

Why GSA Membership Is Important to Me



Mariah “Maisie” Richards in Denali National Park, USA.

When I was little, the tooth fairy would bring me pretty rocks instead of the more common silver dollars. I never knew there was a whole community of people that similarly valued the shine of quartz over a crisp dollar bill until I attended my first GSA meeting.

I graduated from Colorado College in 2011 and immediately headed up to Denali National Park and Preserve to look for dinosaur footprints through GSA’s GeoCorps America Program. That research led me to my first GSA Annual Meeting the following fall, where I spent most of my time, truth be told, perusing the extensive exhibit booths dedicated to glittery rocks and fossil jewelry.

Up until that point, I had been intimidated by phrases such as “networking” and “LinkedIn,” until I recognized that I am an inherently chatty person and “networking” is really just casual chatting with fellow professionals. Realizing this, I approached a speaker who stuck out to me in a panel session on geology in government. Because of this conversation, she later became my supervisor at Death Valley National Park as well as a lifelong mentor.

I continued my GSA membership throughout the following years as I dabbled in forest ecology and returned seasonally to Denali as a park employee. My introduction to Denali through GeoCorps led to research that resulted in a masters project proposal that received the Arthur D. Howard Award this fall and is funded in large part by Denali.

You can only make sense of and see patterns in the choices you’ve made in self reflection, but now I can see a very clear trend. GSA, in the forms of inspiring programs, grants and awards, and beautiful rocks, has been there to help guide me along my winding path that began when I found a shiny quartz crystal beneath my pillow.

Mariah “Maisie” Richards
Graduate Student at Colorado State University
GSA Member since 2010