Information Letter #17

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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IODP Welcomes Steve Bohlen

Significant leadership changes took place at IODP during the summer with Steve Bohlen contracted to lead IDOP for the next 10 months. His principle objective is to define a new vision for the program and to position TAMU to prepare a successful bid for the extension of scientific ocean drilling from 2013 to 2023. I am pleased to welcome Steve who joined the College as Interim Director of IODP and Research Professor in Geology & Geophysics 1 August. Before coming to IODP, Steve was president of the Joint Oceanographic Institutions (JOI) from 2000 to 2007 and continued as president of the JOI Division of the Consortium for Ocean Leadership after the entities merged in 2007. Prior to that, he was with the U.S. Geological Survey for 12 years in various capacities and held assistant and tenured associate professorships at the State University of New York, Stony Brook, from 1979 to 1988. Steve completed his A.B. degree at Dartmouth College and did his M.S. and Ph.D. at the University of Michigan. He has authored or co-authored 60 peer-reviewed publications, several of which are among the most highly cited in the geosciences.

John Nielsen-Gammon Appointed Acting Executive Associate Dean and Dean for Research

I am pleased to announce that effective 1 September 2008, John Nielsen-Gammon was appointed Acting Executive Associate Dean and Associate Dean for Research in the College of Geosciences. John is a Professor of Meteorology in the Department of Atmospheric Sciences and was appointed Texas State Climatologist in 2000. He completed his Ph.D. in meteorology at MIT in 1990 and did postdoctoral research at the State University of New York at Albany. He came to A&M in 1991 as an assistant professor of meteorology and was promoted to associate professor of meteorology at A&M in 1996. John served as Associate Director of the Center for Atmospheric Chemistry and the Environment from 2003 to 2007. His research group studies the characteristics, dynamics, and forecastability of weather systems and air pollution. As Texas State Climatologist, he has supervised research on mechanisms for summertime drought and estimation of long-term trends from climatological data sets.

Welcome to Sonia Garcia, Director of Recruitment

I am pleased to welcome Sonia Garcia to the College as Director of Recruitment. Sonia comes to us via Mays Business School where for the past five years she led their recruitment efforts as assistant director. At Freshman Convocation on 24 August, Sonia was presented the President's Award for Academic Advising of Undergraduate Students by President Murano for her accomplishments at Mays. Prior to

coming to Texas A&M, Sonia worked in student and academic affairs at Michigan State University. She holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Massachusetts at Boston in political science, a master's degree from the University of Rhode Island in college student personnel, and a Ph.D. from Michigan State University in higher education and administration. Sonia was born and raised in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. She immigrated to the United States in 1989 and speaks Spanish, English, French, and Italian. Her husband, Dr. Leonardo Lombardini, born and raised in Florence, Italy, is an assistant professor in the Department of Horticultural Sciences. Her duties in the College are focused on undergraduate recruitment.

Carbon-14 Concerns

As many of you know, we have discovered pockets of elevated carbon-14 (radiocarbon) levels in several O&M labs. These are biological and biogeochemistry labs that use radiocarbon spike as a tracer for productivity. The levels observed are not a health risk and in most cases cannot be detected by conventional means. The Environmental Health and Safety Office has done extensive testing to confirm this. For perspective, the highest level observed in 67 swipes on the third, fourth, and fifth floors was less than a microcurie per gram carbon, whereas even millicurie quantities of radiocarbon do not present an exposure hazard.

The observed levels, however, seriously impact measurements by accelerator mass spectrometer and jeopardize efforts to use natural radiocarbon measurements for geochronology, such as coral geochronology done by Brendan Roark (GEOG) and Matthew Schmidt (OCNG). The labs of Brendan and Matthew are on the 4th floor of O&M where radiocarbon tracers were previously used by Luis Cifuentes' group and Tammi Richardson (O&M 410, 411). Radiocarbon is (was) also used by Doug Biggs (O&M 506CA) and by Lisa Campbell (O&M 908).

Radiocarbon contamination can be transmitted by physical contact, including shoes and hands. Furthermore, contamination can and has been transmitted through equipment and materials used in tracer experiments and moved to other labs. To minimize movement of this and other contaminating tracers, people working with radiocarbon should avoid labs and even floors where natural abundance radiocarbon samples are handled. That includes the 3rd and 4th floors. Likewise, those doing natural abundance work should avoid 5th and 9th floor labs. In addition, equipment used in radiocarbon tracer experiments should be limited to those labs. On the encouraging side, Niall Slowey (3rd floor) has done natural radiocarbon work for many years and has never encountered a problem.

