College of Geosciences at Texas A&M University

Information Letter #1

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: 4 May 2006

"The more we elaborate our means of communication, the less we communicate", wrote J. B. Priestley, the English author and dramatist. In spite of email, web pages, teleconferencing, there is still much room for improving communications within the College of Geosciences. To ensure better communication and thus better understanding, I will communicate with you through an information letter, this being the first issue, sent to you by email and also posted at http://geosciences.tamu.edu. I will also host a series of "town hall" meetings with small groups of faculty and/or staff in the college to listen to your concerns and give you the opportunity to ask questions and voice your opinions. I ask for your constructive feedback.

My goal is to communicate relevant happenings around the University and in the College in a more timely fashion and foster an informed, collegial, and productive College work environment. Not all of the issues will be covered in this first information letter, more will follow in information letters to come.

Tenured and Promoted

Six faculty in the College of Geosciences were tenured and/or promoted, effective 1 September 2006, and were recognized at a reception last night at Pebble Creek. Please join me in congratulating: Dr. Fuqing Zhang, promoted to associate professor and tenured in ATMO; Dr. Christian Brannstrom, promoted to associate professor and tenured in GEOG; Dr. Hongxing Liu, promoted to associate professor and tenured in GEOG; Dr. Rob Hetland, promoted to associate professor and tenured in OCNG; Dr. Lisa Campbell, promoted to professor in OCNG; and Dr. Bruce Herbert, promoted to professor in GEPL.. Join me in congratulating these six faculty!

Undergraduate and Graduate Education Emphasis

When Dr. Robert M. Gates became President of Texas A&M University in 2002, he decided to focus on four aspects of the 2020 Vision plan. He began with the bold faculty reinvestment initiative to hire a total of 450 new faculty members – a project soon entering its fourth year. He decided to emphasize diversity that has lead to record increases in Hispanic and African-American students and an increased number of women and minority faculty hires. He

prioritized the improvement of campus facilities, and he has worked to enhance the graduate and undergraduate student experience. This has resulted in improvements for graduate students by ensuring coverage of tuition and health insurance for all graduate assistants.

An undergraduate Task Force has elaborated ways in which to provide an improved undergraduate experience. At the same time the implementation of a flat 15 credit hour tuition and additional WSCH's and SCH's will help finance these improvements. The charge from the University to all departments and colleges is to raise additional WSCH's and SCH's by 4.1% by next fall, the same we grew last year. The College of Geosciences is working to fulfill its responsibility via increased enrollments in each department. This is a challenge that we all need to keep in mind and work to fulfill. We are also planning to offer more honors courses in the College departments.

Enrollment Update

President Gates has recently announced that he will allow the enrollment at Texas A&M University to rise to 48,500 students. In response to Dr. Gate's 5-year initiative to increase undergraduate and graduate student enrollments by 2,500 and 1,000, respectively, the College of Geosciences needs to increase freshmen and transfer student enrollment by 9 students and graduate enrollment by 10 students during the 2006-2007 academic year. TAMU's goal is to admit an additional 850 undergraduates this coming fall, including 350 "first time in college" freshmen and 500 transfer students from community colleges. TAMU is pursuing articulation agreements with numerous community colleges to aid in the recruitment of transfer students.

We have requested admissions for more "first time" freshmen than transfer students. Our graduation and retention rate among transfers is relatively low compared to our freshmen rates. The University is aware that these increases will impact the student/faculty ratio goals as well as the overall quality of education. Hence, discussions are ongoing to provide additional resources, e.g. new faculty, TA's and space. As of yesterday, there are now 7,300 new freshmen admitted for Fall 2006. Whereas an increase in undergraduate enrollment is easy to implement, the increase of 1,000 graduate students will be much more difficult, as the majority of these new graduate students will have to be funded as GAR's on research grants and/or some extra funding from the University. The success in increasing graduate students across campus and in the College of Geosciences, however, will largely depend on the increased research funding by the faculty.

Budget Update

Largely because of soaring energy costs, the University is experiencing a $16.21 million FY07 budget deficit and has been working on legal but creative means of mitigating the shortfall. At this point, it appears that there will a modest (possibly as high as 3%) merit pool. That is the good news. However, at least $3 million of the shortfall will be distributed among the colleges. The College of Geosciences was yesterday informed that the college's share of the $3 million rebate is $118,264. We are currently deciding from which activities/accounts to contribute to covering the TAMU shortfall. The upper administration is to be congratulated for having protected the colleges' budgets and keeping the amount we are asked to contribute much less than we had originally feared.

