Welcome from the GPC Chair
Mary Silber, University of Chicago
Page 1

APS Fellows Nominations
Page 1

Message from New Lead Editor, Physical Review E
Uwe Tauber
Page 1

ARTICLE: Climate Impacts of COVID-19 Emissions Reductions via Aerosol-Cloud Interactions
Andrew Gettelman, NCAR
Page 1

GPC 2021: Executive
Page 3

GPC 2021: Committees
Page 5, 8

APS March Meeting 2021
Page 6

Other News Links of Interest and Upcoming Events
Calendar
Page 11

Message from the Editor
This is the fifteenth GPC Newsletter, published twice per year. You, the GPC membership, can be of enormous value. We invite comments, event notices, letters, and especially specific suggestions for content. Any of the above, addressed to GPCnews@aps.org, will be gratefully acknowledged in a timely fashion.

Welcome from the GPC Chair
Mary Silber, University of Chicago
I’m writing to you from my home in Chicago, where I am hunkered down in both a pandemic and a polar vortex, and thinking about the intersection of epidemiology and climate science. Yesterday I “attended” a panel discussion at the APS leadership council meeting on “Communicating science to nonscientists in post-election and post-pandemic

(Continued on p. 2)

APS Fellows Nominations
APS GPC Members may nominate colleagues to become APS Fellows through GPC. You are invited to nominate those who have made exceptional contributions to promoting the advancement and diffusion of knowledge concerning the physics, measurement, and modeling of climate processes, within the domain of natural science and outside the

(Continued on p. 2)

Message from New Lead Editor, Physical Review E
Uwe Tauber
Dear Colleagues in the APS Topical Group on the Physics of Climate:
I am writing to introduce myself as the new Lead Editor of Physical Review E (https://www.aps.org/publications/apsnews/updates/tauber.cfm). I believe a considerable range of the research pursued in your interdisciplinary field could fit well into PRE.

I am honored and delighted to succeed Eli Ben-Naim in this important role. Physical Review E is of course a truly interdisciplinary journal whose profile extends well beyond the traditional physics realm to a broad research community in science and engineering. I view this unique setting of PRE within the family of our community-run APS journals as both an

(Continued on p. 2)

ARTICLE: Climate Impacts of COVID-19 Emissions Reductions via Aerosol-Cloud Interactions
Andrew Gettelman, National Center for Atmospheric Research
The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in ‘lockdowns’ worldwide in the first half of 2020. These changes to the global economy and movement of people changed fossil fuel and transport use. These changes thus had impacts on the emissions from these sources. Greenhouse gas emissions decreased nearly 20% in spring 2020, with an estimated annual decrease of about 8% (from the International Energy Agency). These changes also reduced pollution

(Continued on p. 3)
Welcome from the GPC Chair
(Continued from p. 1)
America.” The importance of greater understanding of science, by the public, was highlighted by the panel through the examples of anti-maskers/anti-vaxxers and climate change deniers.

How’s that for an opening example of the intersection of climate and the pandemic?

For almost a decade now I have been involved with a “Math and Climate Research Network” that has, in recent years, run summer workshops and yearlong research activities for mathematics students who want to explore the intersection of applied math (my field) and climate research. Drawing on our mathematical areas of expertise, we explore topics such as possible mechanisms for tipping points and predictability barriers, and we introduce students to algorithms for data assimilation. Last summer we abruptly pivoted to running a 6-week program on “Dynamics and data in the COVID-19 pandemic”. We did this, remotely, through the American Institute of Mathematics, who provided a summer stipend to the students, many of whom had summer internships cancelled by the pandemic.