An ad-hoc committee of 12 faculty and staff members, chaired by Ethan Grossman, has been meeting to address this issue. Based on these discussions, the committee recommends replacing cabinets, benchtops, and hoods where radiocarbon spike has been used or stored. Each faculty member will then perform a thorough cleaning of his/her lab with cleaning solution and with alcohol to remove trace amounts of radiocarbon. Finally, we will perform "swipe" tests to check for contamination. Do not be offended if access to certain labs is restricted to minimize spread of radiocarbon. As noted by Brendan Roark, the silver lining here is that we now have the impetus and opportunity to discuss and develop a management plan for non-natural abundance isotope and tracer experiments in College spaces. Such a plan, and the resulting records, will minimize the potential for contamination, saving money, time and most importantly research projects. I hope we can work together to ensure a safe environment and maintain the integrity of our research programs.

Preliminary Fall 2008 Enrollment

Fifth day preliminary registration figures for the College of Geosciences showed a total enrollment of 830 students, an overall increase of 10.1% (76 students) from fall 2007. Of that, 521 are undergraduates, which is 32 more students than fall 2007 (6.5% gain). Total freshman enrollment grew as well to 91 students (80 in '07). Graduate student enrollment climbed from 265 in fall 2007 to 309 this fall, a 16.6% increase.

A record 48,112 students are enrolled at the University this fall, with the figures also showing more under-represented students in attendance than ever before. Exceeding the 48,000 level for the first time will probably result in Texas A&M remaining at least the sixth-largest university in the nation and possibly moving up in those rankings. The freshman class is the largest in A&M history and one of the largest in the nation with 9,331. Graduate student enrollment totals 9,107, a 427-student increase from last year. A record 5,880 Hispanic students are enrolled this fall, for an increase of 598 over last year, and African-American enrollment stands at 1,560, for a 147-student increase.

Promoted and Tenured Faculty

Six faculty members in the College of Geosciences were approved for tenure and/or promotion by the Board of Regents effective 1 September 2008. We congratulate:

- Craig Epifanio promoted to Associate Professor in Atmospheric Sciences
- John Hopper promoted to Associate Professor in Geology & Geophysics (now at GEUS, Geological Survey of Denmark and Greenland)
- Jennifer McGuire promoted to Associate Professor in Geology & Geophysics (now at the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minnesota)
- Brent Miller promoted to Associate Professor in Geology & Geophysics
- Tom Olszewski promoted to Associate Professor in Geology & Geophysics
- Ping Yang promoted to Professor in Atmospheric Sciences

College Scholarship Banquet 10 October

The annual College Scholarship Banquet will be held at Pebble Creek Country Club on the evening of Friday 10 October. This event recognizes our outstanding undergraduate and graduate students and the generous donors who have established our scholarships, fellowships, and other endowments. This year, College Advisory Council members will also be in attendance. Advisory council member and longstanding College supporter Tom Kelly ’53 will be the featured speaker. All students receiving College or departmental scholarships or fellowships will be invited. Your help in encouraging their attendance at this special event is greatly appreciated. Faculty and academic staff will soon receive formal invitations. This special evening truly celebrates the high caliber of scholastic endeavors within our College. This will be a premier event for the College for all to enjoy.

Proposal Development Resource for Faculty

For any faculty needing assistance with research proposal development, the College has a valuable resource in Jean Ann Bowman, Research Scientist in the TAMU Office of Proposal Development. Jean Ann is available to help faculty from our College develop and write proposals for research funding. She and others in her office work with faculty on proposal narratives to help make them more competitive. Jean Ann received her Ph.D. from our Department of Geography in 1999 with a focus on hydrology. She can be reached at 458-1140, or by e-mail at jbowman@tamu.edu. More information on the Office of Proposal Development can be found at their website - http://opd.tamu.edu.

Bryant to Give University Distinguished Lecture

Congratulations to Bill Bryant, Professor of Oceanography, who has been selected to present a lecture for the 2008-2009 Texas A&M University Distinguished Lecture Series. Bill’s lecture titled “In Search of the Sea Floor” will be presented during spring semester 2009. Established in 1998, this annual series features lectures by renowned individuals from outside the University and distinguished members of the Texas A&M faculty.

