
LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

John M. (Jack) Sharp, Jr.

1 July 2007 – 30 June 2008



I am pleased to report that the Geological Society of America, your society, is in good shape. For the most part, the GSA is moving along steadily and productively. Our meetings and publications are highly respected and growing. The Council and our many committees are setting and revising policies, making decisions, and pointing out new directions. We are finalizing a revised strategic plan. Our Washington office, headed by our Director for Geoscience Policy, Craig Schiffries, is now running smoothly. Our membership is at a new high, with a projected membership for 2008 at over 22,000 including 6,000 student members and nearly 2,000 international members (i.e., not from the USA, Canada, or Mexico). At the 2007 annual meeting in Denver, over 6,700 attendees enjoyed 237 sessions with over 3,600 presentations. The field trips attracted 659 participants and there were 255 short-course attendees. The 2008 sectional meetings in Buffalo, Charlotte, Evansville, Hot Springs, and Las Vegas had a total attendance of 2,855. The North-Central Section had the best meeting T-shirt.

The Treasurer's Report sums up the finances and indicates that we are financially sound. I do encourage you to consider donating to your society through the GSA Foundation, which has expanded its Board of Trustees and is raising funds for GSA at a greater level. There are number of funds already established. The Council has identified priorities for the Foundation fund raising. First goal is to raise the endowment in general. Secondly, increased funding is needed to meet the following specific needs were identified: student and especially international travel, the National Leadership Initiative (our Washington Office) and especially Congressional Science Fellows, mentoring programs, and graduate student research grants. Not unexpectedly, I found our Executive Director, Jack Hess, and the entire GSA staff to be very efficient and a pleasure with whom to work. They keep us running smoothly. We are fortunate to have assembled this group of employees.

The Geological Society of America is not standing still. In this short report, I cannot possibly even touch on all that GSA is doing, but a few things during the past year merit attention. Over the past four years, we had assembled *ad hoc* committees that focused on our divisions, our sections, our associated societies, our international role, and division-section interactions. Their reports were discussed at last spring's Leadership Weekend and meeting of the Council. Several exciting actions were initiated. Two in particular have long-range implications and expand the activities of GSA. These relate to our associated societies and our international activities.

We currently have 45 allied and associated societies. Some (e.g., American Association of Petroleum Geologists) have very strong separate programs; some (e.g., the Society of Economic Geologists) frequently hold their annual meetings in conjunction with ours; some have relatively little formal

interaction with us; and some (e.g., the Mineralogical Society of America and the Paleontological Society) nearly always meet with us and have had a major role in setting scientific programs at the annual and, sometimes, sectional meetings. The Council voted to eliminate the distinction between allied (who have formal memorandums of understanding with us) and the associated (who do not) societies. Now all are the latter. Furthermore, we have found it beneficial for GSA to integrate the associated societies more into our planning process as was shown at the Leadership Weekend. This was the first time that we formally invited our associated societies to participate in setting GSA's future goals and direction. The 2008 annual meeting where we are collaborating with five other societies is yet another example.

In Steve Wells' report last year, he noted that we were then examining our place in the global scientific community. I am pleased to report that we have initiated several new actions affecting our international role. First, we want to stress that the fall meeting is the annual meeting and exposition. It is not a national meeting because GSA incorporates three countries and has members from many others. Second, we decided to have the International Secretary sit as an ex-officio member of the Council and the Executive Committee. Third, for many years the Canadian provinces have been grouped with the US states to form our six sections. Several excellent sectional meetings have been held in Canada, and the next Cordilleran Section Meeting will be held in Kelowna, British Columbia, next May. The Council voted to extend the sections into Mexico. The Cordilleran, Rocky Mountain, South-Central, and Southeastern Sections are proposed now to include appropriate states in Mexico. I think that will lead to more cross boundary collaboration and future sectional meetings in Mexico (at least one is now being considered). The fourth action is to form an international section to replace the international division, which was the only division not organized around a geological topic. All GSA members are assessed a small fee (currently \$2) which goes to the section in which they reside, although one can select another section). Now the fee for international members will go to that section and, with other funds, be used for a variety of purposes including providing travel support for international members to participate in annual meetings, providing GSA members for lecture tours, and for international section meetings to be held in conjunction with appropriate sister societies. Several such international meetings are now being planned. The 2006 Backbone of the Americas meeting in Argentina is an example of a highly successful international meeting. Finally, Council also decided to allow GSA members to be voting members in more than one section. For instance, I will choose to join both the South-Central and International Sections.

