of people who ‘acted’ on them.”

Jerry Gibson reflected, “the most poignant international experience has been and still continues to be the collaboration with Shiraz University in Iran. When people and countries are in conflict, agriculture continues to be the most fundamental need of all people.”

15. Interest and Passion for Agricultural International Development: The glue that essentially ties us all together is our shared interests.

Bob Martin specifically mentioned that his passion began when he served as a teacher of agriculture and biology in Nigeria, West Africa. “This experience had a profound impact on me and has shaped all my experiences since then. Involvement in projects in Western Europe, Egypt, Thailand, Japan, South Korea, South America, Czech Republic and working with graduate students from numerous countries all combine to make international agriculture development a key element of everything I do.”

Wade Miller suggested that AIAEE “was a ‘think tank’ for international agricultural and extension [education].”

14. Social Good: Many of the letters indicated the importance of “doing good” for society.

Jerry Gibson stated that “The greatest impact that AIAEE has had on me is the one regarding increased knowledge of the world’s people…It is my hope that we as educators can enhance the quality of life for everyone.”

David Lawver shares a story about visiting a village in Uganda. “When we asked about agricultural problems, they focused on the simplest things like ‘we need hoes’ or ‘we need seed’…Just a little help meant so much to these people.”

Larry Miller added that “those attending [the inaugural meeting] were individuals who enjoyed international work in agricultural/extension education, but, perhaps more importantly, those whose values were steeped in the accomplishment of ‘social good’.”

13. Communication:

Pete Vergot surmised that “AIAEE is you and me sharing our Agricultural Education and Extension leadership...
and expertise during conferences through papers and posters and carousels and our journal JIAEE. Obviously interacting with colleagues beyond the conference is also important. We use a variety of tools for continued involvement such as the listserv, website, and newsletter.”

Michael Angstreich tells the story about searching for a professional organization on the web and finding AIAEE. “Trouble was, I was having problems getting through to AIAEE via normal channels. I got up my nerve and went right to the top leadership by phoning John Richardson…His warm southern voice allayed my nervousness and started me off as a member of AIAEE.”

12. **Advice to New Members:** Some letters conveyed words of wisdom for those just joining the organization. The primary message was *get involved!* “Take advantage of the leadership opportunities available.” “Share your experiences and what you have learned either through oral or poster presentations or the literature. Your peers need to hear from you.” “Jump in and volunteer. We need your knowledge and your leadership.” “Connect with a ‘tenure’ member and ask if they would serve as a mentor.” “Get involved and take chances. AIAEE offers amply opportunities for all individuals interested in an international experience.” “Submit a paper or poster for the conference, come and meet everyone at the annual conference, and try to publish in the journal.” “I would highlight for new members how many wonderful people are employed in our profession all around the world, how we seem to have common concepts of mission and vision and how they will value each such association and new colleague.”

Dr. Christiansen elaborated, Having been an active member of AIAEE since the early days, I have accumulated many good memories, e.g., meeting and visiting with professionals from many different universities, organization, and regions of the world; reviewers returning promptly manuscripts and papers submitted for presentation at the annual conferences; hard work by the officers and chairs of committees in planning and conducting the annual conferences; observing the eye-opening experiences gained by graduate students attending their first conference in a multi-cultural/cross-cultural setting other than their own, whether in South Africa, Ireland, Costa Rica, or the United States; obtaining perspectives on problems and practices in international development in agriculture…”

James Lindner shared specific events such as “Burt Swanson winging in from somewhere/anywhere to attend the conference,” “floating down the Llano river,” “doing an ecological transect in Junction, Texas and bumping into Jack Pardee [A Texas A&M University Aggie during the Bear Bryant years and former coach of the Dallas Cowboys professional American football team].”

Jerry Gibson also enjoyed the “field trips” such as the boat ride in the swamps of Louisiana and watching the snakes, alligators, and all kinds of wildlife.”

Wade Miller noted the enjoyment of learning about the local language and culture (not on the tourist maps).
“Truly an interesting human experience.”

There are so many wonderful things about AIAEE that it’s hard to sum it all up! However, David Giltrow, a lifetime member since 1991 from Santa Fe, New Mexico, provided “Dave’s Top Ten Reasons to Celebrate and Cheer AIAEE’s 25th Anniversary” (slightly modified by the authors).

10. Food, Food, Food
9. Sesame Street may have a “Burt & Ernie;” AIAEE has a “Burt & Iris”
8. “A Good Job” by volunteers who make all this possible
7. Elephant-sized post conference tours
6. We dance at great cultural events
5. Plenty of publications, papers, and posters in profusion
4. From the humble setting of a 4-H center, AIAEE has gone intercontinental
3. Overcoming burned out overhead projector lamps, Kodak slide projectors, and now, incompatible cables between laptops and video projectors—but still get our results and implication across

2. Pizza-eating graduate students from around the world --providing new energy and fresh blood
1. Anticipation for what the next 25 years will bring.

In closing, Glen Shinn wrote: “As we look to the next 25 year birthday – Twenty Thirty-Four- we should be bold in our vision. Bold enough to embrace diversity, celebrate our knowledge exchange, and advocate promising research and development practice.” This is also the year that we celebrate Neil Armstrong’s first steps on the moon. Let AIAEE go where no man or woman has gone before!

Happy 25th Birthday AIAEE.

Special Thanks: Adewale Alonge, Michael Angstreich, James E. Christiansen, Kristin Davis, Jack Elliot, Jerry Gibson, David Giltrow, Steve Jones, Ana Kazan, David Lawver, James Lindner, Bob Martin, Larry Miller, Wade Miller, Glen Shinn, Sabrina Tuttle, and Pete Vergot III.