Mathewson Wins Pete Henley Mentor Award

Congratulations to Chris Mathewson, Regent’s Professor of Geology, for being selected to receive the Pete Henley Mentor Award from the Texas Section of the Association of Environmental and Engineering Geologists (AEG). The award recognizes individuals who have made lifelong efforts in providing

professional, ethical, and technical mentoring for engineering and environmental geologists. The award is named after Aubrey "Pete" Henley, who was instrumental in founding the Texas Section of AEG.

Kennicutt Elected President of SCAR

Chuck Kennicutt, Professor of Oceanography and Director of Sustainable Development in the Office of the Vice President for Research, was elected president of the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) at its biennial meetings in St. Petersburg and Moscow, Russia, this summer. SCAR was established in 1958 to coordinate ongoing Antarctic research. It is an inter-disciplinary body of the International Council for Science. SCAR provides high quality, objective and independent scientific advice to the bodies of the Antarctic Treaty System.

Faculty Breakfast Held 29 August

I was pleased to welcome new and returning faculty at our annual Fall Faculty Breakfast on Friday 29 August at the MSC. I took the opportunity to share some of the accomplishments of the College this past academic year and to highlight promotions, awards and honors earned by the faculty. Approximately 40 people attended. The PowerPoint slideshow I shared is posted under “Presentations” on the College Website at http://geosciences.tamu.edu/content/view/160/87/.

New Geology & Geophysics Website Introduced

The College recently introduced a newly designed website for the Department of Geology & Geophysics under the domain name geoweb.tamu.edu. This is the fourth departmental website in the College to incorporate the new Texas A&M logo and style specifications. The new Geology & Geophysics website includes pages for recruiters and industry partners; current, prospective and former students; and extensive information on research programs and facilities. The home page features the latest news from the department and a link to virtual field trips so that visitors to the site can get a feel for what classical field geology is all about. Visit the new Department of Geology & Geophysics website at http://geoweb.tamu.edu.

Get All the News!

Keep up with news from the College and our departments by subscribing to the RSS feed on the College website at http://geosciences.tamu.edu/. Click on the RSS feed icon next to “Latest News.”

Facilities Report

Halbouty

- R. Ken Williams’45 Radiogenic Isotope Geosciences Laboratory. This year-long project is nearing its end. Lab operators have been adding final touches such as adjusting the laminar flow hoods, addressing air imbalances, scrubbing and scouring, and caulking surfaces in the chemistry labs. Contractors have fixed a floor and a fan motor. The lab will be operational this month.
- Roof. Delayed by recent rains, the roofing job is now scheduled to end before the contract date in mid-October. Roofers are not permitted to work if the weather forecast contains a 30% or greater chance of rain. The contractor had been several days ahead of schedule before the storms in mid-August, and now Hurricane Gustav likely will delay completion of the job. When work on old Halbouty is finished (shortly, weather permitting), the contractor will relocate the dumpster and tar boiler to the sculpture plaza between New Halbouty and Physics.
- Automatic Door Locks. The budget has been approved for installation of automatic door locks for most of the exterior doors of both Halbouty buildings. Card readers will be installed on two doors, one in each building. The ornate front doors are not included in this project; the required hardware would damage them. They will be locked manually in future.

O&M

- 206. Classroom construction was completed at 1:00 pm on Sunday 24 August, 11 days behind schedule. College staff (thanks, Maureen Reap and Michele Beal!) and their offspring worked Sunday afternoon to furnish and equip the classroom. Media Services is supplying temporary audio/visual equipment. On 8 September they will install the permanent ceiling-mounted projector. An updated podium and other equipment, towards which the College contributed, probably will not be installed until the winter holiday. Owing to construction delays, there was no time for Media Services to install the new A/V package before classes began. Furniture ordered by the College for this classroom, including comfortable student desks on casters and an adjustable table for ADA considerations, is expected to arrive in the coming week.
- 207 & 208. With completion of the second floor classroom renovation, the job for a second laboratory has been resubmitted to Physical Plant and a project manager has been assigned. Construction of a new teaching lab (207) and renovation of OCNG's current undergraduate lab (208) are planned. This project will be advertised for bids from outside contractors to achieve lower cost and on-time completion. The construction period will be next May-June. The work will be scheduled to minimize disruption of classes and final exams.
- Suite 702 (DiMarco). Asbestos abatement of the floor was completed coincident with the work done in Room 206. Now that 206 is finished, construction in 702 will proceed. A six-week completion schedule is projected. The renovated suite will house two professors, a research scientist, two post-docs and six graduate students.
- 714 & 715 (Mills). Materials and equipment have been ordered for these rooms. This project has been delayed by the demands on Physical Plant to prepare the campus for the fall semester. Work should begin shortly.