College of Geosciences at Texas A&M University

Information Letter #7

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

DATE: 28 March 2007

The spring semester is more than half completed, and I would like to update you on a number of issues of relevance to the faculty and staff in the College of Geosciences. As you know, the Texas Legislature is in session until June, and our budget for the next biennium is being set. This spring is thus a very important reporting period, and it is a priority of the Interim President, Dr. Eddie J. Davies, and the administration of TAMU is to work closely with members of the legislature during the next several months. A newsworthy item, only yesterday, it was announced that the Executive Vice President and Provost of Texas A&M University, Dr. David B. Prior, the former Dean of the College of Geosciences, will leave the university to assume the position of Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs of the University of Texas System in Austin, effective 15 June. We wish David all the best!

What Is Expected of a Faculty Member in the College of Geosciences?

What constitutes being a professor in the College of Geosciences? There really is not a universal answer, but a professor should certainly teach classes, be a mentor to undergraduate and graduate students, be a scientist, scholar, leader to students and researchers in his/her field of endeavor, and provide service within the university and in the field of specialization. Although no absolute expectations exist, there are generally accepted guidelines as to what is expected of a professor in the College of Geosciences.

In the state of the College address last fall, I recognized that the College of Geosciences must be balanced, fair and equitable in how it uses its resources and rewards its people. We have a remarkable faculty, including top-notch researchers, master teachers, highly effective student mentors, and service providers to the University and the Geosciences community at large. What metrics and how they are used to allocate resources and measure faculty performance is a topic that merits serious attention.

A professor in ATMO and OCNG is expected to teach one course per semester, whereas a professor in GEPL teaches two to three courses per year, and a professor in GEOG teaches two courses per semester. This inequity in the number of courses taught is, in part, the accepted culture in the respective fields of specialization at TAMU and its peer institutions. Teaching students is typically 40-45% of the workload of a faculty member and is assessed and evaluated in terms of both quality (as judged by evaluations) and production (measured in terms of SCHs generated). A professor who no longer engages actively in research, should teach at least two courses per semester, and could be asked to teach three courses, independent of field of specialization.

Research typically constitutes 40-45% of the workload for a faculty member in the College of Geosciences, and for a faculty member to become a full professor requires an international reputation. Research is measured in terms of quality of scholarly output and research productivity (measured in terms of books, peer-reviewed journal articles and research leading to commercialization, and amount of extramural funding to support research). I have for three years challenged every faculty member in the College to submit three research or educational proposals annually for extramural funding; if good proposals are not submitted regularly, funding is not forthcoming and resources become limited. The inequity of

teaching expectations between the departments reflects the fact that ATMO and OCNG generate significantly more extramural funding than GEPL and GEOG (by a factor of 4-5), but if and when GEPL and GEOG reach similar funding levels, I will work with the Department Head to provide individual faculty members with appropriate teaching relief.

Texas A&M University is an institution of higher education where teaching and training of students is a priority. Faculty members serve as mentors to students, particularly graduate students. A faculty member in the College of Geosciences is expected to mentor graduate students towards M.S. and Ph.D. degrees, and ideally also support them as GARs on extramural research funding. Graduate student mentoring is becoming an increasingly more important evaluation factor in tenure, promotion, and salary merit increase decisions. Whereas faculty members are applauded for supporting post-docs on research grants, the mentoring and funding of graduate students is valued far more highly in comparison.

All faculty members are expected to provide service to the department, the College, and TAMU through committees. They are also expected to provide service to national, international societies and journals in their fields of specialization. Service activities are anticipated to occupy no more than 10-20% of a faculty member's time (but less service is expected of assistant professors).

Your activities are evaluated annually by your Department Head, based on your faculty evaluation form (3G), according to the quality and productivity of your teaching, research, mentoring, and service activities during the past year. Clearly, no one professor has the exact same balance between these activities, and there is considerable flexibility in the system. Faculty members who are more engaged and successful in sponsored research typically teach a lighter load and vice versa. However, everyone has the responsibility to teach the minimum required number of courses (on average at least one course per semester with the minimum TAMU approved number of students in each class) and to mentor graduate students.

