Message From the Chair

Greetings to all friends of Earth & Planetary Sciences,

I hope this first ever exclusively digital version of the EPS newsletter finds you safe and well. In mid-March, the increased threat and spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) forced the University to all but halt on-campus research and teaching activities, and it was announced that the Spring Quarter would be taught remotely. As you can imagine, this sent faculty, staff, and students scrambling to adjust to a new, hopefully temporary, normal. Although our day-to-day work environment has shifted from the hallowed campus walls of the Technological Institute and Hogan Hall to Zoom events delivered from unfinished basements, already crowded bedrooms, and forts constructed in part from the work clothes we no longer need to wear, our mission has remained the same—to continue conducting high quality research and providing the best possible learning experience for students. Although many challenges have emerged, I am immensely proud of the compassion and resilience the EPS faculty, students, and staff have shown in navigating the 2020 Spring Quarter.

WELCOME!

We welcome two new staff members to the EPS community:

Financial Assistant Richard Dodd joined us last May with a background in finance.

Program Assistant Tia Ng Groce joined us in September with a background in activism and event planning.

We also welcome these young scientists to the EPS community:

Senior Research Associate Andrew Masterson welcomed his little firecracker Amelia on July 4, 2018.

Research Associate Meagan Ankney welcomed baby Alice on May 18, 2019 (on the geologically-significant 39th anniversary of the Mount St. Helens eruption).

Assistant Professor Dan Horton welcomed baby Zephyr on January 10, 2019. Zephyr was named for the Greek god of the fair westerly winds and a famous train connecting Chicago and San Francisco.

Environmental Sciences Visiting Assistant Professor Yingying Xie (right) with baby Ethan (born October 22, 2019), Ethan’s grandmother, and Assistant Chair Trish Beddows (left).

Thank you to all members of the EPS community, including alumni, faculty, students, and staff, who contributed photos and stories for this newsletter. Please send additional photos and stories for next year to: earth@northwestern.edu

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Jurdy Retires, 38 Distinguished Years
Professor Donna Jurdy retired at the end of August after 38 years of service to the Department and the University. She joined the Northwestern faculty in 1981 and served as Chair of the Department of Geological Sciences from 2001 to 2005.

Professor Jurdy has had a distinguished scientific career. She was among the first to explore the relation between lithospheric plate tectonics and deep mantle dynamics, a research line that she continued for many years that yielded a number of very significant results. Many of her best papers are pioneering studies using plate reconstructions to study the dynamics of plate tectonics. Her approach was to test hypotheses proposed using the present plate geometry and velocities by using past plate relative and absolute motions. She has looked at the rotation of the lithosphere with respect to hotspots, correlations of plate speeds with latitude, speeds of continental versus oceanic plates, and motions between hotspots. She also showed that episodes of backarc spreading were often triggered by changes in plate motions. This required sophisticated integration of plate reconstructions with tectonic insight. Hence, she played a major role in developing an approach that is now a standard and powerful tool in geodynamic studies.

In recent years, she has also conducted a series of intriguing studies in comparative planetary science, looking at a number of different planets and moons. These show her typical sensible style: asking interesting questions and approaching them in imaginative ways, integrating her wealth of terrestrial experience to draw insight. Thank you Donna, and congratulations!

Brad Sageman studying core in Perth, Australia.

Sageman Awarded Fulbright
Professor Brad Sageman received a Fulbright Scholar Award in support of his sabatical research visit to the University of Birmingham. The Fulbright Scholarship is one of the most well-regarded and impactful scholarship programs in the world.

As a participant, Sageman was selected from a strong applicant pool to collaborate with colleagues James Bendle and Sarah Greene (University of Birmingham) on the geochemical analysis of samples from a >90 million year old lake deposit formed by the separation of Antarctica and Australia. Sageman collected the samples during the first part of his sabatical, when he visited the University of Adelaide, South Australia.

Commenting on receiving the Award, Sageman said: “I feel deeply fortunate to have been selected by the Fulbright Commission for this award. My objective in this project is to contribute new data bearing on the nature of the global carbon cycle during a so-called ‘hyperthermal’ interval of Earth history. Because the bulk of geochemical data on this time period is from the northern hemisphere, the project will contribute important new information from a southern hemisphere terrestrial site.”