A few of the student teams were interested in the interface between climate and the pandemic; for example, examining proxies for quantifying reduction in CO₂ emissions during the lockdown. They were hoping the pandemic would teach us what is possible, with a tweaking of lifestyle. Yes, the pandemic has helped us, individually, decrease our carbon footprint. We have learned new ways to work, many of which are improvements and here to stay. We have explored new research questions, and some have found opportunities for answering scientific questions about climate created by changes in air quality during lockdown. (See the newsletter article by Andrew Gettelman.) I’m also thinking about what is critically lost in my work-space. I miss the serendipity of chance encounters. I miss the conversations that are spontaneous, rather than scheduled to occur via Zoom. Chance encounters, and the ideas that arise through them, often spark our creativity and our curiosity. Almost exactly one year ago I attended the APS Leadership meeting in Washington DC, as chair elect for the GPC. I was there with Bill Collins, now our past chair, and Raymond Shaw, our secretary-treasurer. One of the serendipitous encounters I had at the Leadership meeting was actually with a colleague from the University of Chicago, Tom Witten. We met at the airport, en route to Washington, and sat together on the flight. Tom pulled out a manuscript he was working on with some students, in which he was looking at time-series temperature data across the US, extracting the second harmonic content of the annually oscillating signal. Fast forward a year, Tom will present that work as a contributed talk in a GPC focus session at this year’s March Meeting. It is a session that is jointly sponsored by the Group on Statistical and Nonlinear Physics that Tom chairs. I organized it with Justin Burton, who is a GPC member-at-large, that I met with when he was visiting U. Chicago to give an “in-person” talk. Remember the olden days, when we didn’t have “in-person” and “remote” as essential parts of our vocabulary?

I hope you will join us at the APS March meeting, and help to create some serendipitous encounters for the GPC, across time-zones and climates.

APS Fellows Nominations
(Continued from p. 1)

Any current APS member can initiate a nomination. The membership of APS is diverse and global, and the Fellows of APS should reflect that diversity. Fellowship nominations of women, members of underrepresented minority groups, and scientists from outside the United States are especially encouraged.

For information on how to nominate, and a list of current Fellows, please see the APS Fellows webpage.

The deadline for submitting fellowship nominations for review by the GPC Fellowship Committee is June 1, 2020. For further information regarding fellowship nominations, please email fellowship@aps.org

Message from New Lead Editor,
Physical Review E
(Continued from p. 1)

opportunity and challenge. Naturally, I will have to profoundly rely and draw on your expertise, excellence, and dedication, and I look forward to working with the GPC leadership over the coming years!

PRE covers a huge range of topics, yet all address complex interacting many-body systems, typically subject to nonlinear, often stochastic collective dynamics, and usually (but not exclusively) in the classical realm, and whose analytical and/or numerical exploration tends to rely on statistical approaches. We invite the best topical manuscripts in these broad areas that advance the field and represent an authoritative and substantive addition to the body of literature by presenting important and novel physics. We expect papers published in PRE to make a significant contribution in a specific research area and generate interest for our readership, and to explore the addressed subject matter comprehensively and thoroughly.
Work that addresses the physics of climate could fit very nicely into PRE: there is natural overlap with nonlinear and statistical physics, complex systems, computational physics, fluid dynamics, plasma physics, and data science, all fields that are covered prominently within the interdisciplinary scope of PRE. Especially if you wish to emphasize connections with many-body problems, correlation effects, nonequilibrium features, innovative statistical or computational tools, etc., I would think PRE may be a good match.

The quality of every journal of course crucially depends on the submissions it receives but also decisively on the quality of its referee pool. Please aid our fundamental mission to disseminate the best research by serving as diligent, conscientious, and timely reviewers, and by recruiting and training students and postdocs for our reviewer pool.

We also rely very much on the amazing collective expertise among the APS units to help us stay up to date with our journal scope as, e.g., reflected in its section headings, and I generally would like to maintain an intense open discussion line with all of you to further improve our operations and service to the scientific community in general, and to physicists engaged in climate science specifically.

Please always feel free to contact me with any suggestions, ideas, concerns, or any other issues.

