

FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT

It is with great pleasure that I write my first president's message. The first thing I want to do is to encourage all of you who are members of the Oklahoma Academy of Science, or who might be interested in becoming members, to make use of the great opportunities that the Academy provides to you.

The Oklahoma Academy of Science is the premier organization in the state for the full range of scientists to become acquainted and to work together. The best way to do this is to come to our three annual meetings. We have two field meetings each year. The Spring 2014 meeting will be the first weekend of April at Lake Murray State Park (see this website for information). We also have a fall field meeting each year. The Fall 2014 meeting will be at Black Mesa State Park in September. These field meetings are a wonderful and informal time to meet your fellow scientists and to go on one another's field trips. These trips are among the most rewarding experiences I have. Eye-opening, too: You will see the world in a new way after Gloria Caddell shows you how many dozens of plant species can be found in just a few square meters of lawn.

In addition to these field meetings, we have a scientific meeting every fall. This year's scientific (or technical) meeting will be at the Broken Arrow campus of Northeastern Oklahoma State University on November 7.

All of these meetings are excellent opportunities for students as well as faculty; and this includes high school students as well as undergraduate and graduate students. We even have busloads of middle school students at some of the field meetings. The Academy has sections for a whole range of scientific disciplines, from biology to engineering to the social sciences. There is also a Science Communication and Education section, which welcomes contributions from faculty and students who wish to share some of their teaching techniques and experiences. There is no reason why, if you present a paper in your scientific section, you cannot *also* present a teaching paper, since most of us are teachers as well as scientists.

But the Academy is more than just an opportunity for scientists to get together and learn from each other, and more than just an outreach to students. We are birdwatchers, fossil collectors, and pressers of wildflowers, but we are also, each in our own way, activists. The Academy is also the closest thing that Oklahoma has to an official voice for science. (In this we work alongside Oklahomans for Excellence in Science Education; <http://www.oklascience.org>). We all know that science is undervalued in Oklahoma. Our political and business leaders do not often take science into account when they pass laws or make decisions that affect education, natural resources, and global climate. We need to let them know that we are here and that we know what they are doing. About a decade ago, the Academy issued a statement about the teaching of evolution, and last fall, the Academy issued a statement about global climate change. If any of you teach about these issues, or contact your representatives about them, you should know that you are not alone. You can know that the community of scientists in Oklahoma backs you.

I want to affirm what our immediate past president, Craig Clifford, wrote in his last column: we often do not realize how much good we do, or how much good we can do, for our students, for science, and for the world. Many of us have had the experience of a student that we had forgotten

about writing back to us to thank us for giving them scientific insights, even (or especially) if they are not scientists. (I got an email from a student I had in a class fifteen years earlier; he is now a disc jockey.)

But I want us to think about doing more. We should each take stock of our opportunities and strengths. For example, I teach general biology. It is therefore part of my responsibility to teach about the negative health effects of tobacco, and the danger that fossil fuels pose to global climate. I can also, as a citizen scientist, write letters to tobacco and fossil fuel corporations telling them that they should think about investing in something different. But what about bringing these two things together? I can encourage my students to write such letters. I can provide contact information for them to do so. I can give them talking points (although I do not want them to cut and paste; I want them to put their own experiences in these letters). I can even offer extra credit to them for writing letters, though I cannot require them to agree with me when they do so. It is easy to be cynical and think that a tobacco or fossil fuel CEO will ignore such letters. But if he gets large numbers of them, especially from a state that seems so fond of both tobacco and oil, he might at least feel a moment of discomfort. The main benefit will be to get students to think about how corporations may be manipulating them, at the expense of their health and the future of the planet. At least it will get students to do something other than take notes and exams or fill in blanks on a lab sheet. Of course we, and they, should stick to scientific topics and not involve our institutions or the Academy in any partisan positions. When writing letters, we speak as individuals, not on behalf of the Academy.

And the Academy is here to help you do that. We have a Facebook page. Contact Mia Revels (revels@nsuok.edu) if you would like her to (with appropriate discretion) post an idea that you have. You can join our Facebook page on the home page of this website. We also have a blog (<http://scienceoklahoma.blogspot.com>) on which any council member can post. If you are not a council member, contact one of us and we can (also with appropriate discretion) post an entry. I will use the blog to let you all know in upcoming weeks about letters that my students and I will be writing to our economic and political leaders.

Let's do it. And you don't have to do it alone. You are the Academy too.

Stanley Rice, OAS President