

Information Letter #22

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

FROM: Björn Kjerfve, Dean
College of Geosciences

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JOIDES Resolution Sails Again

The Scientific Ocean Drilling Vessel (SODV) *JOIDES Resolution* will make a port call in Honolulu, Hawaii, 6 May after completing the first leg of its first drilling expedition since undergoing a \$115+ Million renovation. The port call will feature speeches, ship tours and a science lecture given by Peggy Delaney of the University of California Santa Cruz who chaired the Program Advisory Committee for the SODV conversion. Speeches will be given by National Science Foundation Director Arden Bement, Consortium for Ocean Leadership CEO Bob Gagosian, and University of Hawaii Dean of the School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology Brian Taylor. When the ship departs again for the second leg of the Pacific Equatorial Age Transect expedition, OCNIG Professor Mitch Lyle will be co-chief scientist with Isabella Raffi of the Università "G. D'Annunzio" Campus Universitario in Italy. G&G Assistant Professor Bridget Wade will be on the expedition as well. The *JOIDES Resolution* is managed by IODP-TAMU on behalf of the US Implementing Organization and is among the finest working research vessels operating today.

New College Website Launched

Last week Geosciences launched a new website for the College that incorporates A&M's style requirements and is built in the newest version of Joomla 1.5. With this site open, the web development team plans to begin migrating each department website into the new format and version of Joomla. A new site for GERG is already being developed. Please explore this updated and expanded site, and pass on your comments to Web Developer Jennifer Rumford at jrumford@tamu.edu, who is continuing to do a splendid job with the College of Geosciences website.

ATMO External Review

The Office of Graduate Studies conducted a review of the Atmospheric Sciences Academic Program during a site visit 29 March – 1 April 2009. External reviewers were William Brune, Pennsylvania State University; Dennis L. Hartman, University of Washington; Kuo-Nan Liou, University of California, Los Angeles; and William Randel, National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR).

The committee noted that they were struck by the dramatic turn-around in the status of the Department of Atmospheric Sciences given that in the mid 1980s, the program was "clearly heading toward extinction." The Department's 2001 review showed that it had built a solid foundation on which to grow, and since then it has developed into a comprehensive program – both in terms of research areas and in terms of strong undergraduate and graduate academic programs – with the increased support and faculty positions that came from the College and University, including the Faculty Reinvestment Fund. The panel noted that the Department has taken full advantage of the opportunities that the increased support and faculty positions offers and has become competitive with the top-tier meteorology and atmospheric science departments in the U.S. They noted that "as with all academic programs, the Department of Atmospheric Sciences can still improve,

but the improvements in just the last eight years have been remarkable.” Additional comments and recommendations were made regarding faculty, staffing and management, undergraduate and graduate academic programs, and relationships with other programs. The full report is posted online at http://geoscience.tamu.edu/media/pdfs/atmo_report.pdf.

The Office of Graduate Studies will structure a plan for implementation of the recommendations by the external review committee.

GERG External Review

A committee comprised of Kent Fanning, University of South Florida; Fredrick Prah, Oregon State University, and Robert Weller, Woods Hole Oceanography Institution, conducted an external review of GERG last month. According to their findings, GERG has important and largely unrecognized strengths that have the potential to provide significant support for research and education to both the College and the Department of Oceanography in at least four critical areas: (1) analytical capabilities for hydrographic parameters, trace metals, and natural and pollutant organics in the environment and organisms, (2) development of moorings and other equipment as well as data analysis to facilitate study of oceanographic and atmospheric processes, (3) the staging required for marine and other field research utilizing large equipment, and (4) the education and support of graduate students with interests in environmental study.

The committee noted GERG's strengths in both ocean sciences and environmental chemistry. In ocean sciences, the committee said that GERG has an impressive capability to design, build, and deploy oceanographic *in situ* instruments at locations from the Gulf of Mexico to diverse global sites, and skilled staff capable of completing projects in service to the State of Texas or industry and to support research programs in OCNG. They said that the ocean sciences group is both a vital ongoing effort and a potential kernel of expertise for future field efforts by OCNG. The committee noted that GERG's environmental chemistry group has a long-term, well-established record of having done highly effective contract work for a variety of clients and is one of perhaps only three major labs in the nation that serves the contract analytical needs of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for measurement of various priority pollutants in fish tissue. They also noted that even with their relatively small staff, this group has managed to consistently provide an educational benefit to graduate students from both OCNG and GEOG as demonstrated by their publication record.

The committee provided recommendations to maximize GERG's value and for better administrative integration with the College and increased financial support from the University. They also recommended affiliating GERG senior scientists with the University by appointment as part time research faculty, affiliating OCNG scientists/faculty with GERG by encouraging and creating incentives for OCNG faculty to frequently use or reside at GERG, identifying strategic opportunities for GERG, and establishing appropriate levels of University financial support for GERG and its senior scientists. The full committee report is available online at <http://geoscience.tamu.edu/media/pdfs/gerg.pdf>.