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Graduate student Matt Selensky undertakes research in Lava Beds National Monument, California, last summer, as part of Professor Maggie Osburn’s NASA BRALLE (Biologic and Resource Analog Investigations in Low-Light Environments) research project. The cover photo shows Matt studying a microbial biofilm (the yellow/green sheen) on the ceiling of Chocolate Cave. One of the goals of the research project is to better understand how the microbes in shallow caves cycle carbon and nitrogen in the complete absence of the sun. Photo by Brian Anschei.

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Thank you Donna, and congratulations!

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Front Cover

Professor Donna Jurdy with students (from left to right) Igor Eufraiso, Reece Elling, Gabriel Nathan, Nooshin Saloor, Jamie Neely, and Maddy Lucas.

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YARROW AXFORD: It’s been a year of exciting transitions for the Axford research team. Everett Lasher (PhD 2019) and Jamie McFarlin (PhD 2019) earned their PhDs and moved on to postdoc research at the University of Pittsburgh and University of Colorado at Boulder, respectively. Graduate student Laura Laroca received an NSF grant for travel to Copenhagen to digitize historically important aerial photos from mid-20th century Danish mapping expeditions over Greenland. Two new graduate students—Pete Puleo (BA 2019, a lab alum) and Tim Coston (a Bowdoin College alum)—began their graduate studies with an adventurous summer expedition to Greenland, where they recovered one of Greenland’s longest continuous lake sediment records. Undergrads Annika Hansen, Christine Lee, Jeremy Brooks and Regan Steigleder all played important roles in the lab’s research, as did EPS collaborators Annika Hansen, Andy Masterson, Laura Rosales, Assistant Professor at Nevada State College, and undergraduate Alex Farmer. Additional achievements include publication in a major geological journal.

PATRICIA BEDDOWS: Spring 2019 featured promotion to Associate Professor of Instruction, for which Trish sent out heartfelt gratitude to all the colleagues and students over the years. Graduate student Emiliano Monroy-Rios is headed to shaking up the long-propagated paradigm of an immobile “tectonically stable” Yucatan Platform with his research efforts. Summer of 2019 was notably intensive. Over 100 Cave Pearl data logs were collected in July in the southwestern portion of the Yucatan Peninsula. August featured “Science Week” combining cutting-edge hydrogeochemical and geomicrobial research by co-advised graduate students Karyn DeFrancesco and Matthew Selesny, with collaborations with colleagues Andrew Jacobson and Maggie Osburn, respectively. The Science Week Expedition was only possible with the unprecedented support of the Under the Jungle Dive Shop, led by Natalie Gibb and the highly-skilled volunteer cave dive team. Rory O’Keefe, Vlada Diekina, Alex K.S. Fraser, and Nikolas Tschchenko. Special thanks also for site access and deep diving to Luis Leal and Erik Moreno and her team at the Ejido Dos Ojos. Tip of the hat also to dedicated field assistants Kate Halie (BA 2019) and undergraduate Alex Farber. Additional achievements include advancing earth science pedagogy, in deep collaboration with Laura Rosales, Assistant Professor at Nevada State College, and collaborator Edward Mallon, as Laura trained over months to launch her version of the EARTH 360 Instrumentation course. The academic year 2020 looks very different though, with accepting the challenge of Director of the Environmental Sciences Program.

CRAIG BINA continues his collaborations on subduction dynamics with colleagues at Charles University in Prague, with some recent results published in Earth and Planetary Science Letters and others presented at the International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics General Assembly in Montréal. He also continues to collaborate on metastable minerals with colleagues at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, with some results published in American Mineralogist and in Crystals. He co-advises graduate students, often with Professor Steve Jacobs. Bina recently co-authored a paper on the role of C and stable Sr isotopes in Neoproterozoic post-glacial (Marinoan) cap carbonates to better resolve the balance between global weathering and carbonate burial rates and their relationship to environmental changes that followed Snowball Earth events and preceded the Ediacaran diversification of life. Graduate student Niloufar Sarvian, co-advised by Jacobson and Maggie Osburn, is exploring Neoproterozoic carbon cycle dynamics and global-scale glaciations using the Sr isotope composition of rocks deposited prior to the Sturtian Snowball Earth event. Graduate student Lucy Yang presented her work on breadfruit cultivation in current climate zones of B, Ca, and stable Sr isotopes to study the causes and implications of current climate zones.