Uwe Tauber, tauber@aps.org

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**GPC 2021 Executive**

**Chair (through 12/2021):**

Mary Silber  
Department of Statistics  
University of Chicago  
Chicago, IL 60637  
msilber@uchicago.edu

**Chair-Elect (through 12/2021):**

William Newman  
Department of Earth, Planetary, and Space Sciences  
UCLA  
Los Angeles, CA 90095  
win@ucla.edu

**Vice Chair (through 12/2021):**

Hussein Aluie  
Department of Mechanical Engineering  
University of Rochester  
hussein@rochester.edu

**Past Chair (through 12/2021):**

William D. Collins  
Division Director  
Climate & Ecosystems Sciences  
Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory  
wcollins@lbl.gov

**Secretary/Treasurer (through 12/2021):**

Raymond A. Shaw  
Department of Physics  
Michigan Technical University  
1400 Townsend Dr  
Houghton, MI 49931  
(906) 487-1961  
rashaw@mtu.edu

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**Article: Climate Impacts of COVID-19 Emissions Reductions via Aerosol–Cloud Interactions**  
(Continued from p. 1)

associated with fossil fuel emissions. Emissions of air pollution from transport emissions were the most obvious change (such as nitrogen oxides). But particulate emissions of human generated pollution such as Black Carbon (BC, colloquially ‘soot’) and sulfate (SO$_4$) also decreased.

The effect of reductions in fossil fuel emissions was a small cooling tendency on the planet. Because carbon dioxide (CO$_2$) perturbations remain in the atmosphere for a hundred years, a one year change of ~10% is a very small effect. But aerosols are also important for climate. BC is important for the direct absorption of radiation which can heat the atmosphere and surface below. Sulfate scatters visible light, and thus is a cooling effect by scattering some sunlight back to space. Both BC and SO$_4$ also have potentially substantial ‘indirect’ effects on climate. These aerosols act as Cloud Condensation Nuclei (CCN) and are locations for forming liquid cloud drops and ice crystals. Decreases in aerosols would tend to result in fewer cloud drops and crystals. What does this mean for climate?

First, we must understand the role of clouds in the climate system. Clouds are white, and clouds are cold. Low clouds act like a shade, scattering sunlight (shorter visible wavelengths) from their bright white tops that would otherwise be absorbed by a darker surface below. Clouds also absorb infrared radiation from the earth below, acting like a blanket. For low clouds, since they are close to the temperature of the surface, the blanket is not a large warming effect.
For high clouds with cold tops, they absorb radiation from below and emit it in both directions at a lower temperature, acting like a blanket. The blanket is substantial, and usually a little bit larger than their solar cooling effect. So on balance, low clouds cool the planet, and high clouds warm the planet, with the net result a strong cooling of 6 times the effect of doubling CO₂ (25 W/m² cooling for clouds, versus about 4 W/m² warming for doubling CO₂).

So what happens when you reduce the number of cloud drops? The drops get bigger. Bigger drops are ‘darker’: if you think of a cloud, the darker gray parts usually have bigger drops. This reduces the cloud cooling effect and would thus be a net warming.

Back to COVID changes. As aerosols (BC and SO₄) decreased, we would expect reductions in direct scattering and absorption, and also reductions in cloud drop number. What are the climate effects of this? To explore this question, we used a special configuration of two Earth System Models (Climate Models) focusing on the atmosphere. This work recently appeared in *Geophysical Research Letters*.

We used two different models (one from the US, one from Europe) of similar complexity to simulate the changes in radiation and temperature resulting from aerosol emissions changes. We used as input changes to emissions derived from Google mobility trends: the change in where phones were located all over the planet. These mobility based estimates were calibrated against spring 2020 emissions data on fossil fuel use. The result was a method that could be applied nearly globally to estimate emissions reductions. The unique aspect of this study is we use simulations ‘constrained’ by actual meteorology over 2020 to remove the effects of meteorological noise from the simulations. At each time step we push the models back to the observed ‘weather’ state. This results in the ability to find statistically significant changes in clouds and radiation much smaller than could be seen in observations because of year to year variability.

