
Diversity in the Geosciences

Position Statement. The Geological Society of America (GSA) affirms the value of diverse scientific ideas, and the connection between diverse scientific ideas and a diverse group of contributors of those ideas, including those who comment and criticize.

Purpose. This position statement (1) summarizes the consensus view of GSA regarding the importance and value of diversity, (2) provides information that is intended to raise awareness among geoscience professionals implementing those policies and evaluating the short- and long-term consequences, and (3) encourages geoscientists to participate in implementing suitable diversity practices at local, regional, state, and national levels.

RATIONALE

Diversity today generally refers to variety in race and ethnicity, gender (including gender identity or expression), religion, physical and mental abilities, age, sexual orientation or marital status, national origin or ancestry, education, or class. The concept of diversity is complex and has positive and negative connotations. On the negative side, some see unfamiliar characteristics as unsettling, threatening, objectionable, distasteful, unpleasant, or offensive. Such reactions often lead to judgments based on perceived identity rather than on the merits of the individual. These can, ultimately, lead to exclusion. On the positive side, the variations found among humans collectively speak to a richness of resources, perspectives, and experience. A diverse membership (or workforce) is usually more capable, insightful, responsive, and dynamic than one that offers very little contrast.

GSA should enhance its diversity—philosophically and operationally—thereby maximizing the benefit to its individual members and to the organization. This will optimize the ability of GSA to serve society as a whole. GSA must vigorously and proactively reject prejudice and stereotyping wherever it is encountered in our profession, while actively promoting a diverse workforce, now and in the future.

During these times, our science must be justified to achieve a positive standing in performance and value to the community. Increased scrutiny of scientists and scientific organizations exists regarding societally relevant issues and how they are addressed. Cultural variety supports diverse points of view and diverse positions on issues. Awareness of and respect for these issues—geologically related or not—is important in achieving solutions to problems that work well for all those who are affected by them. It is through amalgamation of individual perspectives and diverse backgrounds and cultures coupled with higher order thinking skills that issues can be identified and the full range of possible solutions to problems can be considered.

The GSA community is dedicated to maintaining an organizational climate where diverse scientific ideas are welcomed in an open forum for discussion and exploration by geoscience professionals of varied personal backgrounds, reflecting differences in culture and origin and rejecting prejudice and stereotyping. Diverse perspectives are important and necessary for responsible, effective decision-making and leadership. Other benefits of a diverse profession include increased options in attracting the best and brightest minds into the field and communicating with and educating the public (“Earth literacy”).

PUBLIC POLICY ASPECTS OF DIVERSITY AND DERIVED BENEFITS

Mutual respect is key to successful diversity policy. The GSA community is dedicated to enacting codes of conduct that include demonstrating respect for other members. Although an effort to attain diversity may be well-intentioned, groups might “allow” participation but still ignore certain members (or worse, be disrespectful to them directly or about them to others). Respect is needed before participation and progress for true inclusion can occur.

One key benefit of diversity is the opportunity posed by a rich cultural mixture, along with the idea that no single “right way” exists to do things. Openness to wide-ranging ideas and pathways to progress is the life-blood of science. Who can know the origin of an idea? What nuances of a person’s upbringing, cultural milieu, education, social interactions, and ethnicity can lead to an advancement of human knowledge?

The geosciences have an important service function, and the ability of GSA to serve will be enhanced through the active, engaged participation of a diverse membership. A diverse membership will also establish an environment that is more inviting to potential new GSA members, enhancing the Society’s growth and potential for advancement.

Another benefit of a diverse workforce is in achieving more complete societal support for Earth sciences. As more groups in society become more engaged in the Earth sciences, and as their knowledge and appreciation increases, a likelihood exists that the Earth sciences will be more strongly supported and that citizens will make better choices regarding Earth issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This GSA Position Statement on diversity addresses GSA staff and the membership; headquarters activities, meetings, and special functions; and the role of GSA and its members in their larger communities. In this latter regard, the statement challenges the membership and all GSA units to deal with the complexity of issues related to diversity in their home institutions, whether they are academic, governmental, non-profit, or industry.

