



Information Letter #5

TO: Faculty and Staff of:  
Department of Atmospheric Sciences  
Department of Geology & Geophysics  
Department of Geography  
Department of Oceanography  
Geochemical and Environmental Research Group  
Integrated Ocean Drilling Program  
Texas Sea Grant Office

FROM: Björn Kjerfve, Dean College of Geosciences

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### **State of the College of Geosciences Presentation and Awards Ceremony**

The State of the College of Geosciences address and the presentation of achievement awards by the Association of Former Students and the College of Geosciences have been rescheduled for 4:00 pm on Wednesday 18 October. The venue is O&M #112. I hope all of you - faculty, staff, and students - can attend the presentation. Originally scheduled for 4 October, the presentation was rescheduled when I suffered a tennis accident and underwent arthroscopic knee surgery on 3 October.

### **Some Thoughts on Teaching**

Teaching is at the heart of the mission of the College of Geosciences as well as all other colleges. I submit to you some ideas and comments I have compiled on this subject. These concepts derive from conversations and written correspondence I have had with you over the past two years.

*The Historical Perspective:* In the not so distant past, departments the College of Geosciences were quite different in their activities and functions. For example, Geography was largely devoted to undergraduate teaching with a modest research program, and Oceanography was dominated by a robust research program that supported approximately 120 graduate students. However, the situation has changed, and the departments within the College of Geosciences are becoming more similar in their teaching and research activities. The advent of the Environmental Geosciences undergraduate program and the new University Degree "major minor" offer opportunities for all departments that do not have an undergraduate major, like Oceanography, to expand their undergraduate teaching programs.

We have been advised that it is essential for the College of Geosciences to increase its teaching production both in formal classes and graduate student mentoring. Consequently, more weight will be given to these teaching activities in evaluating faculty for tenure and promotion and in assigning merit raises. Therefore, it is appropriate that a clear enunciation of what is expected be given to faculty along with the rationale on which these expectations are based.

*Work Load Requirements and Teaching:* Each semester, the University requires that "work load" reports be made on all faculty members. Although there are some complexities to this and probably aspects that many faculty might feel are not entirely reasonable (e.g., no credit for service as a committee member or for a single MS student) the report does provide considerable guidance for Texas A&M's general expectations. Faculty may find the details of how work load is defined at: [http://www.tamu.edu/opir/workload\\_policy.pdf](http://www.tamu.edu/opir/workload_policy.pdf) - search="faculty work load".

For a faculty member involved mostly in classroom teaching, this would typically result in 3 classes per semester (or 2 very large classes). This is not an uncommon assignment in many departments, including the Department of Geography and our colleagues in MARS and TAMUG. It should be kept in mind that this is the base required by the University. For a faculty member involved in chairing committees, multiple graduate students, and an active research program, the expected level of classroom teaching is 2-3, 3-credit classes per academic year. It should be obvious that co-teaching a course does not generate the full credits of the course for each faculty member. Typically, teaching half of a 3-credit class does not fulfill the teaching obligation for a semester.

*Classes and Teaching Assignments:* With the new hires, a new problem has arisen, who will teach which class and when. A common complaint of new faculty is that courses and favored teaching times are "owned" by the senior faculty members, leaving new and junior faculty members few choices and unpopular courses and times. This is clearly not an egalitarian method for teaching assignments. Ultimately, the Department Heads make the teaching assignments. We will discuss this problem with them and monitor the situation.

Another problem that is not easily dealt with in a timely manner is courses "not making". Often this cannot be determined until classes are about to start or, in some cases, during the first few days of class. If a faculty member's class does not "make" they should always anticipate and stand ready for a different teaching assignment. Although this is disconcerting, there is no easy way around it. Unfortunately, some act as if their class "not making" means they don't have to teach that semester. It is clearly the individual faculty member's responsibility to make every effort to determine in advance whether their class will "make". If it is clear it won't, then the faculty member should inform their Department Head and any students who have expressed an interest as soon as possible. Doing so will help minimize the last minute changes in teaching assignments.

It has been a common practice to "force" classes with less than the requisite number of students to "make", using a variety of dodges, such as "the class is on one of the student's degree plans". These "exceptions" are becoming less acceptable to the University, and faculty should not rely on them when anticipating if a class will "make". Small numbers of students can often be taught in such circumstances via a course such as 485 or 685. However, this will not replace teaching of a formal, regular class.