In the fall 2004, the College began the development of a web-based system for reporting (3Gs). The primary goal for this database is to facilitate compilation of research, teaching, mentoring and service data at the department and college levels to define a college datum. As we have compiled these data for the past three years, we are now able to begin assessing annual teaching, publishing, funding, mentoring, and service activities and successes in the College. Queries of the database will help us better evaluate how you have apportioned your time between teaching, research, mentoring and service. Your department head will evaluate and reward your performance based on these mostly objective data, recognizing that every faculty member has a different teaching, research, mentoring and service profile. It is our desire to standardize the faculty evaluation process, accurately report on the data, and promote and reward fairly those faculty members who perform to and beyond expectations.

Dr. Sarah Bednarz Honored

Dr. Sarah Bednarz, GEOG Associate Professor, has been selected by the Association of American Geographers (AAG) Honors Committee to receive the Gilbert Grosvenor Honors for Geographic Education of the Association of American Geographers for 2007. The AAG will confer this award to Dr. Bednarz on 21 April in San Francisco. The award is one of the greatest honors for an educational geographer. I should also mention that Dr. Bednarz received the George G. Miller Award from the National Council for Geographic Education in 2005. Thus, Dr. Bednarz has received the two most prestigious awards in geographical education. Congratulations to Dr. Sarah Bednarz!

ConocoPhillips Scholarships

Each year, ConocoPhillips presents a $1M gift to Texas A&M University. The College of Geosciences was the recipient of $156,000 of this funding in 2006-2007. The lion's share of these funds ($140K) was distributed directly to students in the form of graduate fellowships in the Department of Geology & Geophysics. An additional $13K provided support and sponsorship of the ConocoPhillips Colloquium Series in Geology and Geophysics. This is a weekly colloquium series for G&G faculty, students and open to the public. Further, the College of Geosciences received $3K, which was used to support College faculty participation in educational enhancement activities such as faculty research grant writing workshops.

New Rules for International Student Travel

TAMU ranks as the 16th university in the Nation in terms of numbers of international students (Fall 2005). International travel is common for both international and domestic students. It is to be noted that there are new rules for student travel, including guidelines on international travel and requirements for travel notification. All students traveling on University business must register at http://cirt.tamu.edu.

Environmental Programs in the College

Dr. Andrew Millington (Interim Director of Environmental Programs) reports that the Environmental Programs Committee (EPC), which consists of Drs. Millington (GEOG), Sarah Bednarz (GEOG), Don Collins (ATMO), Jennifer McGuire (GEPL), and Bob Stewart (OCNG), has held its first meeting for the semester and is currently making progress on the following tasks: (1) undertaking a thorough review of the BS Environmental Geosciences and Environmental Studies degree plans/curricula; (2) reviewing models for affiliated faculty elsewhere in the University as a prelude to establishing an affiliated environmental faculty drawn from all departments and other sections within the College of Geosciences; (3) establishing a constitution for the EPC to allow rotation of membership and representation from parts of the College; (4) developing ways to improve the experiences for students on the two environmental degrees, and (5) revamping the environmental programs web pages. Dr. Millington is starting a round of meetings with Department Heads as we embark on these changes. The committee members want to have as wide a dialogue as possible to improve and optimize the environmental programs. Please, contact Dr. Millington or the representative in your departments for ideas, suggestions, and insights. Success in these programs needs faculty feedback.

Antigua Update

February 3-4 marked the second all scientists meeting between Texas A&M and the University of Miami to prepare for implementation of the *Integrated Ecological Assessment of Antigua and Barbuda: Identification of Management Options*. This project meeting focused, in part, on efforts to raise awareness in Antigua and Barbuda. The meeting brought together 25 scientists from each institution. On the first day, we were able to view the outstanding video and public relations “I Believe” campaign which is now underway. The video outlined the need for public involvement in restoring and maintaining the health of coastal habitats around Antigua. On the second day, the project teams gave status reports and defined milestones. While the project awaits governmental approvals, we are optimistic that work in Antigua can begin soon.

Status of IT Projects

Overwhelmed by heat and loud jet-like machine noises emanating from makeshift server rooms near your office? Are ugly, obtrusive servers encroaching on your valuable space? Need a place to host your research cluster? If so, then keep reading to learn more about how your college IT and facilities management staff are teaming together to build a new 1,000 SF data center in O&M building room B04. The College’s new data center is one component of a larger IT initiative to improve services, availability, and responsiveness, and reduce overall cost while aligning IT expenditures with the college’s academic and research goals. Our new data center facility will be engineered to support all existing and future college/department rack-mounted servers. In fact, TAMU CIS and Physical Plant, with assistance from a local engineering firm, are helping us redesign B04’s power, air conditioning, fire suppression, network and physical security infrastructure. The design phase is nearly complete and construction should begin within two to three months.

