



WHY JOIN A PROFESSIONAL SOCIETY?



Rick Carlson

This question was recently posed to the membership of the Geochemical Society in a survey whose goal was to ensure that the Society continues to best serve the needs of its membership. The responses were eye-opening, and reflective of scientists' changing expectations and needs as they increasingly rely on social media for peer-to-peer communication and access to journals through library e-subscriptions. The strongest message received concerned many aspects of the journal we cosponsor with the Meteoritical Society, *Geochimica et Cosmochimica*

Acta. Some parts of this story we already knew. The number of personal subscriptions to *GCA* is becoming vanishingly small as the membership, and everyone else, gets access to the journal electronically through their library. Many respondents noted the turmoil, hopefully solved by the time you read this, that accompanied the most recent contract negotiation with the publisher and the change in editorial leadership. The role of a commercial publisher in society journal production was a particularly prickly topic among respondents, with many pointing out the diminishing society editorial control and questioning the wisdom of letting commercial publishers profit from the authors' products and the editorial services provided, generally for free, by our community. What was less often noted is that *GCA* has been the number-one-cited full-length journal in the category of geochemistry/geophysics for many years, in part because of the fair and even-handed peer review managed by Frank Podosek and the selfless service of a large board of dedicated associate editors. Other positive features include the fact that, in most cases, authors can publish in *GCA* for free, that the web presentation of the journal, created by the publisher, allows the reader easy discovery of related papers and, in the near future, the ability to link with other related datasets. Where the balance lies between the strengths and weaknesses of the Society's current publishing activities is front and center in the mandate given to the recently restaffed Publication Advisory Committee, which will be examining the types of publishing activities that would best address the needs of the membership. *GCA* is but one of many publications cosponsored by the Geochemical Society, one of which you are reading now.

One experiment in our publications inventory is the redesigned *Geochemical News* (www.multibriefs.com/briefs/gs), now e-mailed weekly to the membership. The *GN* provides the opportunity to communicate news of interest to the geochemistry community quickly and link the membership to newsworthy stories across the broad field of geochemistry. The *GN* is at your disposal to advertise meetings and publications and to post funding announcements and other news items of interest to the geochemical community. Also appearing in *GN* are job postings listed in our Career Center (www.geochemsoc.org/career-center), an economical way to have your job postings viewed by over 4000 subscribers to the *GN*.

Another traditional *raison d'être* for a professional society is conferences, and here the nearly 3000 abstracts submitted to this year's Goldschmidt Conference in Montreal reflect the continued popularity of the Goldschmidt and its increasing ability to attract attendees from across the breadth of geochemistry. Going forward, our efforts will be focused on keeping Goldschmidt strong by looking for ways to reduce the expense of the meeting for attendees, increasing support for student participation, providing additional content, and rotating the meeting location through a larger proportion of the world, in keeping with the international nature of the Geochemical Society. As with our multiple publishing activities, the Goldschmidt Conference is not our only

conference-related activity. The Meeting Assistance Program offers grants of up to \$2000 to support smaller, thematic meetings (www.geochemsoc.org/programs/meetingassistanceprogram). You can read a report on a meeting we sponsored on page 236. Along these lines, we also have joined forces with the EAG in establishing an outreach program, whose goal is to bring modern approaches and interesting applications of geochemistry to audiences that have fewer opportunities to interact routinely with the international geochemical community. Perhaps the most distressing survey responses were from those who noted their desire to partake in Society activities but could not afford to do so. The US\$30 membership fee of the GS is small by western standards, but not for some developing countries. We hope to address this issue with some form of sliding membership fee that ties the fee to an index of relative income. We already do something similar for students and retirees, who pay a membership fee that is just enough to cover their subscription to this magazine; so, in essence, they receive the other benefits of GS membership for free.

The ongoing programs mentioned above address the majority of member services requested by survey respondents. Beyond these, the survey responses provided a number of ideas for ways in which the GS can expand its activities to better address the needs of the geochemical community. The leadership takes these suggestions seriously and will work to implement as many as feasible. This path thus provides at least one answer to the question "Why join a professional society?" because a professional society can marshal and direct a critical mass of energetic individuals to make highly cited publications a reality, organize well-attended conferences, provide rapid reporting of news relevant to the community, connect those offering jobs to those looking for employment, and provide a variety of other services of benefit to the membership. The GS greatly appreciates the membership participation in the benefits survey and looks forward to making many of the suggested new benefits a reality.

Rick Carlson (rcarlson@ciw.edu), GS President

NOTES FROM ST. LOUIS

Remember the **15 October 2012** deadlines for the 2013 GS awards: **Goldschmidt Medal, Clarke Medal, Patterson Medal, Treibs Medal**, and the GS/EAG **Geochemical Fellow**. Nomination requirements and procedures are available online at www.geochemsoc.org/awards/makeanomination.

The GS **Meeting Assistance Program** (MAP) was established in 2002 to allocate up to five sponsorships of up to US \$2000 each (\$10,000 annually) in support of geochemistry sessions/symposia at any scientific conference of geochemical relevance. Past sponsorships and application procedures are available at www.geochemsoc.org/programs/meetingassistanceprogram/.

The GS weekly e-newsbrief, **Geochemical News**, now has more than 4000 subscribers. Subscription is included with membership, but anyone may subscribe for free at: <http://multibriefs.com/optin.php?gs>. Archives of recent issues are also online at <http://multibriefs.com/briefs/gs/>.

Geochemical Society Business Office

Seth Davis, Business Manager
Kathryn Hall, Administrative Assistant
Washington University in St. Louis
Earth and Planetary Sciences, CB 1169
One Brookings Drive, Saint Louis, MO 63130-4899, USA
E-mail: gsoffice@geochemsoc.org
Phone: 314-935-4131 • Fax: 314-935-4121
Website: www.geochemsoc.org