College Governance

The Executive Committee of the College of Geosciences meets monthly to discuss and resolve salient issues in the College. The Dean's Office (Kjerfve, Cifuentes, Tchakerian, and Mills) are joined by the unit heads and directors (Orville, Sherman/Smith, Carlson, Morse, Guinasso, Fox, and Stickney) and constitute the Executive Committee. All major decisions and happenings in the College are discussed by the committee, and all new College policies are approved and voted on before acceptance. The critiques on the recent unit strategic plans were provided by the Executive Committee members.

GFAC

GFAC is an important College committee, permitting faculty members to be heard without having to go through the unit head. GFAC only met a couple of times during the past year, but has been reconstituted and will henceforth regularly meet on a monthly basis. Faculty members are advised to contact members of GFAC for relevant issues – especially related to the welfare of the faculty – to be raised, discussed, and resolved. As an example, I will ask GFAC to review and maybe revise the College T/P procedures. The current GFAC members are:

- D. Wiltschko, GEPL, Chair
- C. Brannstrom, GEOG, Vice-chair
- J. Wormuth, OCNG, Secretary
- D. Collins, ATMO
- R. Gibson, GEPL
- A. Klein, GEOG
- A. Orsi, OCNG
- R. Saravanan, ATMO

Policy and Procedures

To ensure consistency and fairness, the College of Geosciences has revised and formalized a number of policies and procedures. These policies and procedures will be posted on the College website. New policies have been unanimously approved and adopted by the College Executive Committee. New policies include:

- Faculty Hiring Procedures
- Faculty Start-Up Allocations
- Indirect Cost Return Allocation
- Endowed Chairs and Professorships
- Faculty Consulting, External Teaching, and Other Employment

Changes in Research Funding

The proposal to morph the Texas A&M University Research Foundation (TAMRF) into the Office of the Vice President for Research (OVPR) has been tabled. However, the University, with the backing of the Chancellor, is pushing TAMRF to lower the cost of pre and post-award services. These services are currently approaching 30% of IDC. Since our goal is to reduce TAMRF costs to 25% of IDC, this will have an impact on our college by increasing the IDC to the College 35% from 33.13%. This year, the IDC was split between departments and college at a ratio of 2.5 to 1.0. Department heads were asked to consult with the faculty and decide how each unit shares IDC between the department and the PIs. The College portion of IDC is almost exclusively used to cover start-up packages for new faculty.

IDC Rates Under Scrutiny

As a side effect of IDC changes, the OVPR will scrutinize all prior agreements and new requests of reduced IDC rates on grants. At present the IDC rate is 45.5%. In years past, deals were often made with the OVPR to lower the rate for centers and large money grants. In the College of Geosciences, some of these deals go back to the 1980s. The OVPR has asked us to review all IDC rate agreements and propose changes to those agreements that are no longer relevant. We will begin doing so this summer. At the request of the Provost the OVPR will be hesitant to approve lower IDC rates but would potentially, if justified, be willing to consider deals that return a greater portion of the IDC to a PI/project. The bottom line is that TAMU wants to increase IDC recovery and this would also be good for the College of Geosciences, providing additional resources for instrumentation and facilities.

Facilities Update

In December 2006, the College Geosciences will embark on a project to optimize people and workflow in the dean's office by renovating space on the second floor in O&M, including rooms 204 and 205. The renovation will be funded by private contributions, specifically donated towards this purpose. The project includes an updated conference room with video conferencing capabilities, available for use by all college faculty, staff, and students for research and professional meetings, video conferences, student defenses and other purposes requiring video conferencing for up to 20 persons.

O&M 206 will be equipped as an improved TTVN classroom with approximately 40 seats by spring 2006. Further, the College will work with TAMU to update and improve the classroom technology and electrical systems in O&M 112 by the start of Fall 2006. O&M 112 will offer a completely overhauled classroom presentation system with new projection system, new computer, new document cameras, new podium, new sound system, enhanced support by Instructional Media Services, and basic distance learning delivery system for lectures, a somewhat simpler form as compared to TTVN. Physical Plant will correct 112's cumbersome electrical wiring. Both O&M 206 and 112 will be managed by TAMU but closely monitored by the Director of IT and Communications in the College.