Following construction, Geosciences IT staff will begin installing basic ISP (internet service provider)-like services, including email, web, database, centralized storage and network authentication services. These services will be offered to all department customers (staff, faculty, researchers, and grad students) in three phases over the next 12-18 months. At the same time, the College will begin offering help with new services by creating a new IT service desk. Our ultimate goal is to offer Geosciences customers with assured access to information, people and things (e.g., printers) via secure, high speed networks from anywhere at any time (24/7) and under any condition…with more efficiency and at less cost. Those interested in learning more about this effort or providing information regarding future data center requirements should contact Jim Rosser (jrosser@tamu.edu).

Need Help With Communications?

Many of us in the College of Geosciences require special assistance with graphics, web, news and photography related services. Our only college-wide communications expert, Jay Slovacek, is dedicated to serving the needs of all our departments.

I have assigned Jay to work on several high impact projects over the next year to benefit our college, including a new content management system, updated department web sites, GeoConnections 2007, recruiting materials, college branding, presentations for VIPs and information exchanges, information letters, new faculty profiles, college portraits and news stories. Some of these projects require months of work to complete.

If you have communications needs not suitable for accomplishment by a student worker or staff member, please forward

your request to Jay with a copy to Jim Rosser so that Jay and Jim can determine priority relative to other tasks and provide you with a realistic date of accomplishment. We remain committed to helping you achieve success.

Update on College Facilities

Facility projects are proceeding in O&M and Teague for reinvestment faculty and classroom renovation. The Council on the Built Environment (CBE) is driving both. Eliminating classrooms on the upper floors of Harrington and O&M is a facilities management goal that CBE is addressing in conjunction with the Reinvestment renovations.

Reinvestment Projects:

- O&M 4th floor. The Drs Mitch and Annette Lyle will move into rooms 410 and 411 this month; room 406 is having ceiling and a/c work done; room 408 is being cleared in preparation for major construction.
- O&M 7th floor. The architect's plan has been approved by GEOG, the head of department, and the faculty representatives. Construction will begin in May and will be completed by 15 August.
- O&M 12th floor plans. The architect has presented a first draft plan to Maureen Reap and Drs. R. Saravanan and Ken Bowman, and is being scrutinized. Maureen is looking into what can be done about the noise from the exhaust chase on the east end of the floor. Construction is scheduled to be undertaken this summer.
- Radiogenic Lab in Halbouty. Physical Plant is in the process of bidding the project. Reinvestment funds will cover part of the costs.

Other Projects:

- The sunken floor in the Old Halbouty building has proven to be more difficult to correct than Physical Plant had initially thought. However, the work is now close to being finished, and classes should be able to resume in those rooms soon.
- The College is planning to renovate the east hall of the second floor of O&M for academic better optimization of the space. CBE approval is required because we plan to modify Room 210, which is a Registrar-controlled classroom. If approved, we will downsize Room 211 and create two teaching labs in lieu of the present lab in Room 210. The College office suite, room 209, will be demolished for the new classroom that will replace the current Room 210. Room 210 now seats 74, whereas the new classroom (to become Room 209) will hold 49 and will have more flexible seating. The work is projected to take place in the summer of 2008. Comments are welcome. If you wish to see the floor plan, please contact Maureen Reap; mreap@tamu.edu.
- As part of the proposed dean's office renovation, TTVN Room 205 will become office space, and classroom 206 will be renovated to become the new TTVN facility. Room 206 has been decommissioned by the Registrar effective this summer. Renovations will begin at the end of this semester.
- With respect to the Fall 2007 classroom assignments, the College will slot ATMO, GEOG, and OCNG courses into the classrooms on the first two floors, rooms 103, 110, 112, 206 (TTVN) and 210. Classrooms in the CSA (Teague) Building will be fully utilized as well, primarily by GEOG. Non-Geosciences courses will be assigned to O&M classrooms after our own requirements have been met. GEPL is not impacted by changes in O&M class assignments.