

GSA Committees: Progress through Service

The GSA Committee on Research Grants

Pound for pound, I doubt any group has a greater impact on the course of geological research than GSA's Committee on Research Grants. The beneficial impact of giving budding geoscientists a boost when they need it most cannot be overstated.

Two commitments are needed to keep this good thing going. The more obvious one consists of funds to give to awardees. The less obvious one consists of dedicated GSA Members who are willing to devote a block of time to reading and ranking proposals each spring. The reading and initial ranking are now done online, but half of the committee still travels to Boulder (at GSA's expense) to meet face to face, discuss the proposals, and make the final decisions on which research will be funded.

These activities are necessary for the continued health of the geoscience profession. I sincerely hope you will consider volunteering to be part of them in the near future.

COMMITTEE HISTORY AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Committee on Research Grants has evolved dramatically since its inception in 1932, as a direct result of the Penrose bequest. The early committee had an annual budget of about US\$50,000. Grants were given only to established professionals and were voted on individually by Council, and a detailed quarterly accounting was required (see Eckel, 1982). Ph.D. students started receiving grants in 1955, and grants to master's degree students followed in 1973.

The main emphasis of the research grants program has always been on funding multiple short-term projects, but it also helped support a few larger projects early on, including the *Treatise on Invertebrate Paleontology* series and a Depression-era revision of Dana's *System of Mineralogy*.

From the year 2000 until now, the committee has dispersed more than US\$3,750,000 to some 2,070 graduate students, meaning the average award

was over US\$1,800. The percentage of applicants receiving full or partial support over that time span is an impressive 45%, and the grants are almost equally divided between Ph.D. and master's degree candidates.

GSA has worked hard to sustain this high level of support and has been able to do so by actively seeking funds from multiple sources. These include substantial contributions from the National Science Foundation, generous gifts from individual members, and the active participation of GSA's Divisions. The committee has tinkered with the grant conditions over the years, striving to provide meaningful support to as many projects as possible. For example, in 2005, we reluctantly moved to a policy of only awarding one grant per student per graduate degree, but that helped put us in position to increase maximum awards from US\$3,500 to US\$4,000 this year.

SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPACT OF GSA RESEARCH GRANTS

Support for geological research, defined broadly, is what the committee is all about, and this is the primary motivator of those who agree to serve on this committee. The grants are a thing of beauty in many ways—they go directly to students, all of the money is used in direct support of research, and many give the recipient their first taste of success in the all-important grant game. Recipients are justifiably proud when they receive a GSA research grant, and they feature it on their curriculum vitae.

Many GSA-funded projects serve as springboards toward opening broad vistas. An informal canvas of 17 colleagues confirmed what I suspected—most of us received GSA grants-in-aid as graduate students. The grant I received in the 1970s made it possible for me to study Precambrian iron formations in North America.

Since then, I have studied them on three other continents. You can help ensure that the next generation of geoscientists has comparable opportunities by serving on the Committee on Research Grants and/or contributing to its funding.

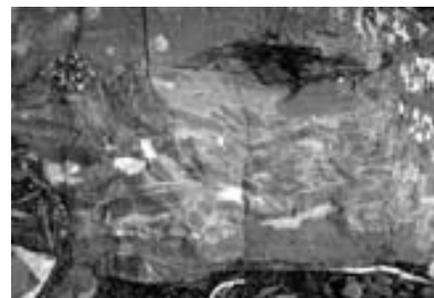
Bruce Simonson, Oberlin College, bsimonso@oberlin.edu
Past Chair, Committee on Research Grants

REFERENCE CITED

Eckel, E.B., 1982, The Geological Society of America—Life History of a Learned Society: Geological Society of America Memoir 155, 167 p.



Two-billion year-old Negaunee banded iron formation (BIF) on Jasper Knob, Ishpeming, Michigan, USA, in the 1970s (rock hammer for scale).



Intraformational conglomerate of jasper pebbles in two-billion year-old Sokoman granular iron formation (GIF) near Schefferville, Quebec, Canada, in the 1970s (penny in upper right for scale).

Note: For more information on GSA committees, go to www.geosociety.org/aboutus/committees/

 THE GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA®

SCIENCE ■ STEWARDSHIP ■ SERVICE