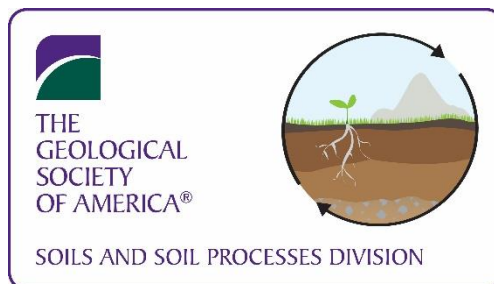


GSA Soils and Soil Processes Division

Spring 2025 Newsletter



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Message from the Management Board

We would like to extend warm greetings to our new and longtime members. This newsletter includes updates on recent activities and exciting of new initiatives of the GSA Soils and Soil Processes Division (SSPD). Our division is now in its eighth year, our membership is strong, and we continue to hold an outsized footprint at GSA conferences. Attendees of GSA Connects may have noticed the large crowds queuing up to purchase a nerdy and fun soils-themed t-shirt, or you may have caught up on the latest research showcased at one of our technical sessions. Since the pandemic, multiple cohorts of officers have worked diligently to strengthen our division and move our activities forward in positive and creative directions.

The SSPD now offers two prestigious division awards, *Peter W. Birkeland Distinguished Career Award* and the *SSPD Distinguished Service Award*. Fundraising efforts are underway to create an endowed fund in support of the Distinguished Career Award. Once endowed, this named award will be our first *division primary award*, meaning that the winner will not only be honored on stage by GSA leadership along with all major awards at GSA, but also receive a financial

award. The Distinguished Service Award comes with a lifetime membership to the SSPD and will be conferred as appropriate.

The SSPD also has established new student awards! These include student research awards, specifically intended to support both graduate and undergraduate research activities. We also will be conferring a travel award to support student attendance of GSA Connects, as funds allow. See below for details on our first cohort of winners!

We completed a 5-year self-study of our Division in September 2024. An excerpt from the report is included later in this newsletter. One major highlight is that, in contrast to trends in GSA overall, our membership continues to grow. We see this as evidence for the wonders of soil, and its importance as a geological science. We look forward to hearing from you about how we can continue this upward trajectory!

The SSPD sponsored 46 unique technical sessions at the 2024 GSA Connects meeting in Anaheim. We continue to run two sessions dedicated to highlighting soil and paleosol science: *Recent Advances in Soil and Paleosol Science*, and *Emerging Voices in Soil and Paleosol Science*. Thanks to former division chairs Zsuzsanna Balogh-Brunstad and Lauren Michel for initiating these sessions several years ago! The *Recent Advances* session is chaired by the division chair and chair-elect, and it is meant as a catch-all for presentations that align with our division's disciplinary interests. The *Emerging Voices* session has been hosted by Zsuzsanna and Lauren and their colleagues, and it carves out a space specifically for undergraduate and graduate student poster presentations focused on soils and paleosols.

A reorganization of scientific division booths at GSA Connects meetings began at the 2023 annual conference in Pittsburgh, PA, and continued at the 2024 Anaheim, CA, meeting. You can now find all scientific division booths arranged around the GSA Bookstore, centrally located in the exhibitor hall. An effort was made by GSA staff to modernize division communication materials, including new brochures, banners, and color-coded signage for each division. Payments for division merch (e.g., t-shirts) are now made using 21st century technology via handheld point-of-service devices at our booth! We are encouraged by the fresh ideas of GSA leadership and have found them to be very welcoming of constructive feedback during recent changes and reorganization.

On that note, you may have noticed that GSA overall is in a period of change, reflected by new leadership and supported by the positive, can-do attitude of GSA staff. Working with GSA's staff is one of the most rewarding parts of serving in division leadership – they are constantly trying to find creative solutions to issues that arise, and they actively listen to our divisions' concerns. We ask that you take that as an opportunity to reach out to the SSPD officers with ideas or concerns that you would like us to pass along, or feel free to discuss with GSA staff directly.

We enjoyed seeing soil and paleosol enthusiasts at GSA Connects this past fall, and we look forward to working with you to enrich our scientific society.

- The SSPD Management Board

2024 Peter W. Birkeland Distinguished Career Award Winner: Dr. Rivka Amit

Dr. Rivka (Kiki) Amit is the inaugural honoree of the SSPD's distinguished career award. Dr. Amit has led an internationally recognized career focused on arid soils and geomorphology, and she is currently a senior researcher and director of the Geological Survey of Israel.

