The UTEP Department of Geological Sciences Imperial Barrel Award (IBA) Team took first place in the American Association of Petroleum Geologists (AAPG) Worldwide Competition in Calgary, Canada.

“This win is a testament to the wonderful UTEP students who year after year, put in the long hours assembling a major research project and presentation in eight weeks,” said Rip Langford, Ph.D., professor in UTEP’s Department of Geological Sciences. “This activity is student driven; they decide to compete and it's up to them to do the creative and scientific work,” Langford said. “We in the department only provide advice and technical support. It’s a testament to the quality of our students that they place so highly every year.”

AAPG’S Imperial Barrel Award is an international competition between teams of university students who analyze real datasets eight weeks prior to the regional competition that include the geology, geophysics, land, production infrastructure and other relevant information. The final evaluation includes how the team effectively worked to meet a strict deadline, made decisions based on adequacy of the data and the ability to deliver an oral presentation to a panel of senior industry experts.

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Imperial Barrel Cont.

“Being part of The University of Texas at El Paso team competing for the Imperial Barrel Award is one of the most exciting experiences in my academic career,” said Eric Bergersen, a Masters student in Geological Sciences and the team leader. “The thrill of working hands-on with a real data set, rapidly learning new concepts, developing and testing new ideas, and the exhilarating feeling of having conquered obstacles that appeared to be insurmountable is something I will never forget.”

The team earned the first place spot in regionals earlier this year, accompanied by a $1,500 check, adding to the 5 previous regional wins. First place at the worldwide competition is a first for the University and is accompanied by a $20,000 prize.

Team members Andy Anderson, Andre Llanos, Alan Vennemann, and Langford returned to UTEP after the AAPG Annual Convention while members Eric Bergersen and Patrick Rea returned to their internships with the Apache Corporation and NASA, respectively. Upon their return, UTEP President Diana Natalicio, Dean Robert Kirken and the Department of Geological Sciences sponsored a reception in honor of their outstanding performance. Video link: http://www.elpasoproud.com/news/local/el-paso-news/utep-geology-team-wins-global-competition

NEW GIST Graduate Certificate Program

Early this Spring, the Department created a new Geographic Information Science and Technology (GIST) Graduate Certificate program led by Professor Deana Pennington. The 15 credit hour program is designed for people from any discipline who already hold a baccalaureate degree, and would like to add this skill set to their portfolio. Geospatial Information Science and Technology (GIST) is a collective term used to describe geographic information systems, remote sensing, global positioning, internet mapping, and other approaches for collecting, managing, analyzing, and visualizing data with spatial attributes.

Geospatial technologies are transforming the way in which many fields of study conduct their work. In earth, ecology and environmental sciences, geospatial technologies are used to model the earth’s subsurface; model and analyze climate change impacts; quantify the extent and spatial arrangement of natural resources and land cover types; monitor disasters in real time; and map hostile environments – including the deep ocean and Mars.

In the health and biomedical fields, GIST enables tracking of the emergence and spread of disease; investigation of environmental correlates of chronic health issues; analysis of health disparities due to location of medical facilities; and analysis of proximity to walking space, grocery stores that sell healthy foods, and related resources that are conducive to healthy living.

National defense and border security use GIST to track the movement of persons, weapons, and other contraband; monitor foreign military operations; map the spread of adversarial propaganda and disinformation on social media; and identify the location of terrorist events.

The multidisciplinary nature of geospatial technology makes it an ideal program for the Department of Geological Sciences, which already oversees the highly interdisciplinary Environmental Science bachelors and masters degrees, and now involves nearly every department in the College of Science.

The UTEP student chapter of the Society of Exploration Geophysicists (SEG) achieved the rank of Summit Level Chapter. Student chapters at the Summit level have members that serve on SEG boards, organize and participate in SEG student programs as well as local activities, are involved in outreach, and mentor other SEG student chapters.
Dr. Diane Doser Honored by Seismological Society of America

The Seismological Society of America (SSA) will present Diane Doser, Ph.D., Professor of Geological Sciences at The University of Texas at El Paso, with its 2016 Distinguished Service Award at the SSA's Annual Meeting held in Denver, Colorado, April 18-20, 2017. The award recognizes Doser's two decades of outstanding dedication and leadership of the Bulletin of the Seismological Society of America (BSSA).

Dr. Doser, who is also the director of UTEP’s Kidd Memorial Seismic Observatory, served as BSSA associate editor from 1996 to 2010, becoming editor-in-chief of the journal in 2010, appointing and managing a 27-member international board of associate editors reviewed roughly 350 yearly submissions to the journal, and overseeing the production of the 110-year-old journal's online and print editions. She will complete her service with BSSA in June 2016.

“I am greatly honored to receive the 2016 Distinguished Service to SSA Award,” Doser said. “The Seismological Society of America was the first professional society I joined as a student. I have always felt a strong affiliation with the society and its focus on understanding earthquakes to benefit humankind. Serving as editor-in-chief of the Bulletin for nearly six years has been a wonderful opportunity for me to help advance the society's purpose and values. I am grateful to all the associate editors, reviewers and staff who have helped me to ensure the Bulletin remains the premier journal of earthquake-related research.”

In their letter nominating Doser for the award, SSA Past President Ruth Harris and President-Elect Andrew Michael commended Doser’s high scientific standards as BSSA editor.