The study found that significant changes in simulated aerosol emissions led to reductions in total anthropogenic aerosol cooling through aerosol-cloud interactions. Cloud drop numbers were reduced in the simulations and liquid water path decreases. This leads to a dimming of clouds and a net warming effect. Panel (a) in the figure shows how this evolved over the months of 2020 with 2 models (Orange, Blue, Green one of the models; Red the other model), with some sensitivity tests for different emissions frequency (daily versus monthly) and constraining temperature or not. The combined average effect is small (+0.29 ± 0.15 W/m²) and peaks in April-June 2020. Both models give a similar estimate, that the total human cooling effect (-1.5 W/m² or so) was reduced about 20%, for a small net warming.

The magnitude of these changes is regionally significant in radiative and cloud properties only when tightly constrained simulations nudged to meteorology are used. The differences from baseline are much smaller than year to year variability in radiative and cloud properties due to meteorology, and thus not directly detectable from observations.
Though the simulations use fixed ocean temperatures, surface temperature over land can vary. Accordingly, the fast radiative response from clouds and aerosols does cause regional changes in surface temperature on the order of +0.1 to +0.3 K, mostly at higher northern hemisphere latitudes over the US and Russia in spring (panel (b) of the figure). However, this result does not account for all the earth system dynamics or the slower response as the ocean interacts with radiation. To assess the long term response but limit noise, we put the aerosol warming effect derived here into a coupled climate model emulator. The impact of these aerosol changes on global surface temperature is estimated to be very small (+0.03 K peak) and transient over several years. However, the aerosol changes are the largest contribution to COVID-19 affected emissions induced radiative forcing and temperature changes. Aerosol changes are larger than the cooling from reductions in CO$_2$, contrails or ozone.

Interestingly, 2020 was by some estimates the warmest year on record. +0.03 K is about 1/3 of the recent interannual variability of the global average mean temperature: indicating that maybe the reduction in pollution (aerosols) and resulting warming might have pushed 2020 over the edge into being the warmest year ever.

What does this mean for the future? We account for these effects in our current climate model projections. We assume that the air will be cleaner, and this will cause a net future warming. But the processes involved are highly uncertain due to the scales (cloud drops and particles at micro-meter scales). That makes it harder for us to constrain future warming. As we get more detailed observations from 2020, we might be able to use the unintended experiment of COVID pollution reductions to test the effects described here.
The two GPC Focus Sessions will take place Thursday, March 18. The GPC Business Meeting will take place 6-7 pm that evening.

GPC Early Career Prizes: Two GPC early career prizes were awarded this year. The recipients were focus session contributed talk presenters Dallas Foster, a graduate student at Oregon State University (An Improved Framework for the Dynamic Likelihood Filter), and Srikanth Topaladoddi, a postdoc at University of Oxford (Statistical Mechanical Theory of the Thickness Distribution of Arctic Sea Ice). The awards cover March Meeting registration fees.

GPC Student Chat with the Experts: The student chat with expert events will take place 12:30-2:00 pm CST on Tuesday, March 16. Each online table will include up to eight students. The role of the expert is to speak informally on a chosen physics topic. It is a great opportunity for students and experts to have a conversation without any presentations or formality. Bill Collins will host the GPC table, which will be devoted to the topic “Connecting physics and physicists to solutions for climate change.”

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**GPC Focus Session: Rare Events, Tipping Points, and Abrupt Changes in the Climate System**

**Session R15**, 8:00 – 11:00 am CDT, Thursday, March 18

**Invited Talks:**

**FREDDY BOUCHET**
ENS de Lyon and CNRS

**Title:** Large deviation theory, extreme events and abrupt changes in the climate system

**Synopsis:** In the climate system, many events of primarily importance, for instance rare extreme events or rare transitions between climate attractors cannot be studied with conventional approaches, because they are too rare and the realistic models are too complex. We will discuss several new algorithms and new theoretical approaches based on large deviation theory, where huge progress have been made to compute such rare events. We discuss results for the study of extreme heat waves and abrupt climate changes. We will delineate a research program in order for these approaches to be used with the most realistic models in the future in order to pave the way of a quantitative science of rare climate events.