GSA is committed to making Earth literacy available to all people and to having geoscience professionals, including its membership, reflect the diversity of the population, and will undertake reasonable efforts to ensure that its activities are open to all. Although a diverse climate cannot be achieved through rules, it can be encouraged and nurtured through processes that educate leaders and participants about the benefits of and pathways to equity and balance.

The implementation of the recommendations below is a major element in achieving the goals of this Position Statement. It includes elements that GSA, as an organization, and particularly its leadership (Council and the Executive Director) need to address, and elements that individual members (in their GSA-related activities and otherwise) are herein challenged to engage. Some of those elements are

- **Current Status**—There is a lack of quantitative and qualitative understanding of the current status of diversity-related issues and conditions in and associated with GSA. This should be addressed by GSA in a structured, timely, and ongoing manner.
- **Corrective Actions**—GSA should be committed to addressing organizational gaps or deficiencies identified in the status analysis. This includes specific actions that individual GSA members or GSA as an organization are encouraged to take.
- **Assessment**—This Statement defines the “yardstick” that may be used to measure progress as GSA and its members begin the implementation process. GSA should define a benchmark that measures its diversity. Commonly used demographic parameters are a starting point, but this effort calls for broader sociological and ethical measures that align with the objectives posed and that utilize the specialized expertise needed to achieve the assessment.
- **Dissemination**—Implementation includes the commitment of GSA to establishing and engaging a plan for disseminating the GSA position on diversity throughout the membership and for promoting increased communication and increased advocacy to support the actions of members to achieve the goals posed by the Position Statement.

ABOUT THE GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

The Geological Society of America, founded in 1888, is a scientific society with more than 22,000 members from academia, government, and industry in more than 90 countries. Through its meetings, publications, and programs, GSA enhances the professional growth of its members and promotes the geosciences in the service of humankind. GSA encourages cooperative research among earth, life, planetary, and social scientists, fosters public dialogue on geoscience issues, and supports all levels of earth science education. Inquiries about the GSA or this position statement should be directed to GSA’s Director for Geoscience Policy, Dr. Craig M. Schiffries, at +1-202-669-0466 or cschiffries@geosociety.org.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GSA AND ITS MEMBERS TO HELP IMPLEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

To facilitate implementation of the goals of this Position Statement, GSA recommends the following actions to increase the involvement of geoscientists in local, regional, statewide, and federal diversity policy decisions.

- *GSA members should seek opportunities to communicate effectively the value of a diverse workforce and of implementing suitable diversity practices to all levels of government, to private industry, and to academia.* GSA members are encouraged to work with print, electronic, and broadcast media in promoting the value of rational approaches for addressing critical diversity issues. Members who participate in diversity issues are encouraged to share their experiences at GSA meetings. If possible, it is beneficial to provide local examples where efforts to promote a diverse workforce or implement diversity practices have been successful.
- *GSA members should seek opportunities to communicate effectively the value of a diverse workforce and of implementing suitable diversity practices to community groups.* The public must be able to respond in an informed manner to diversity decision-making that potentially can have detrimental affects; thus, a growing need exists for the public to be educated about the value of diversity.
- *GSA members should participate in professional forums and town hall meetings for open community discussions on the importance of a diverse workforce and of implementing suitable diversity practices.* Discussions should emphasize the value of rational information for diversity and its sustainability outcomes.
- *GSA should provide readily accessible print, Web, and personnel resources to members that support geoscientists' communications with decision makers regarding the value of a diverse workforce and of implementing suitable diversity practices.* Considerable expertise and resources are available to members through GSA's Geology and Public Policy Committee (GPPC) and GSA's Geology and Society Division. GSA expertise can help members participate in diversity policy decisions by creating talking points on common diversity problems and by providing examples of how they can participate in diversity decisions by becoming members of relevant decision-making bodies. GSA and its members must identify legislation that affects diversity and alert the GPPC, Geology and Society Division, and GSA's Associated Societies if action by the GSA membership and affiliated organizations can help improve the rational basis for diversity decisions. The GPPC, Geology and Society Division, and Director of Geoscience Policy, working with GSA members, can also bring this Position Statement to the attention of lawmakers when legislation affects diversity.
- *GSA should raise awareness of diversity issues by publishing articles on the links between diversity and geoscience planning and management decisions.*