

OAS President's Message
Cameron University
Lawton, OK
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Introduction

As an academic administrator at a regional university I'm quite accustomed to writing all sorts of memoranda and preparing a variety of reports. Sometimes I daydream that our governing bodies and accrediting organizations must occupy extremely well-insulated offices, thanks to the many reams of paper documents that I send them each year. But thinking about writing my very first "President's Message" to the members and friends of Oklahoma Academy of Science has been, well, a bit unnerving. What if I say something that offends someone? What if I come across as boring? What if no one actually reads my thoughtfully crafted "President's Message?" Oh well, I often have the same thoughts about the emails that I send out to my faculty here at Cameron University. So, throwing caution to the wind, here goes.

I have many friends and colleagues among the membership of OAS. Some of these friendships and professional relationships date all the way back to the 20th century. It's funny how "20th century" seems like such a long time ago, and such a brief instant in time ago, all at the same time. I'm sure that many of you feel the same. OAS has been a part of my life since my first meeting attendance as an undergraduate, in 1976. I would like to claim that I was an extremely young undergraduate student, but in truth I was mainly naïve about science, and about life in general. Like many of you, and like many of our students even today, I was a first generation college student. It took the sage counsel that I received from a botany professor at Northwestern State, Dr. Paul Nighswonger, for me to realize that I might chart a course that would lead to a degree in science. What I remember most was Paul telling me to always keep an open mind, and to always seek to understand both sides of an argument. He said that it's alright to examine a new idea, and that I could do so without necessarily taking that point of view as my own. At that stage of my development I felt astonished that this accomplished college

professor would go out of his way to speak to a lowly undergraduate. I am still honored that those early discussions developed into a friendship that lasted until Paul's death in 2014. My friendships and professional relationships with many of you in OAS continue to this day, and my great hope is that all of us will take the time to speak on a personal level to the latest generation of students. In truth, it is we who work with students who are the privileged ones.

Spring Field Meeting

Coming up very soon is the annual OAS Spring Field Meeting, to be held April 8-10, 2016 at Beaver's Bend State Park. Registration will open soon, and I hope to see many of you there. Even in a time of pinched (or nonexistent) travel budgets the meetings that are organized by OAS members are affordable cost and offer good value. Field meetings offer something for practically everyone, and aren't just for biologists! However, if you've never attended a field meeting be forewarned: the accommodations tend to lean toward the "rustic" side, shall we say. But nearly all of the meetings are at locations where, with a bit of advance planning, slightly less rustic lodging can be procured, just in case the friendship that you have with your sleeping bag has worn thin.

Field meetings are outstanding opportunities to introduce your students (or yourself) to the varied biology and geology of the state of Oklahoma, and many of your students will likely never venture to these sites without your encouragement. As a case in point, I recently polled my class of freshman and sophomore non-majors biology students about how many of them had been to visit the nearby Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge. I was astonished when half of them responded that they had never been! Nudge your students and encourage them to go to Beaver's Bend, because they will return home with memories that will last a lifetime. Even if it should rain all weekend! Because with spring rains comes the vocalization of frogs, which leads to discussions of frog reproductive habits, which leads to, well you get

the point. Take the opportunity to turn every moment, even a rainy moment, into a teaching moment.

Membership Survey Highlights

I hope that you have read the results of the membership survey that was conducted in the fall. The survey results are still available on the OAS website, and please bookmark the new URL if you haven't done so already: <http://www.oklahomacademyofscience.org/>. I want to give a special thanks to Dan Hough and to the Oklahoma Biological Survey for maintaining and hosting the OAS web pages. The survey confirmed much of what we thought we knew about the membership. Yes, many members are biologists, and a majority of us are college faculty. But our membership spans the full range of academic disciplines represented by the OAS divisions, and our members are employed in middle schools, high schools, two-year colleges, regional universities, tribal colleges, private universities, research universities, rural school districts, urban school districts, and the state and federal governments. We are also a very experienced group, and 62% of survey takers reported that they have been OAS members for ten years or more.

The survey provides an opportunity for us to take stock of where we stand as an organization, and where we want to be going in the future. Several of the recommendations really stand out for me: the need to broaden the outreach of OAS to be more encompassing of the variety of disciplines represented by its membership; the need to improve the OAS website and to make it easier to register for meetings and to renew memberships; and most critical of all, the need to recruit more members into OAS. Some of these suggestions are already being taken to heart. The Executive Council has taken steps to reduce the cost for students to attend and participate in the Annual Technical Meeting. The meeting registration process has been simplified and will continue to improve, and we hope to have the membership renewal process streamlined soon. Other recommendations will take longer and will require creative suggestions by our membership.

Upcoming Executive Council Meeting

A recommendation that came out of the November meeting of the Executive Council was the need to meet more frequently. In recent years the Executive Council has only met annually, though other business is conducted electronically. Next month we plan to meet for an hour during the morning in conjunction with Oklahoma Research Day, which will be held at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, on March 11, 2016. For a number of years the Annual Technical Meeting and the annual Oklahoma Research Day (ORD) took place during the same month in the fall, creating scheduling conflicts and often causing members to choose between one meeting and the other. That changed several years ago with the shift of ORD to its present spring venue. I view the activities that OAS promotes and the activities that take place during ORD as being complementary to one another, and both benefit our students. We are all busy people and the leadership of OAS comes from individuals who volunteer their time and energies. But we are willing to give a little more in the hopes that our investment will pay dividends for OAS.

Call for Campus Liaisons

Communicating with the membership of a state organization should be easy, especially in this age of instantaneous electronic outreach. Both points are well taken, but we still think that OAS members are some of our most valuable assets when it comes to communicating with the OAS membership. We are currently recruiting campus liaisons, and hope to have a point of contact named for each of our college campuses, and for all of the sites where our members work. If you are interested in assisting please contact me directly, at tconley@cameron.edu. OAS is led by volunteers, and we are always interested in new volunteers! The duties will not be onerous, and will mainly consist of providing information about OAS to colleagues. We know that much information about OAS is still transmitted by word of mouth and through our academic institutions.

Workshop on Integrating Research Into Lower Division Undergraduate Courses

I know that many OAS members teach and work at Oklahoma colleges and universities that are affiliated with OK-INBRE, which is the Oklahoma IDeA Network for Biomedical Research Excellence. Hopefully you have heard by now of the workshop that is being held in Oklahoma City on March 25, 2016. Titled “Promoting Undergraduate Research in Oklahoma,” its goal is to help workshop participants develop new activities for undergraduate courses and laboratories that integrate research activities into them starting at the freshman level. I also serve as the chair of OK-INBRE Deans Council and please feel free to contact me for more information about this meeting.

Wrapping Up

In closing, I would like to say “Thank you!” to David Bass, who serves as the Executive Director of the OAS. David is the “man behind the curtain” at many of the OAS events, and he is the point of contact for meeting registrations and membership questions. David wears many hats in our organization, and he has much experience and wisdom in the ways of what has worked well and what has not. But we are a volunteer organization and we need to work continuously to attract more volunteers, and especially those who are truly new to the organization. The wonderful thing about volunteer organizations is that if there things about the organization that you would like to see changed, you have an opportunity to become engaged at the leadership level and to help to make those changes. I want to encourage all of you who support OAS to continue your support for the organization. OAS has been part of the fabric of science education in the state of Oklahoma since 1909 and we want to continue well into the future. I hope to see you at future OAS events. But if you have concerns, want to become more engaged, or have suggestions for improvement, I will welcome your calls and emails. Take care and thank you for all that you do!

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