Although Dr. Amit was unable to travel to the 2024 GSA Connects meeting due to the conflicts in Israel and Gaza, her colleague and award nominator Prof. Yehouda Enzel graciously accepted the award on her behalf. Those in attendance were pleased to hear stories of Dr. Amit's wide-ranging career, particularly about her introducing Pete Birkeland to the desert soils of Israel. We look forward to seeing Dr. Amit at the 2025 GSA Connects meeting in San Antonio!



Dr. Yehouda Enzel accepted the 2024 Peter W. Birkeland Distinguished Career Award on behalf of Dr. Rivka Amit.



"Prof. Birkeland's pioneer approach, vast knowledge in geology, geomorphology, and pedology and his inspiring way into integrating these disciplines to one scientific field, guided me through whole my entire career. I even had the opportunity to work with him in the Negev desert at the 1980s! It was huge privilege and great experience which I will never forget."

– Dr. Rivka Amit

2024 Student Research and Travel Award Winners

We are excited to announce the first cohort of student research and travel award winners! These awards were made possible by generous donations from SSPD members.

The SSPD provided three competitive student research awards in 2024:

- **Katarina Keating**, University of Michigan, \$1000 (graduate student award)
- **Catherine Peshek**, University of New Mexico, \$1000 (graduate student award)
- **Ana Venters**, James Madison University, \$500 (undergraduate student award)

The Division also provided one travel award (\$500) for a student to attend GSA Connects:

- **Ely Hartl**, University of Minnesota-Mankato

Make an impact on student research and conference experiences today! Consider donating to the SSPD's fund at GSA Foundation, which will directly support our student members (see next page).

Fundraising and New Directions

Many of our careers began with the momentum provided by GSA grants and the networking opportunities found at GSA meetings. We are excited that the SSPD is now able to offer research and travel awards to support student activities. However, we need to ensure that these are financially viable into the future. Your donations can directly support student research activity and student attendance of scientific meetings, fostering the next generation of soil and paleosol researchers.



Donations made to the **Soils and Soil Processes Division Fund** at the GSA Foundation will be used to support student research and conference travel.

Donate at this link:

<https://gsa-foundation.org/fund/soils-and-soil-processes-division/>

Or click on the **QR code** using your smart phone's camera.



"My award funded my fieldwork this past summer in Wyoming's Hoback Basin, where I collected late Paleocene and early Eocene paleosols and plant fossils for organic carbon isotope analysis. I am now using these data to characterize early Paleogene paleoenvironment in the Hoback Basin and to improve terrestrial-based proxies for atmospheric carbon isotope composition."

Katarina Keating, University of Michigan

"The Soils and Soil Processes Division grant has supported my PhD research by providing the resources necessary for collecting monthly, high-resolution soil pore water profiles for the 2024 year. These data track the bimodal seasonal variation in input precipitation and evaporation extent for a young soil located in the semi-arid desert environment of the Sandia foothills, in Albuquerque New Mexico."

Catherine Peshek, University of New Mexico



"I used the undergraduate research award to pay for paleosol thin sections. With these, we discovered previously unknown pedogenic carbonates from the Early Miocene of West Turkana, Kenya."

Ana Venters, James Madison University

2025 Division Award Solicitations

The SSPD is soliciting nominations for two prestigious awards conferred by the division, the *Peter W. Birkeland Distinguished Career Award* and the *SSPD Distinguished Service Award*, as well as two student research awards. The award descriptions and nomination requests are provided below. Please submit nominations to Dr. Steven Driese (steven_driese@baylor.edu), chair of the awards committee. **The nomination deadline for all awards is May 1, 2025.**

The nominees will be selected by an *ad hoc* committee organized by the chair of the awards committee. Please reach out to Dr. Steve Driese if you are interested in volunteering as a member of the review committee. Winners of the awards will be honored at our annual business meeting at the fall GSA Connects conference.

Peter W. Birkeland Distinguished Career Award

The Peter W. Birkeland Distinguished Career Award recognizes individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the general field of soil or paleosol (buried or fossilized soil) science. Dr. Birkeland's main area of research was soil geomorphology, and his steady stream of publications, often with his students, demonstrated the application of pedology to address landform and landscape evolution.