The next step in the review process will be for the College to explore how best to implement committee recommendations and how to make collaborating with OCNG more seamless. This and other discussions relative to the future structure and operation of GERG will take place in the fall of 2009.

FY2009/2010 Budget Presentation

Each spring the College participates in budget presentations to University administration that highlight the respective unit's programs and accomplishments since the previous year's presentation and summarizes the current financial status and plans for the coming year. This year's presentation (http://geoscience.tamu.edu/media/presentations/budget2009_10.pdf) was made to University officials on 1 April 2009.

College Endowed Chairs and Professorships Policy Updated

After extensive review and endorsement by the Geosciences Faculty Advisory Committee (GFAC) and approval of the Geosciences Executive Committee, the Dean of Faculties, and the Provost and Executive Vice President for Academics, the College of Geosciences' Endowed Chairs and Professorships Administrative Policy (<http://geoscience.tamu.edu/files/chairs.pdf>) has been officially revised to provide the following: (1) clarification of the nomination packet requirements to include a statement of the nominee's anticipated activities if appointed; (2) greater flexibility for a chair holder in utilizing chair funds for salary by providing an administrative stipend option, and (3) formalization of the process for granting policy exceptions for extenuating circumstances. With finalization and adoption of the revised policy, the College will next begin the process to fill current vacant chairs and professorships in the fall of 2009.

Millington Appointed Director of Environmental Programs

Andrew Millington, professor of GEOG, has been appointed director of the Environmental Programs in Geosciences. Andrew has been interim director since 2007 and has overseen the growth of the Environmental Programs from approximately 70 to over 100 majors. His persistence and patience as the interim director for the past two years are important factors in the success of the Environmental Programs, and it is clear that this program will continue to gain momentum as the student enrollment increases. Andrew joined GEOG in 2005 after having held academic appointments at the University of Sierra Leone in West Africa and the universities of Reading and Leicester (England). At Leicester he served as head of the Geography Department from 1995 to 2000 and planned and managed a 50% expansion in the size of that department.

After extensive review and approval of the Geosciences Executive Committee, the Dean of Faculties, and the Provost and Executive Vice President for Academics, the bylaws for the Environmental Programs in Geosciences have been formally adopted.

Sager Honored with University Distinguished Achievement Award for Research

Will Sager, professor in OCNG and holder of the Jane and R. Ken Williams '45 Endowed Chair in Ocean Drilling, has been honored by the University with a 2009 Distinguished Achievement Award for Research. Twenty-four faculty and staff were chosen to receive Distinguished Achievement Awards, which are organized by category including teaching, research, staff, and student relations. Will is one of six faculty to receive the award for research. As a recipient, Will receives a \$4,000 award, an engraved watch, and a commemorative plaque. The awards ceremony will be held 28 April at 1:30p.m. in Rudder Theatre.

2008 Halbouty Medal Awarded to Clayton Williams Jr.

It was my great pleasure to present the Michel T. Halbouty Geosciences Medal to Mr. Clayton W. Williams Jr. '54 at a special celebration in his honor on 24 March. Claytie spoke with our geosciences students and faculty, sharing his insights, opinions, and wisdom gained throughout his 50+ years building the oil and gas industry in Texas. If you missed Claytie's presentation, listen to the podcast posted on the College of Geosciences iTunesU site at <http://itunes.tamu.edu>.

James Royce Whatley '47 Gives \$2M to Geosciences & Mays

James Royce Whatley '47, an East Texas businessman who passed away in 2005, bequeathed \$2 million for endowed faculty chairs in the College of Geosciences and Mays Business School. Although he did not get a degree in the geosciences, Mr. Whatley made tremendous oil/energy contributions. Through his professional and personal association with Michel T. Halbouty and others in the oil industry, he became well acquainted with our College and served for many years on the College Advisory Council. His personal involvement and this lasting gift are testament to his commitment to geoscience education at Texas A&M.

Geography Department Garners Awards at AAG Conference

Several faculty and graduate students in GEOG won awards at the Association of American Geographers (AAG) Conference in March. Assistant Professor Tina Mangieri won the Nystrom Award, an annual prize for a paper presented at the meeting based upon a recent dissertation in geography. Associate Professor Charles Lafon won the Denali Award from the Mountain Geography Specialty Group which recognizes recent significant contributions to mountain geography, and Associate Professor David Cairns and Lafon won the Cowles Award from the Biogeography Specialty Group for an outstanding biogeography paper published in the last 12 months. Four Ph.D. students won awards from their specialty groups for papers they presented: Danny Redo, Bailang Li, Eugene Farrell, and Minsung Kim.