*Other Issues:* It is common sense, but not a universal practice, for faculty members to work closely with their Department Head on issues that might interrupt their availability for teaching. These include teaching courses outside the Department, going on some type of leave (development, sick, Fulbright) or extensive travel for fieldwork, committee service, etc. Such travel is done with the approval of the Department Head, not simply announced to him/her with the presumption that it is the faculty member's right to do so. Circumstances may arise where too many faculty are asking to be unavailable in a given semester for courses to be properly covered. As much advance planning as possible should be made.

Related to this issue is that of faculty "buying out" of teaching generally using research funds. Again this is not something that should be assumed to have automatic approval. Any negotiated amount of money involved will need review by the Dean. This should reflect the percentage of effort the faculty member would be making in teaching that semester and their salary, i.e. there will be no "fixed price" per course.

It is common for faculty to attend meetings, serve on national and international committees, and do other professional activities that require they be away during times when classes are taught, although an effort should be made to minimize such absences. When this is necessary, the faculty member is responsible for finding a colleague to cover their teaching assignment and the Department Head should be informed of the arrangement in advance.

### **Department Head Searches**

OCNG has interviewed three candidates for the position of Department Head, but this process has yet to come to fruition. In the meantime, Dr. Robert Stickney serves as the Interim Department Head. A search for a new Department Head in GEPL has just been begun with Dr. Jeff Fox as chairman of the search committee. The Interim Department Head is Dr. John Spang, who was appointed on 1 September and will continue to serve until a permanent head has been hired. John was the GEPL Department Head for more than 8 years in the 1980's and 90' and brings lots of experience and leadership to his interim post.

### **Faculty Searches**

Four ODASES searches are underway, one in each department of the College. Dr. Mitch Lyle was recently hired into an ODASES slot in OCNG and will arrive on campus on 1 November 2006. In addition, the College is attempting to conclude all reinvestment hiring prior to next summer. That means that OCNG is currently searching for one faculty candidate, GEOG for three, and GEPL for three. ATMO has already filled all of its Reinvestment positions. Needless to say, filling 11 faculty positions in addition to two Department Head positions will require focused and proactive effort on the part of the faculty, staff, and the dean's office. However, we need to keep in mind that no task is more important than hiring new faculty. I urge all of you to put your department and the College of Geosciences in the best possible light as you interact with candidates and interviewees.

### **College of Geosciences Senior Program Adviser**

Roxanna Russell joined the College of Geosciences as the new Senior Academic Advisor a month ago. Prior to this position, she was with the Undergraduate Advising office in the Department of Biology. "That position was very fastpaced, as our undergraduate department had about 1400 students," Roxanna said. "I became an Academic Advisor four years ago, and my fledgling freshmen are now graduating. It amazes me how fast time

flies when you really enjoy coming to work everyday. "What I enjoy most about my job is having the opportunity to ensure that our students know what they need to graduate, to encourage them and provide as much support as possible through the resources on campus."

This is Roxanna's first experience with graduate level requirements and procedures, in addition to working in a Dean's Office. She is eager to learn as much as she can about her new position, the students we serve, and to meet the faculty. I encourage you to stop by her office and introduce yourselves.

### **New OCNG Display**

Last Friday afternoon, OCNG unveiled a new departmental display in the entrance hall of the O&M Building. If you have not yet had a chance to view it, I would encourage you to do so. Chrissy (Stover) Wiederwohl, Ruth Mullins, Laura Rubiano-Gomez, and Kelley Cole are to be congratulated for making the display under the supervision of Dr. Shari Yvon-Lewis.

### **GeoConnections Published**

After a hiatus of more than 2 years, GeoConnections, our College of Geosciences magazine was published in August 2006. It is now in the process of being distributed to the colleges, alumni, and donors. We are currently initiating work on the 2007 issue. I would like to encourage you to contact Jay Slovacek ( [jayslo@tamu.edu](mailto:jayslo@tamu.edu)) for ideas, articles, and graphics for the next issue.

### **Space Developments in the College**

The College of Geosciences has been assigned 4,000 square feet of new space in the Teague complex. By the summer of 2007, the 002 suite in the basement of the 0445 Building will be used by Geography for student computer labs. In addition, GEOG has been assigned the remaining offices on the second floor in the CSA portion of Teague. Completion of the exterior sealing of O&M is ahead of schedule, and the job may already be finished before January 2007. The basement is undergoing a major cleanout in preparation for support space for Dr. William Bryant's new ROV and construction of the new server room for the College of Geosciences. Another building-wide trash clearance is in the planning stages. A dumpster will be brought to the loading dock at the back of the O&M Building, and another "dead computer drive" will also be scheduled. Announcements will be posted.

