SAPROLITE

NEWSLETTER of the **SOUTHEASTERN SECTION**

THE GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

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A LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

I would like to begin by congratulating and thanking Richard Dieccio and George Stephens, General Chairmen; Brenda Pierce and Leslie Ruppert, Program Chairs; Al Taylor, Treasurer; Ione Taylor and Sally Brady, Registration Chairs; and all the other committee members and those who assisted in making the 2004 Southeastern-Northeastern Combined Annual Meeting at Tysons Corner a truly great and enjoyable meeting. Having been chair of a joint meeting, I know how much work goes into it and really appreciate their effort. Great job!. We now look forward to another excellent meeting in Biloxi, Mississippi, in March, but more on that later.

This year has been an exceptionally busy one for me as Chair of the SE Section, Chair of the new Division of Geology and Society, member of the GSA National Committee on Geology and Public Policy, and a member of the Joint Technical Program Committees for the National GSA meetings in Denver and Salt Lake City. While sitting here scratching my head (no jokes about the folliclely challenged please) and trying to come up with a topic for my letter, I began scanning through the multiple spam and legitimate e-mails that seem to flood in on a daily basis. A critical topic literally jumped out at me.

First, I received an e-mail on a survey out of Carnegie Mellon University. What are the best jobs to pursue for the next 5 years based on job growth, salary potential, education level, and room for innovation. Geoscientists rank number 22 of the top 25, just behind airline pilots and flight engineers, and just ahead of research analysts. Not top ten, but not too bad. (Good news.) Then I open an e-mail stating that South Carolina will probably drop geology registration because "it does not protect or preserve the health, safety, and welfare of the public." And, it will save South Carolina $65,000. Wow, a budget breaker. "The budget authors have lumped professional geologists with the Auctioneers Commission, and the Perpetual Cemetery Board," a move that is certain to save South Carolina big bucks. The document does propose to keep Barber Examiners and the Board of Cosmetology because ostensibly they do protect the public health, safety, and welfare. (Bad news.) Then, as I scroll down the list and open another document it tells about a national survey that shows that 55 percent or more of the public does not believe evolution is legitimate science. (Bad news.) Scrolling down more, another e-mail from the Chair of the University of Kentucky Department of Geological Sciences informs me that the Faculty Senate has tabled a proposed name change to "the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences," to better reflect new emphasis on persons in environmental geochemistry. Why was it tabled? The College of Agriculture indicated that they would soon propose a school of Environmental Science with a multidisciplinary major under their aegis. (More bad news.)

Let me add a personal note to this list. My son, a junior in college, after three straight semesters on the Deans List of a large university decides to transfer to another large well known university in the Southeast and is told that all of his credits transfer except (you guessed it) geology, which is no longer in the curriculum and cannot be considered toward your science requirement. (still more bad news) I want to scream, "Hey, we are number 22 on the list of greatest programs in America!" Then I remember reading in *Geotimes* about the number of universities that have dropped geology majors and minors from the curriculum (including my own alma mater) or have combined geology with geography, engineering, or a general science program. How did we get on this slippery downhill slope to anonymity? Do geologists no longer study the earth? Is the earth no

longer considered part of the environment? Are geologists not responsible for locating strategic and critical minerals or the extremely important and heavily used industrial minerals such as limestone, sand, and gravel? Nearly every branch of geology—natural hazards, engineering geology, coal, petroleum, mineral resources, water resources, geomorphology, geochemistry, and climate—relates to man and his relationship to the earth and to the environment.

Who is responsible, and how do we stop the bleeding? Can we stop it, and if so how do we start? The first question is not hard to answer. In the immortal words of Pogo Possum, "We have met the enemy and they are us." No one is going to promote our profession for us if we don't do it ourselves. What do we do about it is a more difficult question to answer. We have dug a deep hole for ourselves, and there is no magic solution to get us out of it quickly. Much of the answer lies in education, not just at the university level, but at the primary and secondary levels and beyond the university level. Unfortunately, there are still far too many states that have no required earth science education program. Where they do teach earth science, few of the teachers have an earth science background. Most have been educated in other fields, but are pressed into service because there are few qualified earth science teachers around. In Kentucky, there are probably not a dozen earth science teachers with a background in the subject. The one bright spot in my e-mail today was one that begins: "Dear Dr. Kiefer, my name is Alyson and I am in the 7th grade doing a science project-like ('at least we are science-like' JK) thing in my class. Would you mind answering a few questions for me? What is it like to be a geologist? What is your favorite geological place to visit in Kentucky? What things as a geologist do you do? What landforms do you work with? What fascinated you to become a geologist? Have you ever worked with a volcano? Do you run any tests on anything? If so, what types of tests and on what? Thank-you for your time and if it wouldn't hurt if I asked you one more question, if you could possibly make arrangements to come to my class and explain geology to us. If you could, my class and I would be very, very happy."