STEVE JACOBSEN: group got smaller with three postdocs beginning new faculty positions: Alisha Clark now at University of Colorado, Lily Thompson now at Sewanee University of the South, and James Walsh (Chemistry) now at University of Massachusetts Amherst. Michelle Wenz (PhD 2020) co-discovered a new perovskite mineral and named it goldschmidtite (KNO3) after the preeminent geochemist V.M. Goldschmidt. Graduate student Fei Wang co-discovered a new polytype of Mg2, Ca, and Mn oxide (NaT3O5) after a mantle petrologist, Peter H. Nixon. Both articles were published in American Mineralogist. Graduate student Hannah Bausch held a one-month internship at Sandia National Laboratories in Clovis, New Mexico, where in 2019 alumnus Joshua Townsend (PhD 2016) was promoted to Staff Scientist. Former postdoc Xiaobing Liu was promoted to Professor at Qufu Normal University, China, and alumnus Yun-Yuan Chang (PhD 2014) is continuing his work as a Weinberg Assistant Research Fellow at the Institute of Earth Sciences, Academia Sinica, Taiwan. Jacobsen is Editor at American Mineralogist and serves on the National Academy of Sciences consensus committee (CORES) to identify funding priorities for the coming decade at NSF’s Division of Earth Sciences. He co-authored the high-pressure materials genome for Physical Review X with Northwestern faculty (Materials Science and Engineering) Chris Wolverton.

ANDY JACOBSON congratulates former postdoc Ben Linsmeier (now a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison) for publishing his research examining Ca isotopes variations across the end-Cretaceous mass extinction, as well as graduate student Jiuyuan Wang for publishing his research focusing on Ca and stable Sr isotopes across the end-Permainian mass extinction. Other members of the Jacobson group include Research Associate Anastasia Schnell, graduate students Karly Kitch, Annie Nelson, and Nilou Sarvian, and undergraduate students Tia Chung-Swanson and Claudia Sandine. In collaboration with Professors Matt Hergtgen, Maggie Osburn, and Brad Segaman, several students are studying the role of B, Ca, and stable Sr isotopes to the causes and implications of current climate zones.
consequences of environmental change in “deep time”. Time periods of interest include the Neoproterozoic (Sarvian and Wang), OAE 1a (Wang), OAE 2 (Kitch), and the PETM (Kitch). Floyd started or worked with the Cambridge Stable Isotope Geochemistry group in chemistry of weathering. Field sites include Iceland (Nelson and DeFrancesco) and the Yukon Peninsula (DeFrancesco). Several members of the Jacobson group presented research findings at the V. M. Goldschmidt meeting in Barcellona; Jane continues to serve as associate editor for Geochemistry et Cosmochimica Acta.

DONNA JURDY officially graduated to Emerita Professor on September 1, 2019. For our first fall departmental seminar, we hosted Tom Brocher, USGS, presenting “The 151st Anniversary of the Damaging 1868 Hayward Earthquake: Why it Matters and How we Can Prepare for its Repeat” and afterward celebrated with the visiting speakers and friends and colleagues throughout the university. Donna Jurdy continues research focused on tectonic and volcanic activity on terrestrial planets, Venus and Mars, also the outer satellites. She was recently elected Chair of the Geophysics and Geodynamics Section of the Geological Society of America (GSA). With Gillian Foulger, she organized and chaired a very successful special session honoring Warren Hamilton at this year’s Phoenix GSA meeting. She’s actually planning similar special geophysics sessions at upcoming meetings.

For the last three years, ABRAHAM LERMAN’s research has continued to be in the field of the biogeochemical cycles of the past and present and in planetary science. In the field of terrestrial geochemistry, Abe Lerman and Fred MacKenzie, continuing their long-time collaboration, completed two articles, “Carbonate Minerals and the CO2-Carbonate Acid System” for Encyclopedia of Geochemistry and “Global Biogeochemical Cycling” for Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Geochemistry. In the field of planetary science, Abe presented on behalf of co-authors: Ashley E. Gilliam (PhD 2016), and Professor Jared Wunsch, “Explicit and Asymmetric Solutions of Simultaneous 1st-order and Riccati Equations” for the 2017 European Astronauts, presented on Applied Mathematics and Informatics in Cambridge, UK. He also chaired one session at that conference. Ashley Gilliam’s several articles, co-authored with Abraham Lerman, have also been published in peer-reviewed planetary science journals.

As Professor Emeritus, EMILE OKAL pursued his research on tsunamis and the quantification of earthquakes with alumni: Amir Salaree (PhD 2019), who is now a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Michigan, and Nooshin Saloor (PhD 2020). He is also involved in worldwide efforts for the preservation of historical seismological archives. This year, he took research trips to France, Malta, Japan, China, and invited lectures in Iran, Croatia, Oman, China, Tunisia and India.

