

GSA Committees: Progress through Service

The Annual Program Committee

The GSA Annual Program Committee (APC) is a vital committee to GSA and probably directly impacts more members than any other committee. Ever wonder why GSA never has its annual meeting in Honolulu or Newark? Or which sessions get selected to be Pardee Sessions? Or where those crazy and catchy meeting themes come from? These are just part of the job of the Annual Program Committee.

Planning the Annual Meeting

The fundamental responsibility of the APC is long- and short-range planning for quality science, education, and outreach at the annual meeting and other Society-sponsored meetings. This includes selecting locations for future annual meetings, approving the number and content of technical sessions, selecting leaders for such diverse activities as hot topics, field trips, classes, the public forum, and late-breaking sessions, and setting policies for abstracts. The APC spends a good deal of time evaluating the results of annual membership surveys and meeting surveys to try to understand what was popular and successful and what did not work or needs to be rethought.

A number of financial concerns related to the annual meeting are overseen by the APC. Some obvious ones are the perpetual hot-buttons of registration fees and hotel costs. I doubt many annual meeting attendees, while enjoying the warmth and comfort of the Exhibit Hall or meeting rooms (for sessions, Division and Section meetings, alumni parties, specialty group gatherings, committee meetings, and the like) reflect on the fact that this space is not free.

The annual GSA meeting is a major undertaking. Including GSA's Associated and Allied societies, 6,000 or more geoscientist and guest attendees require space, hospitality, lodging, food services, transportation, and technical support for as long as five or six days.

Only a limited number of cities can accommodate a meeting as large as ours, and in order to reserve space in desirable places at the times we want, contracts and commitments must be made six to seven years in advance. For example, the APC has already planned for GSA to meet in Minneapolis in 2011, and the 125th anniversary meeting will be in Denver in 2013.

A Creative Endeavor

The APC also tries to be creative within a highly structured system of needs and responsibilities. The 2008 joint meeting in Houston with the "Tri-Societies," comprising the American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, and Soil Science Society of America, is a first for GSA. This meeting presents many challenges as well as opportunities.

The APC also devotes significant time to creative thinking about geoscience discoveries and directions. We continually hear about "AGU-

envy" for everything from meeting locations to quality of science. The APC tries to identify new and emerging areas of earth science that are of interest to large numbers of GSA members. One recent example is the number of topical sessions on wildfire (2001). Following the annual meeting, the APC organized and sponsored a highly successful specialty meeting on wildland fire science in the Denver area in 2002. We are always looking for new ideas, new approaches, and new directions to better serve our members.

GSA meetings are technically strong, healthy, and serve the needs of geoscientists, both young and old. We recently created a subcommittee of young geoscientists, made up of current and former recipients of the Donath Medal and Subaru Outstanding Woman in Science Award, to help broaden our thinking about new directions in earth science.

An Invitation to Participate

The Annual Program Committee usually meets twice a year and occasionally has conference calls and e-mail discussions. I have served on many GSA committees in my time as a geoscientist, and I feel that the APC has been one of the most interesting from the perspective of breadth of responsibility, impact on GSA, meeting interesting people, and having the opportunity to participate in decisions that really have the chance to improve and advance the geosciences. If these qualities are of interest to you, please let us know, and we would be glad to forward your statement of interest to the Nominating Committee!

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