Have you ever taken the time to explain to some middle-school- or high-school-age students what the profession of geology is all about, how important it is to all of us, and integral to our way of life (I shy from using the term sustainability)? Have you taken the time to go and talk to some classes about your profession, how you got into it and why? Why is it important for everyone to understand? I don't mean talk to some 2nd graders about fossils or dinosaurs, but about the profession. We have to show them that geology is relevant. No matter what area of geologic research you are involved it, I'll bet that you can show that it has some relevance to Society. Have you ever attended a city/county council meeting, or a state legislative hearing and actually participated in a discussion where geology is a critical element? The opportunities are not really hard to find. In recent years I have chaired the State Solid Waste Management Plan Committee, and been a member of the State Water Management Task Force, the Governors Earthquake Hazards Task Force, the Kentucky River Issues Steering Committee, the City/County Greenspace Commission, the Water Supply Planning Commission, the Storm-Water Flooding Committee, a committee to write a mining and quarrying ordinance, a committee to write a sinkhole ordinance, and a committee to develop an environmental park. I've taken part in numerous meetings and hearings, as well as given talks at civic and church clubs. I repeat: opportunities are not hard to find. Perhaps I have overdone it, and I know all of you have your teaching, research, consulting, and other duties that seem to consume all of your time. It is not always easy, but perhaps you need to set a little time aside to tell others outside the profession why you are working so hard and why it may be so important to them and their well being. I am in the midst of my third time on the Joint Technical Program Committee for the GSA National Meeting and I am amazed at the hundreds of proposals for symposia and theme sessions and the thousands of abstracts that pour in, and I am proud of it. But does the phrase **"preaching to the choir"** come to mind? Don't get me wrong: keep them coming, we need to do that too. But in light of what is happening, I can't help but worry that some of you may have a front-row seat to watch your #22 profession collapse around you. The stakes for the profession are high, but the long-term stakes may be even higher, much higher. Will there be paleontologists in the future? Think about it!

Now I'll take off my Geology and Society and Geology and Public Policy hats and put on my Biloxi hat by asking you to attend the Section Meeting there March 17–18 and really contribute to the meeting. It's a great opportunity, and although the deadline for abstracts is past, you can help support GSA and Gail Russell and her committee by attending and making this another successful meeting.

John Kiefer

Southeastern Section Chair

STUDENT RESEARCH GRANTS

The Southeastern Section of the Geological Society of America has a long history of providing research grants to geology students in the region that are members or associates of the Society. The Section now offers two programs, one for undergraduate students and one for graduate students.

The undergraduate program was first implemented in 2003. During its brief history, it has proven to be quite competitive. Approximately 40% of proposals received have been funded. Awards have ranged from $250 to $350. Undergraduate research grant applications are due October 1. Grants are awarded by mid December, in time for Spring-semester research.

The grant program for graduate students is a continuation of the program that existed prior to 2003. This program has the same eligibility requirements as the national GSA student research grant program; it uses the same deadline (February 1) and has used the same application form. Most graduate students apply for grants from both national GSA and the Southeast Section.

The Student Support Committee reviews grant applications and makes award recommendations to the Management Board. For the graduate student grant program, final award recommendations are not made until after national GSA has announced its awards, typically in mid April. Applicants that are successful at the national level commonly receive little or no additional support from the Section.

Since the split of the 2 grant programs, approximately 45% of proposals from graduate students have been funded by the Section. Awards have ranged from $370 to $750 for Masters students and $770 to $1270 for Doctoral students. A few particularly worthy proposals that were funded at the national level, but for considerably less than the amount requested, have received supplementary awards of $125 to $850. For comparison, national GSA reports a 47% success rate for 2004 and an average award of $1750. Graduate students typically receive their grants from the Section in late May.

To learn more about student research grant programs of the Southeastern Section, go to http://core.ecu.edu/geology/neal/segsa/undergradres.html (undergraduate grant program) or http://core.ecu.edu/geology/neal/segsa/research.html (graduate grant program). To learn more about grant opportunities for graduate students from national GSA, go to http://www.geosociety.org/grants/gradgrants.htm .

Jonathan Mies, Chair
Student Support Committee

STUDENT TRAVEL GRANTS

The Student Travel Grant program continues to be very popular. In the Fall of 2003, the Section expended a total of $4500 ($2250 provided by the GSA Foundation) to support the travel costs of 50 students who presented papers at the Seattle, WA, meeting. In the spring of 2004, the section spent a total of $4500 ($2250 from the GSA Foundation) to help cover the costs of 45 students who gave papers at the Tyson's Corner, VA meeting. In the Fall of 2004, the Section expended a total of $4500 ($2250 provided by the GSA Foundation) to support the travel costs of 50 students who presented papers at the Denver, CO, meeting.

FUTURE SECTION MEETINGS

2006—Knoxville, TN Claudia Mora will be the Local Chair
2007—Savannah, GA Dallas Rhodes will be the Local Chair
2008—Charlotte, NC Andy Bobyarchick will be the Local Chair

FINANCIAL STATUS

At the end of FY 2003-2004, the Section had $95,459 in its accounts. The total interest realized in 2003-2004 was $1543. This interest, together with meeting surpluses, and section members' dues provided the funds for the Section's Student Grant Program and Student Travel Program as well as the general operations of the Section.

BILOXI 2005 SECTION MEETING

The 54th meeting of the Southeastern Section of The Geological Society of America will be held March 17 and 18, 2005, in Biloxi, MS. Here are some highlights:

Keynote Address: "Tsunamis and Data Buoy Warning Systems," Paul Moersdorf, Director, NOAA National Data Buoy Center, Stennis Space Center. Thursday, 17 March, 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. in Ballroom B.

New Town Meetings:
* GSA's Geology and Public Policy Committee is sponsoring a panel discussion on "Professional Licensure and National Academic Accreditation," moderated by Darrel Schmitz, Mississippi State University. Thursday, 17 March, 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. in meeting room 8.

* "Earthscope," moderated by Krishna Sinha, Virginia Tech. Thursday, 17 March, 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. in meeting room 5.

ELECTIONS

Be sure to vote for Section officers by means of the online ballot available soon.

Nominations:

Chair:	Michael Katuna	College of Charleston
Chair-Elect:	Jonathan Mies	University of Tennessee, Chattanooga
Vice-Chair:	Claudia Mora	University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Secretary-Treasurer:	Donald Neal	East Carolina University