There are new challenges ahead of us as both a profession and a society. For instance, how do we communicate our science and promote what the Geological Society of America does in its mission of advancing the geosciences, enhancing the professional growth of its members, and promoting the geosciences in the service of humankind? To this end, new *ad hoc* committees were established one, chaired by Darrel Cowan, will examine overarching themes for the society, our annual meeting, and other programs. The second, chaired by Randy Keller, will investigate how GSA communications need to evolve in the transition to serve an ever more electronically-oriented society. The committees would appreciate your input on overarching themes and electronic communications.

Our expanded international role and relationships with our associated societies will evolve and require attention. In addition, great challenges exist for us as a science and as a society — how do we communicate science with politicians, the business community, and the public? How can we integrate science, especially geology, into public policy decision-making? We have to evaluate and

communicate how large a population can be sustained given predicted climate, geologic, hydrologic, technical, and socioeconomic changes. We need to understand and prepare for or avoid geologic hazards. Our other challenges are also exciting and daunting. These include an appreciation of deep time and the evolution of the Earth; predicting environmental and climate change; promoting science and learning for its own sake; and encouraging future citizens to study and understand science. Currently, there are too few students pursuing degrees in science. Clearly, the Geological Society of America and its membership should have important roles to play in meeting these challenges.

This year's GSA President's Medal will be awarded to Roy Shlemon in part for his support of the applied geosciences in GSA and, in particular, his establishment of the Shlemon Mentor Program in Applied Geoscience. These have been held at the section meetings since 1995. As your President, I tried to attend all the section meetings and was very impressed with this program. Dave Stephenson (GSA Foundation President) and I were even drafted once to serve as mentors, which was a gratifying experience. Indeed, I would encourage you attend one of next spring's section meetings. I found the caliber of the talks high (on a par with those at the annual meeting) and, with the smaller venues, I was able to interact with undergraduate and graduate students. Section meeting attendees are generally able to meet more easily and have the chance chat with the GSA leadership (commonly including Executive Director, The Director of Geoscience Policy, the Foundation President, the GSA President, and some of the Councilors) than at the annual meeting. So, next spring, I urge our academic members especially to drive a van full of students to the nearest section meeting for a great geological experience. Sectional meetings offer us the opportunity to bring our science, its fascinating new findings, and its applications to regional communities across North America as well as help beat the higher costs of travel.

I hope that you will be able to attend the 2008 joint annual meeting in Houston that will be celebrating the International Year of the Planet Earth. We are the lead organization and are partnered with the Soil Science Society of America, the Crop Science Society of America, the American Society of Agronomists, the Gulf Coast Association of Geological Societies, and the Houston Geological Society. This may be the largest ever annual meeting of the GSA and we shall be collaborating with our colleagues studying petroleum geology and soils to a greater extent than ever before. There will be a great variety of exhibitors and scientific sessions. I think that this will be a very stimulating meeting.

Finally, after my year as President, I want to express my appreciation to the GSA and GSA Foundation staffs, the Council, our standing and *ad hoc* committees, our division leadership, our section leadership, and to others with whom I have had the pleasure to work with in my role as your President. I have been almost uniformly pleased and impressed with everything you have done, your professional competence, and your enthusiasm. Thank you! I have also been impressed with professional and student members that I met and with the scientists who volunteer to provide direction for the GSA including the Councilors and Presidents (both past and incoming). I encourage GSA members to volunteer whenever possible with the GSA. I can assure that you will find it highly beneficial both personally and scientifically.

We are indeed lucky to be geologists – rock on! The adventure continues!