MAGGIE OSBURN: The Osburn Isotope Geobiology Lab had another busy year with many notable comings and goings as well as research achievements. Graduate student Jamie McFarlin (PhD 2019) successfully defended her thesis and moved on to a postdoc at University of Colorado Boulder. Undergraduate Hannah Dion-Kirschner has started graduate school at Caltech in addition to submitting her senior thesis on surface wave radiations. Maggie’s team, including graduate student Caitlin Casar and postdoc Lily Momper, continue their work on the deep subsurface including multiple trips to the mine. Caitlin submitted a manuscript for publication in Geobiology titled “Mineral-hosted Biofilms in the Continental Deep Subsurface: Deep Mine Microbial Observatory, SD, USA.” Second-year graduate student Matt Selensky had a busy summer, completing two back-to-back field seasons in LaBrea Basin National Monument (CA). Maggie’s student, Niloufar Sarvian, conducted a detailed study on the microbes found within different shallow subsurface environments. Graduate student Niloufar Sarvian received an honorable mention for an NSF GRFP and passed her quals, and presented her first conference posters. New additions to the lab group include new graduate students Floyd Nichols and Tim Custon (joint with the.EMPTY). Other students continue strong, including Maggie on a field season to hypersaline lakes in British Columbia, Canada, which will be the subject of his thesis. Tim will be following in Jamie’s footsteps, joining the forces of Osburn and Oxford labs to better understand past climate variability in Greenland. While postdoc Lily Momper has moved on to start a career in environmental consulting, postdoc Fabrizio Sabba joined the group in November to probe deep subsurface microbial dark matter with metagenomics and metatranscriptomics. Maggie was honored by an appointment as CIFAR fellow in the Earth 4D program and is hoping to build a more holistic view of subsurface microbiology in the coming year.

BRAD SAGEMAN relocated to the southern hemisphere in December 2018 to begin his post-chair sabbatical. After a stop in New Zealand, he settled into Adelaide, South Australia. Former NU colleague Cesca McNerney was a consummate host and five delightful months flew by. During that time Brad began research on the Kipper Shale, a Turonian lacustrine deposit, and the Cambrian SPICE event before returning to Evanston for the summer. For the last three months of sabbatical Brad was a Fulbright scholar at the University of Exeter, U.K., collaborating with Professors James Bendle and Sarah Greene. He is a co-author of seven 2019 publications, with about the same number currently in review, or soon to be submitted. These include papers by former graduate students Young Ji Joo (PhD 2013), Matt Jones (PhD 2018), and Jin Laurin of Charles University in Prague, and current graduate students Siyuwan Wang and Gabby Kitch, as well as 2018-19 postdoc Ben Linzmeyer. Brad’s newest graduate student, Luca Podrecca, spent the year doing research and preparing for qualifiers.

SETH STEIN, graduate students Reece Illing and Molly Gallahue, visiting scholars Mitchell Barklage and Carol Stein, and collaborators are studying the structure and evolution of a gas system on the new planet of Saturn. This year, they after more about this huge feature and what it tells us about how continents break apart to form new oceans. Stein, graduate students Leah Salditch and James Neely, undergraduate Madeline Lucas, and collaborators are exploring a broad range of issues in earthquake seismology including how well hazard maps forecast the shaking from natural and human-induced earthquakes, why large earthquakes occur in temporal clusters, how well earthquake stress drops can be measured, and what controls the magnitudes of earthquakes in different tectonic settings. A major project is the California Historical Intensity Mapping Project (CHIMP), a dataset of shaking data for the past 160 years for California and surroundings, to explore how well hazard maps performed and how to improve them. These studies seek to better understand the basic science and use the results to help society mitigate resulting hazards.

SUZAN VAN DER LEE and her research group congratulate Trevor Bollmann (PhD 2019) and former postdoc Kevin Choy, who left NU and now apply their seismic signal processing skills to resource exploration and detecting heart disease from sensor data. Graduate students Vivian Tang and Boris Rosler published papers in Seismological Research Letters on detecting tiny earthquakes with teaching learning and research. They submitted additional work to Journal of Geophysical Research on observations of dynamically triggered seismic events and the stresses and strains imposed by fluid waves that lead up to triggering. Meanwhile, graduate student Igor Erufer explored multi-messenger modeling of lithospheric structure of the mid-continental Rift and presented his conceptual results at the 2019 Fall AGU Meeting. Igor further joined Vivian and Boris as a trainee in IDEAS, an interdisciplinary data-driven discovery program co-steered by Van der Lee. Lastly, 2019 marked the beginning of Van der Lee’s term as president-elect of the Seismology section of AGU.
150 YEARS OF WOMEN

The Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences has its own interesting take on 150 years of women at Northwestern. According to department records, the first woman to graduate in geology from Northwestern was Helen Skewes (BA 1908). The second, Gertrude Curme Bragg (BA 1908). We believe that Helen Skeves Plummer (MA 1925) and Lucille Ridgeway (MS 1925) were the first women to receive master’s degrees in geology from Northwestern, and that Helen Belyea (PhD 1939) was the first woman to receive a PhD in the department.

