



MY PANDEMIC PRESIDENCY



Vickie C. Bennett

The Geochemical Society (GS) completes its biennial leadership transition in January 2022. Sumit Chakraborty will be your new president as I move into the role of past president, where I will serve for another 2 years. The new vice president will be from North America and will be announced in January following the election. Current past president, Roberta Rudnick, will take a break after 6 years of high-level service to the society. Her leadership, experience, and enthusiasm will be very much missed during our weekly executive meetings.

Serving as President of the Geochemistry Society has been a great honour, a daunting responsibility, and an exciting challenge. When I attended the inaugural 1988 Goldschmidt Conference in Baltimore (Maryland, USA) as a graduate student (my presence conspicuous by my gender), there were ~300 participants. Back then, it was not in my wildest dreams that the Goldschmidt Conference would become a major international meeting with thousands of attendees, or that the GS would become a powerful international professional society, or that I could be the leader of such a society. As it turned out, as an Australian-based scientist, I was the first president in the then 67-year history of the GS who was not from North America or Europe, fulfilling the vision of Past President Sam Mukasa (2010–2011) that an international executive team would be integral to the future of the society.

The past two years have largely coincided with the global COVID-19 pandemic, which presented immense new challenges for the GS. Indicators that the 2020–2021 term was not going to be business as usual arose in early 2020 as we were putting the finishing touches on the Goldschmidt Conference, which was scheduled for June in Hawaii (USA). All was on-track, program in place, abstract submissions closed, and we were anticipating the largest attended North American Goldschmidt Conference. However, with the COVID-19 shadow looming ever closer, in late March we made the difficult decision that the conference could not go forward as planned. Many e-mails and many very early (Australia time) Zoom calls later, and with approval of the GS Board of Directors and the European Association of Geochemistry (EAG), Goldschmidt2020 went virtual rather than being postponed or cancelled, one of the first Earth sciences conferences to do so. This rapid change, accomplished in a matter of a few weeks, reflects the dedication and innovation of the organising teams, and produced a successful conference with more than 3,000 global participants. Many valuable lessons for future conference planning—virtual or hybrid—were learned.

With travel restrictions in place, many of the normal opportunities for training and networking were not available. To help fill this gap, the GS offered a series of seven well-attended online workshops during November–December 2020 and cosponsored a series of “townhalls” with the EAG to promote interaction and discussion on current topics of wide interest to our membership:

- GS–EAG Town Hall Discussion: “Black Lives Matter–Promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Geochemistry”, 12 June 2020
- GS–EAG Town Hall Discussion: “Mentoring in Geochemistry—A Tool for Creating More Inclusive and Equitable Environments”, 3 December 2020
- GS–EAG Town Hall Discussion: “Covid-19 Impacts on Geochemistry: What’s Next?”, 15 September 2021

The GS is committed to creating and providing an inclusive and supportive international professional environment and changing the picture of geochemists. This can be seen in the composition of our leadership where 8 of the last 11 presidents have either been women or have been men from diverse cultural backgrounds. We continue to develop programs to increase diversity, equity, and inclusivity (DEI) in geochemistry in all forms. An important aspect of this commitment is to emphasise development and mentoring of early career researchers and students: these are our future GS leaders.

Some recent achievements:

- An energetic DEI committee was established in 2020, comprising students, early career geochemists, as well as more senior geochemists, all tasked with providing and implementing new DEI strategies.
- We expanded the criteria for many of our awards to reflect the spectrum of achievements that constitute excellence in geochemistry and are continuing to seek ways to increase the diversity of our awardees to better reflect our membership.
- The awards nominations process has been simplified. Efforts were undertaken to increase the diversity and number of nominators. This resulted in increased nominations for all awards, including a record number of 87 nominees for the 2021 Geochemistry Fellows.
- The GS also established two new board of director positions specifically for early career researchers, the first of which will start in January 2022.

Future Goldschmidt Conferences

Planning is well advanced for Goldschmidt2022 to be held 10–15 July, in Honolulu (Hawaii). (Abstract deadline is 1 March 2022: <https://2022.goldschmidt.info/>). This will be a hybrid meeting, bringing together the best of in-person and virtual formats and will likely be the format for many future meetings. The message from the membership is that there is a strong desire to continue to have an in-person component at conferences. Geochemistry is international, and it benefits greatly from face-to-face interactions with global colleagues that optimise opportunities for serendipitous discussions and collaborations. International meeting attendance is of particular importance for early career researchers and students to present their work and to network widely. Ever mindful of the carbon costs, the GS works closely with the venue to make our meetings as “green” as possible. The program and local organising committees are tasked with ensuring that there is a full schedule of fieldtrips, science programs, workshops, and professional development programs to maximise development and networking opportunities.

Following Hawaii, the next GS-organised Goldschmidt Conference is scheduled for 18–25 August 2024 in Chicago (Illinois, USA). Discussions that were in progress in 2019 to site a GS-organised Goldschmidt Conference outside of North America were put on hold due to pandemic travel restrictions; we now eagerly anticipate reconsidering international venue bids for future planning.

Despite the novel challenges of the last two years, the GS was able to adapt quickly and respond in new ways to support our membership. This was possible owing to the selfless contributions, commitment, and abilities of our volunteers on all of the committees and by the GS Board of Directors who were willing to meet at short notice and sometimes inconvenient hours (a downside of being truly global). All outgoing presidents thank volunteers, but it is not pro forma. When you have the privilege of seeing the various committees and teams in action, you start to fully appreciate the deep commitment by people to realise GS principles and goals of improving the culture and professional standards

in geochemistry as a means to achieving excellence in service of society. The GS would not exist without the volunteers, and I give my heartfelt thanks to them for their substantial contributions.

A final grateful acknowledgement and thanks goes to unflappable Executive Director Kevin Johnson, whose broad skills, insights, and knowledge keep the GS running smoothly.

Input from the membership is welcome on all issues. Please share your thoughts at: president@geochemsoc.org or on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/geochemsoc>.

Vickie C. Bennett, GS President
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VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION

The Geochemical Society thrives due to the efforts of many dedicated volunteers. Our sincere gratitude goes to the following GS members whose board and committee terms conclude in 2021.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Elizabeth Cottrell (National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, USA)
- Naomi Harada (Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology)
- Hilairy Hartnett (Arizona State University, USA)
- Anna Martini (Amherst College, Massachusetts, USA)
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