The students actually wanted to expend their time and effort, not to mention their own money, toward an unselfish goal. The student clubs of all the departments housed in the Physical Sciences Building at Eastern Illinois University united in November of 1996 for a worthy, philanthropic cause and some friendly competition. The Psychology, Physics, Geoscience, and Chemistry Clubs held a coin war to raise money for the Charleston Food Pantry. Each club earned points from the money placed in their department’s container. Pennies placed in a container counted as positive points whereas all other coins and bills counted as negative points. Point values equaled the face value of the money. During the two-day event, students, staff, and faculty showed tremendous spirit and support for their departments. A total of $122.81 was collected, including over $60 in pennies alone. Every cent of the money collected went to the food pantry to help feed needy families during the holiday season.
The entire event began innocently enough as a suggestion from our club secretary that the Chemistry Club consider a philanthropic project. The result of that suggestion and collaboration with three other student science clubs was an all out battle between the departments with the weapon of choice being loose change. The first meeting of the 1996 fall term for the Student Affiliates of the American Chemistry Society Chapter at Eastern Illinois University was, as usual, a brainstorming session to determine the activities, fund raisers, and projects the chapter would tackle during the upcoming academic year. Many ideas were pitched by the students present, and, as you can imagine, student interest and excitement was minimal until Sara Burton, the club secretary, suggested an interdepartmental coin war. The proposal of a coin war elicited several comments, questions, and suggestions from the students present as well as from myself, the faculty advisor. The club secretary and a couple other members had heard of coin wars before but were not really sure about the details. There was much discussion about what kind of war we wanted. Everyone agreed that two very important aspects of this coin war were that the money collected must go to a worthy charity and that it must evoke competitive involvement from all the departments.

It was refreshing, gratifying, and inspiring to see the excitement in their faces and hear their enthusiasm at discussing an altruistic activity. The students actually wanted to expend their time and effort, not to mention their own money, toward an unselfish goal. As advisor, I did not have to cajole, encourage, or lead. I was so proud to see the group develop a small suggestion for philanthropy into a complete project. After deciding to hold the war during the week before Thanksgiving break and discussing several charitable organizations, someone mentioned the local food pantry. The Chemistry Club quickly decided that the proceeds from the coin war would be donated to the Charleston Food Pantry, whose needs are great during the late-November holiday season. Then, as a group, the Chemistry Club developed the rules of the war, determined the dates of the battle, and invited the other science clubs to participate.

At Eastern Illinois University, the Physical Sciences Building houses four science departments: Chemistry, Geology/Geography, Physics, and Psychology. Each department has their own departmental student club: Student Affiliates of the American Chemical Society Chapter, Geoscience Club, Society of Physics Students, and the Psych Club, respectively. A mild rivalry has existed for some years between the four departments in the Physical Sciences Building and between their departmental