Nurturing Relations between the Applied and Academic Geoscience Communities

B. Clark Burchfiel, *GSA Past President*

In September 2002, GSA sent a Publications Research Survey to its members. Written responses to this survey indicated a number of our members are employed in "applied" geology, and they consistently expressed the opinion that GSA was not meeting their needs.

In looking into this more thoroughly, I discovered that more than 25% of our membership work in areas broadly covered by the term applied geoscience. Several members have relayed to me the point that all geology can be considered applied.

It was also frequently mentioned in these responses that GSA is perceived as mainly an academic society and that applied geoscience takes a back seat. Having worked as a consultant in industry for many years, I am aware of the significant contributions that can be made by cross fertilization of ideas and technology between applied and academic geoscience. It is an important two-way scientific street.

In order to clarify the concerns of our applied colleagues and to see how GSA could better serve them, I e-mailed all our applied scientific members requesting information on how GSA could be more responsive to their needs. I was pleasantly surprised by the large number of thoughtful responses I received. Many were 3–6 pages long with discussions and suggestions for how GSA could better integrate the two communities. Thanks to all members who took the time to write such thoughtful letters. I read them all!

It has taken some time to decide how to address the issue of better integration of the applied and academic communities within GSA. Such integration will be clearly advantageous to both groups.

One point made by many respondents was that GSA should not try to compete head on with other societies that more directly serve applied geoscientists and have well-established programs that meet their needs. For example, most respondents did not support the establishment of a new Division of Applied Geology because most of them already belong to one or more GSA Divisions, many of which already have an important applied component.

Respondents offered a wide range of suggestions, and it is clear that GSA cannot incorporate them all. It is also clear that GSA should not try to be all things to all geoscientists. Many respondents commented that GSA could play an important role filling niches not filled by other societies.

In order to find and fill such niches, I recommended to GSA Council that we establish a standing committee to develop more effective approaches to bring the applied and academic communities closer together. Council unanimously approved the committee, agreeing that this was an important direction for GSA to take.

The key to making a success of this new initiative is selecting a committee that will be proactive in canvassing our applied members, determining their needs, developing ideas on how GSA can better satisfy these needs, and serving as a focal point for better integrating the two communities. Scott Burns has enthusiastically agreed to head the committee, and he has put together an excellent group of geoscientists to begin this important work.

Communications between applied and academic scientists is one important first step, and both communities must take an active role. If you have ideas or want to be involved in some way, contact Scott at burnss@pdx.edu. I hope that many of you will try to make this initiative a success, as it will benefit all of us.

GSA Academic and Applied Geoscience Relations Committee

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