

Why Become a Member of a Professional Society?

I RECENTLY ATTENDED the 2010 Ocean Sciences Meeting “From Observation to Prediction in the 21st Century” in Oregon. Cosponsored by the American Geophysical Union, the American Society of Limnology and Oceanography, and The Oceanography Society, this meeting brought together ocean science researchers, educators, and policy experts from throughout the United States and the world. The timeliness of the meeting theme, the great breadth of topics covered by ocean scientists representing many areas of expertise, the town hall meetings encouraging community involvement, the interactive poster sessions, and the vendor exhibits all contributed to making this meeting a true success. It also gave all those in attendance an appreciation of the vitality and rigor found in the ocean sciences. I am sure I was not alone in feeling uplifted by my professional colleagues.

As I circulated among the attendees, I inquired about professional society membership, and, sadly, I report that many of the attendees were not members of The Oceanography Society. Thus, I decided to use this *From the President* message to remind us why belonging to our professional organization is very important, hoping that it will give those who are TOS members selling points to encourage others to join.

First and foremost, being a member of a professional society establishes one as a career professional. You officially have demonstrated your interest and commitment to advancing the field, and you have ensured your ability to connect with the mainstream of the profession. This connectivity leads to another advantage of joining a professional society—that of networking. Professional societies encourage the gathering of intelligent, like-minded professionals who are immersed in the subject matter to exchange ideas, theories, and opinions. These discussions may lead to the development of new and/or expanded collaborations. While ever-expanding information technologies abound, the opportunity to cull through this information and examine it through intellectual discourse is critical. Again, the professional society offers such a forum—through professional meetings, workshops, and peer-reviewed journal publications.


Another, sometimes overlooked, advantage of joining a professional society is that it affords you the opportunity to demonstrate leadership among your peers. Whether serving as a reviewer of journal articles, an organizer of a meeting or poster session, or serving as an officer in the organization, there are multiple opportunities

for one to step up and lead. Such evidence of peer respect and endorsement is invaluable, regardless of where one is in his/her career path. Both prospective and current employers seek to recruit/retain individuals who demonstrate high standing in their profession.

Beyond the self-enhancement and relational benefits of belonging to professional societies, the definition of a professional includes a responsibility to contribute to the health and well-being of the profession itself. After all, if those who have identified themselves with a particular field are not interested in its future evolution, how can we expect others to care? Professional societies offer a collective voice to advocate for a vision of the future and for activities required to sustain and advance the field to a variety of audiences. Let's move from generalities to the specifics regarding the status of oceanography today and beyond. At a recent workshop entitled "Oceanography in 2025" sponsored by the Ocean Studies Board of the National Academy of Sciences, John Cullen of Dalhousie University, one of the speakers, made the following observations (for full context and quote see http://www.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=12627&page=4):

The challenges of climate change and increasing human impacts on the ocean will drive ocean research during coming decades. However, research alone cannot do the job. Ocean researchers must work across disciplines to provide policy makers, and the public they serve, with clear and understandable assessments of the state of the ocean and its sensitivity to climate and human influences in coming decades of change, if not environmental crisis. The challenge extends beyond finding the answers to technical and scientific questions: the results of scientific research must be validated and conveyed to a broad range of users, quickly and effectively. New forms of communication will be key—among disciplines, across sectors, and with the public. Rapid and broadly accessible communication of the state of the ocean, and its future role in the biosphere, will be a primary justification and goal for ocean research.

So...with all these positives associated with membership and the imperatives associated with a rapidly changing field, I encourage you to seek out new members for The Oceanography Society so that as the professional society of oceanographers, we are better positioned to provide the professional leadership required for an ever-changing future.


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