“It is through service to the society, as exemplified by the dedication of Diane to our journal, that we are able to achieve publication longevity and excellence,” they wrote.

Doser graduated with a B.S. in Applied Geophysics from Michigan Technological University in 1978 and received her M.S. and Ph.D. in Geophysics from the University of Utah in 1980 and 1984, respectively. Her current research centers on studies of earthquakes in south-central, southeast and interior Alaska, helping to produce seismic hazard maps for the Alaska region, as well as the application of geophysical techniques to environmental and engineering issues related to watershed studies and saline and freshwater aquifers.

The Seismological Society of America is devoted to the advancement of earthquake science. Founded in San Francisco a few months after the infamous 1906 earthquake, the society now has members throughout the world representing a variety of technical interests: seismologists and other geophysicists, geologists, engineers, insurers, and policy-makers in preparedness and safety.

Right: Field Geology is the keystone course for all Geoscience majors and many Environmental Science majors. This year’s class, one of our largest, are beginning new careers or advanced degrees. The course is now subsidized by the UTEP Field Geology Experience Fund initiated by James Cearley and generous donations by alumni.
N A S A  I N T E R N S  F R O M  G E O L O G I C A L  S C I E N C E S

Kelsey Mason (pictured with advisor Dr. Pavlis, advisor Dr. Pennington not shown) and Patrick Rea (pictured with advisor Dr. Jin) have been selected for NASA internships. Kelsey’s internship is at the Goddard Space Flight Center studying the Potrillo Volcanic Field in New Mexico as a proxy for Mars vulcanism. Patrick will be at Langley Research Center improving accessibility of NASA atmospheric data.


Matt Hiebing, Kelsey Mason, and Andre Llanos have been awarded scholarships from the West Texas Geological Society (WTGS). Headquartered in Midland, the society serves professionals and non-professionals with an interest in the earth sciences. Each year, approximately 16 scholarships are awarded.

A A P G  S C H O L A R S H I P  A W A R D S

Masters students Andre Llanos, Alan Vennemann, Matt Hiebing, and Eric Bergersen have been awarded competitive scholarships from the American Association of Petroleum Geologists Southwest Section.

Shoemaker Scholarship Award

Anna Mwangi has been awarded the Shoemaker Scholarship through the Texas Section of American Institute of Professional Geologists (AIPG). Ms. Mwangi’s outstanding essay as well as her glowing recommendation from her advisor, Dr. Laura Serpa, made her stand out from other applicants.

Joshua Peterson receives Alpha Phi Omega Student Award

The 2016, Alpha Phi Omega (APO) Student Award for the Department of Geological Sciences goes to Josh Peterson. The APO Fraternity was founded in 1919 at the Texas College of Mines for Engineering and Geology students with high GPAs. Josh will start his Master's Degree program at UTEP in Fall 2016.

Chevron Scholarship Recipients

Ph.D. student Evey Gannaway and Master’s student Eric Bergersen have been awarded this year's Chevron Scholarships based on their academic excellence, progress, involvement in outreach activities, and their research interest in petroleum.

This newsletter caps a successful and rewarding year for the department. In addition to the Imperial Barrel Award win and the numerous awards and scholarships achieved by our students and faculty, the Department of Geological Sciences has graduated 23 B.S., 11 Masters and 3 Ph.D. students. Dr. Philip Goodell was awarded the Undergraduate Student Choice Award for Outstanding Teaching, Ana Quevedo and Joseph Sabandal were selected as the Outstanding Undergraduates, and our Outstanding Graduates were Loren Ochoa, Syprose Nyachoti and Nicholas Talavera. Diane Doser and myself are attending a workshop on the Future of Geoscience Education at UT Austin in January as we work to improve and update our educational program. Geological Sciences faculty have received a significant number of grants including Dr. Marianne Karplus’ grant studying earthquakes in Nepal and the Environmental Science faculty’s Training in Environmental Research and Academic Success (TIERA). The students ran an exciting Colloquium this year including 13 talks and 28 posters featuring both graduate and undergraduate research. A new pick-axe statue created by Gabriel Gaytan and donated by Joe Gomez was dedicated at a reception during the Colloquium and now resides in our lobby. We have had great contributions in various forms from our alumni especially James Cearley, Larry Franceware, and Joe Smith. UTEP Geological Sciences will have a presence at the Fall 2016 GSA, SEG and AGU meetings, so if you are attending, stop by our booth to say “Hi.” At SEG, we are planning a reception at Aloft in Dallas on Tuesday October 18th. If you are attending, this will be a chance to meet with friends over hors d’oeuvres and beverages. We have remodeled the main office and added new office staff, Amber Bruner – Administrative Assistant, and Annette Veilleux – Graduate Coordinator, to complement our overworked team of Kristen Gonzalez and Joel Gilbert. I especially appreciate the efforts of Kristen and Joel to get us through my first year here and getting us to the point we are now. We will also welcome two new faculty this Fall – Geochemist Jie Xu and Physical Geologist Hugo Gutierrez-Jurado. Both bring expertise we do not currently have and will increase our educational offerings and research portfolio.

Our future goals include several remodeling projects, such as graduate student office space and classroom upgrades, evaluating undergraduate and graduate curricula, and expanding collaborations both within and outside UTEP. I am excited for our future, and I hope you will continue to feel welcome when visiting. Hint: Homecoming is October 23-29, 2016. We would love to see you this fall!

James Kubicki, Chair, Department of Geological Sciences