To mark the 150th anniversary of coeducation at Northwestern, the University is celebrating individuals—past, present and future—who take risks, chart their own course and inspire change. These include bold and brave women/womxn who led the struggle to open doors, creating greater access and opportunity for all who follow.

As part of the year-long celebration, One Book One Northwestern (the campus-wide reading program hosted by the Office of the President) selected Hidden Figures by Margot Lee Shetterly for the 2019-20 academic year. The Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences teamed up with One Book One Northwestern for a special seminar with NASA scientists Andrea Mosie and Ryan Zeigler, who spoke to EPS about the 50-year legacy of the Apollo lunar collection.

California Historical Intensity Mapping Project (CHIMP)

Graduate students Leah Salditch and Molly Gallahue, advisees of Professor Seth Stein, embarked on a journey last summer to collect oral history observations from witnesses to two large earthquakes—the magnitude 6.1 earthquakes of 1992 near Joshua Tree and 1993 near Big Pine, California. The trip was part of a larger project, termed CHIMP (California Historical Intensity Mapping Project), which aims to compile a historical shaking dataset for all of California and surroundings. Meeting in gathering places between Palm Springs and the Inyo National Forest, Salditch and Gallahue searched for residents whose accounts of these earthquakes could help the students study how well seismic hazard maps, which are used to design earthquake-resistant buildings, actually predict shaking. The trip was made possible by AGU’s Celebrate 100 grant program.

California Historical Intensity Mapping Project (CHIMP)

Graduate students Molly Gallahue and Leah Salditch

NASA Scientist Andrea Mosie with Professor Maggie Osburn.

Grad students Gabriel Nathan and Niloa Sarvian touch an Apollo lunar sample.
Steve Brand (BA 2016) currently works for the California Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC). As an environmental scientist for DTSC, he regulates entities that manage hazardous waste under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), including generators, transporters, and treatment, disposal, and storage facilities (TSDF). Steve’s job is to make sure these businesses comply with California and federal laws to ensure that hazardous waste is delivered to its proper destination and that releases are minimized along the process. He has been involved with responding to public complaints for hazardous waste mismanagement and inspecting businesses in vulnerable communities for an environmental justice initiative.

Steve Brand conducting a hazardous waste inspection.

Professor Donna Jurdy (third from right) and Professor Seth Stein (far left) with alums (left to right): Jeremy Cooper (Environmental Sciences BA 1994), Audeliz Matias (PhD 2005), Fred Marton (PhD 1998), Sarah Andre (PhD 2004), and Eryn Klosko (PhD 2002).

Mark Dring (MS 2003) has been working in Milwaukee for the last 12 years for the FBI. He is currently using his science background as a Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Coordinator. He performs outreach and acts as a liaison to business, academia and first responders on threats involving chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosives. (CBRN).

Mark Dring (Postdoc 2011) working on the weekends, and much more. It was the experience of a lifetime!

Yuxi Suo (MS 2018) is currently an investment researcher for the BlackRock Sustainable Investing team, based in New York. Her job is focused on identifying drivers of long-term return associated with environmental, social and governance issues of all public-listed or private companies, integrating them throughout BlackRock’s investment portfolios, and creating solutions to achieve sustainable environmental outcomes and investing returns.

Yuxi Suo conducting a hazardous waste inspection.

Michael Witek (PhD 2017) and Sung Joon Chang (Postdoc 2011) are working together on the 3D structure of crust and mantle of east Asia.

Michael Witek and Sung Joon Chang enjoying Korean bbq in Chuncheon, Korea.

Top photo: 2019 Undergraduate Alumni Jamie Easton, Eric Van Camp, Peter Palos, Katherine Haile, and Monica Ha.

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Thank you to our amazing donors, including those listed here, who donated between December 2018 and January 2020. If you donated during this time and do not see your name listed, please contact us.

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