

The Joint Technical Program Committee

Have you ever wondered how the GSA Annual Meeting technical program gets put together? It is a complex fusion of activities performed by headquarters staff and generous volunteers, choreographed each year by a Technical Program Chair working closely with the GSA Meetings staff. At the heart of this process is the Joint Technical Program Committee (JTTC).

Make-Up of the Committee

Representatives from GSA's seventeen Divisions and from several of GSA's Associated Societies, including the Association of Earth Science Editors, the Geochemical Society, the Geoscience Information Society, the Mineralogical Society of America, the National Association of Geoscience Teachers, the Paleontological Society, and the Society of Economic Geologists, contribute to a significant portion of the technical program every year. Five Representatives-at-Large, covering specialties like environmental geosciences and marine-coastal geology, round out the JTTC.

JTTC representatives serve terms of variable length depending on the bylaws of each organization or Division. All are volunteers.

The JTTC Process

The Joint Technical Program Committee is involved with most aspects of organizing the Annual Meeting's technical program. The first main task is to review proposed topical sessions. Remember that 9 January 2007 deadline for submitting topical session proposals (*GSA Today*, v. 16, no. 10, p. 32)? Even before that deadline is reached each year, JTTC representatives begin looking at proposals in their respective fields and may review any and all others to look for duplication, poorly defined concepts, and the like. JTTC reps also finalize sponsorship of topical sessions during this time.

Once the list of topical sessions is finalized, by the end of January each year, preparations are made for the Call for Papers, which appears on the GSA Web site and in the April *GSA Today*.

The next major deadline is abstract submittal—this year, it is 10 July. JTTC representatives oversee several topical sessions based on the scientific categories proposed and advocated earlier in the process. The actual organization of each topical session is done by the session advocate, but JTTC reps oversee the process.

Once all topical sessions are filled or withdrawn, abstracts not assigned to a topical session are placed into an abstract pool. This is when the JTTC does its heavy lifting. Representatives select abstracts pertinent to their areas of expertise and organize them into discipline sessions. They may trade abstracts and move abstracts around, trying to generate the best sessions possible. They may even give a session a name if enough abstracts are submitted to give it a discrete focus.

JTTC representatives sometimes contact abstract authors asking them to switch from oral to poster presentation, or vice versa, in order to fit papers into open slots.

Finally, working with the Technical Program Chair, JTTC reps recommend time slots for the various sessions. They are responsible for making sure their sessions do not conflict with Division or Society meetings, special presentations, field trips, and workshops. They also recommend scheduling to the Technical Program Chair to create clusters of similar topics in a given area of the convention center and avoid time conflicts with sessions of similar appeal to attendees.

This is an impossible task, of course, but the JTTC works tirelessly with the Technical Program Chair to make sure there are as few conflicts as possible. Conflicts of time or location will never be totally eliminated, especially if attendees have interests in sessions or papers on widely varying topics. Sessions on geomorphology and igneous petrology, for example, may conflict, and there will always be some folks who are eager to attend both. But considerable regard and effort goes into avoiding or minimizing the most likely conflicts.

By late July, sessions are organized and last-minute changes may be suggested by the Technical Program Chair. The final program goes to the Annual Program Committee for approval in early August and then is posted online, printed in the September *GSA Today*, and listed in the *Annual Program with Abstracts* book and CD.

An Invitation to Participate

When you next think about the Annual Meeting, think also about those who have given of their time to organize the meeting. Most of the work that goes on behind the scenes would not be possible without the considerable efforts of JTTC volunteers. The hard work is concentrated mostly over short periods of time, including a few days in mid-January and several days in mid- to late July. If you're interested in putting your stamp on the Annual Meeting, you may wish to consider volunteering to serve on the Joint Technical Program Committee. It's an enormously rewarding endeavor and I guarantee you will never again look at the Annual Meeting technical program in the same way.

David M. Bush, University of West Georgia, dbush@westga.edu
2007 GSA Annual Meeting & Exposition Technical Program Chair