*Some of the research leading to these results has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union’s seventh Framework Program (FP7/2007-2013 Grant Agreement No. 616811). Some through the ACADEMICS grant of the IDEX LYON, project of the Université de Lyon, PIA operated by ANR-16-IDEX-0005. The computation of this work were partially performed on the PSMN platform of ENS de Lyon. This work was granted access to the HPC resources of CINES under the DARI allocations A0050110575 and A0070110575 made by GENCI.*

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Extreme teleconnection pattern: averaged north hemisphere temperature (colors) and 500hPa geopotential height (lines), conditioned on the occurrence of an extreme heat wave over Europe. The picture shows clear global correlations for the occurrence of a local heatwave. Gathering the very long statistics for this picture was possible thanks to the use of a rare event algorithm.
JUAN RESTREPO
Computer Science and Mathematics Division, Oak Ridge National Laboratory

Title: Data Assimilation and Uncertainty Quantification in the Geosciences

Synopsis: In the statistics community “Big Data” science is meant to suggest the combining of inferential and computational thinking. We also speak of big data in the geosciences. However, the problems we pursue, e.g. Earth’s climate, are often extreme in the number of degrees of freedom, and in many instances, non-stationary in their statistics. This usually means that we are working with sparse observational data sets, even if the number of observations is large. The Bayesian framework is a natural inferential data assimilation strategy in geosciences, to some extent because the degrees of freedom in the problem vastly outnumber observations but more critically, because the models we use to represent nature have considerable predictive power. Data sparsity is thus mitigated through physics-informed models. After presenting a review of this Bayesian estimation strategy we will summarize how this process has evolved to handle nonlinear and non-Gaussian processes. We will also suggest that it is possible to design estimators to highlight certain features or exploit structure in the dynamics or the physics. An example of an approximate Bayesian estimator informed by models and future data will be shown to lead to improvements in forecasts. Machine learning can be exploited to capture unknown or unresolved processes and made to work with these estimators. We will conclude the presentation with a review of present challenges, encompassing multiscale dynamics and statistics, unresolved physics, and event forecasting.

*This work is supported by the National Science Foundation and by GoMRI.

MORGAN O’NEILL
School of Earth, Energy & Environmental Sciences
Stanford University

Title: Feedbacks between the worst storms on Earth and lower stratospheric water vapor

Synopsis: The presence of water vapor in the lower stratosphere is enormously consequential for climate. Physically, it helps set the ’cold reservoir’ temperature effectively experienced by the tropospheric heat engine, and an increase in water vapor in the lower stratosphere cools the stratosphere and warms the Earth’s surface. Chemically, an increase in stratospheric water vapor speeds ozone destruction. The complexity of accurately predicting the track of hurricanes in time to respond to their potential socio-economic impact. A long-term goal is to reduce the risk/uncertainty of these tracks to allow for responders to station their resources within a short driving distance of the most affected population areas. Image from NOAA.
The articles in this newsletter represent the views of their author(s) and are not necessarily those of the Unit or APS.
Invited Talks:

DANIEL ROTHMAN
Earth, Atmospheric, and Planetary Sciences
MIT

Title: Characteristic Excitations of Earth’s Carbon Cycle

Synopsis: Over geologic time, Earth’s carbon cycle has been intermittently disrupted by transient changes in the oceans’ store of carbon. Each of these events co-occurs with significant climate change; moreover, mass extinctions are always accompanied by such disruptions. Yet the cause of all of these events remains mysterious. Disruptions of the carbon cycle are typically assumed to represent a proportionate response to an external stressor, such as enhanced volcanism or the release of methane. This talk reviews a combination of empirical evidence and physical theory that suggests instead that many of these events are characteristic nonlinear responses of the Earth system to relatively minor perturbations. Two kinds of observations support this conclusion: the existence of a characteristic carbon flux in the surges that mark these events, and a tendency of minor events to occur in pairs. Both observations are consistent with the predictions of a model of an excitable carbon cycle.

