

# SAPROLITE

NEWSLETTER of the SOUTHEASTERN SECTION

THE GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

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## A LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

As the chair of the southeastern section it is my task to compose the annual "Letter from the Chair" for inclusion in the Sapolite Newsletter. I wrestled with several topics that I thought would be of interest to the membership. Initially I thought that perhaps an article dealing with energy resources would be appropriate in the face of rising gasoline prices. But we all know that this subject is mostly political and besides who wants to learn how much more we will have to pay at the pump in the years to come. Then I thought perhaps a discussion of the devastation and destruction brought about by the barrage of hurricanes that affected our coastal communities would be a topic of interest. Being a coastal geologist and having experienced the wrath of Hurricane Hugo, I certainly could expound upon this topic. I guess that we were fortunate in scheduling the Biloxi meeting in 2005 instead of this year. Certainly our sympathies, thoughts and prayers go out to all those individuals whose lives were so tragically affected by these devastating events.

Instead, I decided to deliver a "State of the Section" address, after all this is a newsletter to inform the membership of those items of interest and importance that are being discussed at national GSA headquarters. Some of you may already be aware of the "hottest" topic that is being discussed these days. There is considerable concern at national over the decrease in attendance at Section meetings during the past few years. In fact, the GSA Programmatic Committee discussed this topic at length during its meeting in March 2004. This committee consisted of representatives from all six sections and other members of GSA. They recommended the formation of an Adhoc Committee to look into this issue. According to the report submitted by the Adhoc Committee in 2005, the overall attendance at Section meetings between 2001 and 2004 decreased from 3792 to 2627 or by approximately 30%. In fact, there

has been some discussion about incorporating sections and/or eliminating or decreasing the frequency of sectional meetings mainly due to financial concerns and the general lack of participation on behalf of the membership

I thought that this issue is or should be of interest and concern to all of us, and that everyone should be made aware of some of the recommendations that were presented to each Section by the committee. The Adhoc Committee can only make recommendations to the Sections to initiate change, and it is left up to the individual Management Boards for each section to approve or adopt their recommendations. Obviously not all of the recommended changes apply equally to all Sections. I am happy to announce that the attendance at the Southeastern sectional meetings has been very good overall, and that we are in better financial shape than some of the other sections.

Let me first summarize some of the reasons for the declining attendance at the sectional meetings as perceived by the members of the Adhoc Committee, these include:

- A perception that the science discussed at sectional meetings is not of the same quality as that at the national meeting.
- Travel funds are becoming more limited for attendees.
- Meetings are often held at less appealing locations.
- Costs of attending the meetings are increasing.
- The quality of the meeting varies due to the enthusiasm and abilities of the meeting organizers and the lack of mentoring by national GSA.

I think that we would all agree that many, if not all, of the aforementioned reasons are generally legitimate and perhaps we could add a few more of our own.

What is the justification for retaining sections and the need for hosting sectional meetings? The following is a list of reasons in support of sectional meetings as outlined by the Adhoc Committee:

- Sections are a vital part of what GSA is all about.
- Good regional science is discussed at the meetings.
- Meetings provide professional services similar to the national meetings.
- Sections are more likely to attract new members, particularly students.
- Sectional meetings are usually less expensive to attend due to proximity resulting in reduced cost of travel and lodging.
- Provides networking opportunities with regional colleagues.
- Sections provide financial support to students in the form of research grants and travel support.

The members of the Adhoc Committee have also put forth a list of potential solutions or recommendations for the sections to consider in order to improve meeting attendance, these include:

- Seek out and encourage the membership to present exciting and “cutting edge” theme sessions and symposia.
- Be more innovative in constructing the technical program.
- Provide and encourage more scientific discussions at the meeting
- Offer a more diverse program to include members from many different arenas (e.g., industry, academia, K-12 teachers).
- Reach out to members of the “applied geology” community by designing special symposia.

In order to accomplish these proposed solutions, the Adhoc Committee has recommended greater involvement on the part of the members of each Management Board. Individuals serving on the Management Board (usually the elected officers) as well as members of the local organizing committee need to take a more proactive role in the organization of the meetings. One of the committee’s recommendations suggests that each section form a Section-wide Program Committee to assist the Local Meeting Chair in the organization of the technical program for the meeting. It was also recommended that the Management Board of each section create a Meeting Advisory Committee to provide advise and more guidance to the local organizing committee. This committee would also be responsible for selecting future meeting sites that would have greater appeal to the membership. The Committee also recommended the establishment of a sectional Fundraising Committee for assisting in acquiring

sponsors and seeking additional funds in support of the meeting.

It is my job as section chair to bring these issues to your attention and to discuss the findings presented in the Adhoc Committee report with the current members of the Management Board at our next meeting. This meeting will take place in conjunction with the sectional meeting to be held in March. In the meantime, I would appreciate hearing from you with regard to any thoughts or concerns that you may have regarding these issues.

In closing, I would like to express my appreciation to Gail Russell and to all of the members of the local organizing committee for the job they did in organizing last year’s meeting in Biloxi. It was a great success, and again we offer consolation to all those who were affected along this hurricane ravaged coastline. I would also like to encourage all of you to attend the upcoming sectional meeting to be held in Knoxville, Tennessee, March 23-24, 2006. Let’s all show our support for sectional meetings. Bring a fellow colleague and your students to the next meeting. See you then.

Michael Katuna

Southeastern Sectional Chair

## **STUDENT TRAVEL GRANTS**

The Student Travel Grant program continues to be very popular. In the Fall of 2004, the Section expended a total of \$4500 (\$2250 provided by the GSA Foundation) to support the travel costs of 36 students who presented papers at the Denver, CO, meeting. In the spring of 2005, the section spent a total of \$4500 (\$2250 from the GSA Foundation) to help cover the costs of 16 students who gave papers at the Biloxi, MS, meeting. In the Fall of 2005, the Section expended a total of \$4500 (\$2250 provided by the GSA Foundation) to support the travel costs of 45 students who presented papers at the Salt Lake City, UT, meeting.

## **FUTURE SECTION MEETINGS**

2007—Savannah, GA will be the Local Chair  
2008—Charlotte, NC Andy Bobyarchick will be the Local Chair  
2009--TBA  
2010--joint meeting with Northeastern Section, location TBA

## **FINANCIAL STATUS**

At the end of FY 2003-2004, the Section had \$95,459 in its accounts. The total interest realized in 2004-2005 was \$3637. This interest, together with a reported surplus of \$7310 from the Southeastern Section meeting in Biloxi, MS, and Section members' dues, is used to fund the Section's Student Grant Program and Student Travel Program as well as the general operations of the section. At the end of FY 2004-2005, the Section had \$92,974 indicating a loss of \$2485.

## **ELECTIONS**

Be sure to vote for Section officers by means of the online ballot or the attached paper ballot.

Nominations:

Chair:	Jonathan Mies	University of Tennessee, Chattanooga
Chair-Elect:	Mark Groszos	Valdosta State University
Vice-Chair:	Pranoti M. Asher	Georgia Southern University
Secretary-Treasurer:	Donald Neal	East Carolina University

Join us for the section meeting in

Knoxville, TN

March 23 and 24, 2006