Plans for the radiogenic laboratory in Halbouty have been approved, and a contractor will shortly be selected with hopes that construction can begin in January 2007. Physical Plant has promised to repair the sagging floors in the Halbouty Building during the holiday break.

IODP has several projects in the works on Discovery Drive, space will be renovated for a new lab adjacent to the cold storage area and another room will undergo a utilities upgrade. At Riverside campus, exterior paving and interior renovations will allow for a new equipment testing area at Bldg 8316. All three projects are expected to be completed before January 2007.

### **Dr. Chris Mathewson Steps Down as Halbouty Proctor**

After 26 years, Dr. Chris Mathewson has decided to bring to a close his responsibilities as building proctor for the Halbouty Building and the GEPL space at the Riverside campus. No one knows the Halbouty Building better than Chris, who has taken care of his charge with loving attention for almost three decades, and for this we thank him gratefully. Maureen Reap will be the overall proctor for the College of Geosciences, for on-site attention, GEPL is in the process of hiring a staff person to be in charge of space and inventory.

### **Technology Update**

*O&M Room 112 Receives Technology Facelift:* On 28 August, Geosciences faculty and researchers who teach and present seminars in O&M room 112 kicked off the new semester with the help of some new classroom enhancements. In partnership with TAMU Instructional Media Services and Physical Plant, the College of Geosciences improved instructional delivery capabilities by replacing outdated equipment and adding several new tools. Improvements include: PC and Mac support; lecture/seminar recording capability; multi-classroom collaboration capability; ability to present DVD and VHS video; upgraded projection and audio systems; document camera capability; and new adjustable podium. Physical plant also carpeted the stage and fixed some annoying electrical problems. We thank many geosciences faculty who continue to offer constructive feedback regarding configuration and use. Those interested in learning how to use the new tools in room #112 should contact Jim Rosser at 845-2734.

*New Video Conferencing Suite Available for Use:* The new video conferencing suite in the College of Geosciences is located in the Dean's conference room (O&M room 204F), is configured and available for your use. The suite is comprised of commercial off-the-shelf technology (50" plasma screen, PC, camera, etc.) and a combination of inSORS IG2 and VRVS (Virtual Room Videoconferencing System) software to communicate with remote sites,

including TTVN, Access Grid, and other standard video conferencing suites (e.g., Polycom and Tandberg). This new conferencing suite can also be used to deliver local presentations during meetings. Contact Jim Rosser for more information. Please remember to contact the Dean's office at 845-3651 to check conference room availability before scheduling a videoconference and/or meeting.

### **Super Computer**

TAMU has acquired a new super-computer, an IBM 5-575+ cluster 4 tera-flops system. The system was delivered on 6 October and could be operational within two months. The IBM system is a 640-processor p5-575 cluster system. Under a SURA-IBM arrangement, this system was purchased at a very reduced price through the contributions of several A&M groups: CIS/Supercomputing Facility, VPR's office, CPSC, and the College of Geosciences. The peak computational capacity of this system is 4 teraflops. Its acquisition represents a 12-fold increase in the facility's computational capacity. The core of the new system's processing capability is IBM's power5+ 1.9GHz processor. Sixteen power5+'s are built into a p5-575 node, which itself functions as full symmetric multiprocessor (SMP) with 32 gigabytes of shared memory. In all, the cluster has 40 such nodes that are interconnected with the HPS, IBM's duallink (8 gigabytes per second bandwidth) high performance switch. Disk storage of twenty terabytes will be provided by a DataDirect Networks fiber channel raid array (S2A9500) that has "sustained" read and write performance of 3 gigabytes per second. The raid will be directly attached to 4 p5-575 nodes, designated as I/O nodes. Two of these, it is planned, will also function as user login nodes from which users will be able to do some interactive work and launch batch jobs. CPSC and the College of Geosciences will have access priority (with preemption) to batch queues that will be configured with resources commensurate to their contributions. We hope the system will be in production use by next December. Production time depends on when the necessary A/C and power upgrades will be completed in the machine room. Currently this stage is stalled because of temporary unavailability in the market place-due to a high demand for high-power cooling equipment.

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