Oceanography Graduate Student to Attend Nobel Laureates Meeting

Brandi Kiel Reese, a Ph.D. student in OCNG, has been accepted as a participant in the 59th Meeting of the Nobel Laureates to be held in Lindau, Germany, 28 June to 4 July, 2009. The annual Lindau Nobel Laureate Meetings provide a globally recognized forum for the transfer of knowledge between generations of scientists. Brandi's sponsor, Oak Ridge Associated Universities (ORAU), and advisors, OCNG Assistant Professor Heath Mills and Professor John Morse, guided and supported her on the way to receiving this invitation. In order to attain this invitation, Brandi was chosen by TAMU to move forward to the round of evaluation by ORAU. Based on her research success and potential in academia, she was selected by ORAU to advance to the international selection by the Lindau meeting organizers. In being accepted, Brandi

is one of the top 2.5% of all applicants. This is an honor not only for Brandi, but for her advisors, OCNG, the College, and TAMU.

Woodard Awarded Schlanger Ocean Drilling Fellowship

Stella Woodard, a Ph.D. student in OCNG, has been awarded a Schlanger Ocean Drilling Fellowship for 2009-2010. Only five Schlanger Fellowships are awarded each year nationwide. The Schlanger Fellowship Program offers highly competitive, merit-based awards for outstanding graduate students to conduct research related to the IODP. The \$28,000 per year award is used for stipend, tuition, benefits, research costs, and travel. Stella is the fourth graduate student in the College of Geosciences to win a Schlanger Fellowship in the last four years.

Mullins and Tominaga Receive Distinguished Graduate Student Awards

Ruth Mullins and Masako Tominaga, Ph.D. students in OCNG, were awarded the Texas A&M University Distinguished Graduate Student Award. Ruth won the award for Excellence in Teaching and Masako won the award for Excellence in Research. These awards are given annually by the Texas A&M University Association of Former Students and coordinated by the Office of Graduate Studies. Ruth and Masako were presented their awards at a ceremony held 25 March in the Clayton Williams Alumni Center.

G&G Students Place First in AAPG Gulf Coast Section Imperial Barrel Award Competition

A team of graduate students from G&G won first place in the Gulf Coast Regional Imperial Barrel Award competition sponsored by the Gulf Coast Association of Geological Societies and the American Association of Petroleum Geologists (AAPG). This is the first year G&G has fielded a team in this global competition. In winning their region, the team will now compete in the international finals at the AAPG convention this June in Denver. Team members are G&G master's students Mike Casey, Sireesh Dadi, and Tom Hull, and Ph.D. students Hamid Adesokan (Geophysics) and Qian Song (Geology). Faculty advisor for the team is Associate Professor Yuefeng Sun.

College of Geosciences Relay for Life Team

The College of Geosciences Relay for Life team exceeded its goal and raised over \$1,500 for the Aggie Relay for Life held 3-4 April at Anderson Track and Field. The team would like to thank everyone in the College who supported them. Plans are underway for next year's event which will be 9-10 April 2010. Photos are posted on the [College Facebook](#) page.

Recruitment/Admissions Update

Student Recruitment Director Sonia Garcia spearheaded a College-wide effort for an Aggieland Saturday open house in February. All of the departments, programs and student organizations had an opportunity to interact with many prospective and admitted students, and more than 100 of those students expressed interest in Geosciences. In addition, Sonia has established relationships with high schools, community colleges, and prospective donors. She has submitted two grant proposals, one internally to the University and a second to BP, in search of seed money for a summer geosciences program for high school students that will serve as a student pipeline program. Sonia has also developed recruitment materials that are available for use by the departments and programs. The College now has a recruitment brochure targeted to high school students, a scholarship brochure, departmental fact sheets, posters, and promotional items. She also has a page for future students on the College website that includes a welcome message in both English and Spanish and recruitment contact information. With the help of geosciences student volunteers, Sonia has held two 5-hour phone marathons in which current students called admitted students to encourage them to accept admission by registering for their new student conferences. According to the April 2009 TAMU Enrollment Management Report, the College has seen a 10% increase in total applications, a 20% increase in completed applications, a 20% increase in admitted students, and a 40% increase in confirms/acceptances. The breakdown of admitted undergraduate geosciences students by major at this point in time is as follows: ENGS 26, ENST 26, GEOG 2, GEOL 38, GEOP 19, METR 64, and SPSP 4. The deadline for students to accept admission to Texas A&M and/or register for their new student conference is midnight Friday 1 May.

Facilities Update

Halbouty

- Automatic Door Locks. Electrical wiring has been completed, and door hardware is being installed. G&G will distribute user instructions once firm completion and activation dates are set.

O&M

- Rooms 104-106, 109 (Environmental Programs). This renovation is near completion with only decorative items and cleaning remaining to be done.
- Rooms 207-209 (Teaching Labs). The bid period for this major renovation project closes 28 April. Work is expected to begin on or about 1 June with completion by 14 August.
- 4th Floor Lab Furniture Replacement. Demolition has been completed, and the new cabinetry is being installed. A completion date of 1 May is expected.
- Rooms 714, 715 (Mills). This renovation project will begin soon. Revised costs have been received by Physical Plant and approved by the College.