At the same time, O&M 210, which currently hosts one Geography course, will become a new classroom for six OCNG classes. O&M 210 will be shortened but will still have room for 40 students (but not 60). Thus, in principle, O&M 206 will replace O&M 205, and O&M 210 will replace O&M 206, at the same time there will be three, rather than one, available video conferencing/TTVN facilities in the building for common use by College faculty and staff.

The College is also working to double the laboratory classroom facilities on the second floor in O&M, to allow OCNG to expand its OCNG 252 offerings and give other units options to use the space. The plan is to make two separate laboratory classrooms out of the current O&M 211 and portions of O&M 210. The planning for this change has begun and will be vetted further with DH's and interested faculty.

March's Spring Cleaning event in O&M was successful. A 30-yard dumpster was filled twice with discards. A total of 5 tons of "stuff" was removed from O&M. The collection of surplus computers yielded nearly 60 machines of various descriptions. While many were taken directly to Surplus, some are still being processed. IT personnel harvested usable parts before the machines were removed from the building.

Air conditioning problems continue to plague O&M. Physical Plant, Area Maintenance, the Energy Office, and Siemens continue to monitor the building. They have had some success in moderating temperatures case by case. Similarly, the computer room on the third floor in Halbouty is overheating and we are looking at options to remedy this problem.

The O&M terrace work is done. Next follows the exterior cladding project, wherein the grout in all the joints will be drilled out and replaced, and the entire facade will be cleaned (including windows). This work was planned to begin in May, but appears to be delayed until June. Unfortunately, it will take 6 months to complete the project. Plans are in place to move personnel discomfited by noise or vibration.

Room B04, a 1,024 square foot facility with raised flooring, is slated to become the primary server room for the College of Geosciences. It is being completely cleared and cleaned in preparation for renovation later this year. Jim Rosser is currently presenting his implementation plan to department IT committee chairs for review and feedback. More details will follow in a future Information-letter.

Recent Personnel Changes

The College of Geosciences hired a Director of IT and Communications in December 2005. Jim Rosser joined the College from Tampa Florida, where he was the Deputy Director of Intelligence Systems for the United States Central Command. Jim advises college and department leadership on all matters pertaining to information technology and communications, conducts strategic IT planning, develops IT architectures for new initiatives, coordinates and leads new college IT projects, and facilitates internal and external communication. Within the next year, Jim will assume responsibility for managing college IT operations and maintenance, to include classroom technology and common IT services (e.g., IT security, email, web delivery, domain authentication, and labs).

Jay Slovacek joined the College of Geosciences as its Communications Specialist in March 2006. Jay is an Aggie from B/CS with BS in journalism. His duties will cover publications, graphics, web and photography for the Dean's Office College but also for departments and research groups. Jay will be delighted to help departments and other units in the College with promotional, newsletter, and web design issues.

Greg Willems, Development Officer, was promoted on 1 May 2006 to Director of Development for the College of Engineering. We will deeply miss Greg, who provided tireless fundraising efforts for the College. We are currently working with the A&M Foundation to identify a suitable replacement for Greg.

Dr. John Morse is serving as Interim Head of the Department of Oceanography from January-31 August 2006, while an OCNG search committee is conducting a national search for a new Head of Department. Dr. Jerry North is directing the search, reports that more than 40 individuals have been contacted and that at least 6 full applications have been received. Dr. North will seek the input of the OCNG faculty, staff, and students and will make recommendations to the Dean for the hiring of a new DH. Interviews are likely to be conducted beginning this month, according to Dr. North.

College of Geosciences Web Pages

Please visit http://geosciences.tamu.edu of you have not done so recently to view the completely revised web site of the College of Geosciences. The credit for redoing our web presentation goes to Jim Rosser, who has done a superb job. The College of Geosciences is the first College to adopt the new TAMU templates for the design of web pages. Jay Slovacek is responsible for keeping the web pages up to date. Departments and other units in the College are encouraged to seek the assistance of Jim and Jay in revising their web offerings. So far all updates are conducted manually, requiring the writing of html code. However, the plan is to change to a content management system within the next year, to allow any departmental employee to make updates without knowledge of html coding.