*This work was supported in part by the Lorenz Center

ALISON BANWELL
Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences (CIRES)
University of Colorado, Boulder

Title: Impacts of surface melt and hydrology on Antarctic ice-shelf dynamics and break-up

Synopsis: Ice shelves, which are thick floating layers of glacier ice extending from the glaciers on land, buttress much of Antarctica and protect the ice sheet from greater rates of mass loss than it is already experiencing. However, field, remotely-sensed, and modeling based data suggest that the stability of these ice-shelves is threatened due to stress variations associated with surface meltwater ponding and drainage. These processes may initiate meltwater-induced vertical fracturing (‘hydrofracturing’) and iceberg capsize, which may ultimately lead to ice-shelf disintegration. For example, the rapid and widespread collapse of the Larsen B ice shelf in 2002 was likely driven by the drainage of about 3000 lakes via a chain reaction style process. Surface melting and ponding on the surfaces of

Comparison of estimates of the perturbations of the modern and end-Cretaceous (KT) carbon cycles (red symbols) to a hypothesis for the upper bound of a threshold for nonlinear excitation (straight line), as a function of the duration of time \( t_i \) over which the
Antarctic ice shelves is becoming increasingly widespread, and melt rates are predicted to increase significantly this century. Although the most up to date ice-sheet models do not account for the effects of meltwater ponding on ice-shelf stability explicitly, these models respond dramatically to increased ice-shelf melting, predicting up to 1 m of sea-level contribution from Antarctica this century. By focusing on a variety of field, remotely-sensed and modeling based case studies drawn from my research, I will present recent progress and future research directions in the rapidly growing field of Antarctic ice-shelf surface hydrology and stability. Such case studies will include: i) the first field-based study of ice-shelf flexure in response to the filling and draining of surface lakes; ii) an optical and microwave satellite data based study showing 32-year record melt on the George VI Ice Shelf in the 2019/2020 austral summer; and iii) results from a new process-scale ice shelf model that simulates, for the first time, both ice flow and viscoelastic flexure in response to a variety of surface meltwater phenomena. *NSF award #1841607 to the University of Colorado Boulder (PI Banwell).

### Contributed Talks:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yunxiang Song, Thomas Witten, Kyle B. Lawlor</td>
<td>“Excess” semiannual variation in historic temperature records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin Burton, Cassotto Ryan, Joshua Mendez Harper, Jason Amundson, Mark Fahnestock, Martin Truffer, Marc Guasch</td>
<td>Granular decoherence precedes failure of glacial ice mélange</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peter Weichman</td>
<td>Enhanced deep water acoustic range estimation based on ocean General Circulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Balch, Christian Pappas, Arjang Geramifard, Madhu Gyawali, Lok Lamsal, Bimal Gyawali, Chloe Vieira, Andre Wright, Rudra Aryal</td>
<td>Space and Ground-Based Decadal Trends of Nitrogen Oxides in Texas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Autonomous kayak collecting measurements of ocean properties and currents in front of LeConte Glacier, Alaska.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Article Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lily Liu, Punit Gandhi, Mary Silber</td>
<td>Banded Vegetation Patterns in Drylands: Modeling across timescales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Srikanth Toppaladodi, Woosok Moon, John Wettlaufer</td>
<td>Statistical Mechanical Theory of the Thickness Distribution of Arctic Sea Ice</td>
</tr>
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### Other News Links of Interest and Upcoming Events Calendar

1. [2021 International Conference on Clouds and Precipitation](http://example.com), San Francisco, USA, November 1-2, 2021