

Why GSA Membership Is Important to Me



Szymanski at the Pan de Azúcar ash flow tuff near the town of Bagaces in the Guanacaste Province of Costa Rica.

Without a hint of hyperbole, becoming a member of GSA changed my life. From field camp to the halls of the U.S. Capitol, my journey as a professional earth scientist was made possible by the opportunities and the people of GSA. Like many geologists, my relationship with GSA began as an undergraduate student member. I learned how to navigate a section meeting, not fully understanding at the time what it meant to coauthor an abstract, much less present research to an audience that *clearly* knew more than I did about the topic. With requisite time and good mentoring, that gateway North-Central Section Meeting prepared me for my first Annual Meeting in Denver in 1996, followed by another

first: independent fieldwork in the Wasatch Mountains of Utah fully funded by a GSA Graduate Student Research Grant. It's safe to say that up to that point, I had virtually no understanding of my own potential as a scientist or citizen.

With a bit more encouragement, I went on to graduate school for igneous petrology and forensic science, applying the analytical skills of a chemist essential to both fields. I cut my teeth in science communication by testifying as an expert witness in court, convincing lawyers, judges, and juries that geology has a lot to say about the chemical composition of synthetic glass. The challenge of using science for the public good revealed the less obvious connections between geoscience and society, and once again my membership in GSA opened new doors.

In 2008, I moved to Washington, D.C., and served for a year as the GSA-USGS Congressional Science Fellow. I worked a portfolio of energy, climate, and environmental issues for Sen. Jon Tester and learned the real value of science in policymaking, wrapped up in the competing interests of economics and public opinion.

And there was the next big change. I decided to teach business students the role of science and policy in a better, more sustainable society. Over the past eight years, GSA has helped me do this, through meetings and leadership opportunities in the Geology & Public Policy Committee and the Geology and Society Division. I not only share our work at Bentley University with my geoscience community, but I also have a direct conduit to similarly passionate colleagues and an entire network of geoscience difference-makers.

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