Nominations: The Soils and Soil Processes Division requests nominations for the Peter W. Birkeland Distinguished Career Award. Nominations should be sent to Steven Driese (Steven_Driese@baylor.edu) and should include a biographical sketch, a statement of outstanding achievements, a selected bibliography and/or CV for the nominee, and up to four letters of support.

Nomination deadline: **May 1, 2025**

Soils and Soil Processes Division Distinguished Service Award

The Soil and Soil Processes Division Distinguished Service Award recognizes individuals who have contributed significantly to the advancement of the Division either through service as an officer, service as a chair or member of a committee (or committees), or any other service-related activities (e.g., sponsorship of symposia or topical sessions, field trips, workshops, etc.) that draw positive attention to the research aims and activities of the Division. It includes lifetime membership in the Division.

Nominations: Nominations may be submitted by any member of the Division in good standing and should include a 1-to-2-page narrative summarizing the noteworthy service accomplishments of the individual. Up to 3 supporting letters can be included. Nominations should be sent to Steven Driese (Steven_Driese@baylor.edu).

Nomination deadline: **May 1, 2025**

Student Research Awards

The SSPD is pleased to announce the availability of two \$500 student awards in 2025. The proposed research must emphasize soil or paleosol research for it to be considered for an award. Proposals should be submitted to Dr. Steve Driese (Steven_Driese@baylor.edu) by **May 1**, with awards announced by June 1, 2025. Funds may be used for field or laboratory research. Applicants are encouraged to become members of the Division, but it is not a requirement for proposal consideration.

Proposal materials should include the following, in a single file (PDF or Word only):

1. Student full legal name, affiliation, contact information, current degree program, and expected graduation date.
2. Proposal narrative. This will include the purpose and significance of the proposal research, and the methods employed to complete the research. (Recommended length of the narrative is 1-2 pages).
3. Itemized budget. Please include information on all additional sources of funding for the project, including previous and pending sources of funding.
4. Project supervisor's name and contact information. Your supervisor may be contacted for a recommendation if your proposal is considered for funding.

Division Financial Summary

The SSPD currently maintains three financial accounts. Like all divisions, we have an *operating budget* that holds all liquid funds that are used for general purposes. This account is supported by your division membership dues and donations made when you renew membership. The current operating budget is approximately \$5,500. This is lower than pre-pandemic years, when membership was strong and division dues were more expensive. However, this amount is higher than in most years since the pandemic, reflecting that GSA now will cover costs of merchandise up front (i.e., they pay for the fun t-shirts and we get profits after they are paid off) and no longer requires divisions to pay for booths at GSA conferences. We aim to increase our operating budget to roughly \$10,000 to allow for more fiscal cushion in the coming years.

The other two accounts associated with the division are managed by GSA Foundation. The *Peter W. Birkeland Distinguished Career Award Fund* is well on its way to the endowment level of \$25,000, and it may achieve that amount by the time you read this. This account will support a monetary award for the winner of the Peter W. Birkeland Distinguished Career Award after the account grows for a period of three years post-endowment. The *Soils and Soil Processes Division Fund* is our general account at GSA Foundation and serves to collect donations that support student research and travel awards. In 2024, we transferred \$2,500 from our operating budget to this fund to kickstart the first student awards. The account is now below \$1,000 and is in great need of donations to support the next round of student awards. A new fundraising effort will seek to rally donations to bring our Division Fund into a fiscally responsible level to ensure that we can confer student awards in the years to come.

Five-Year Self-Study Report

The SSPD completed our second 5-year self-study report this past September. The report was delivered to GSA Council at their fall meeting. Highlights from the five-year self-study report (2019-2024) include:

- Our membership has grown strongly, which is surprising when set against the general decline in membership across the Society. We want to continue growing our membership, to at least 500 persons from the current 399 persons.
 - We want to maintain and strengthen our two Division sessions, ensuring their viability at the oral session level to provide visibility to our memberships' academic achievements.
 - We want to provide a healthy financial buffer in our Foundation account so we can confidently continue awarding our three student research awards.
 - We want to establish an endowed fund for the Peter Birkeland distinguished career award, thereby creating our first division Primary Award.
 - We plan to offer our non-primary awards regularly and raise appropriate funds to support financial awards for students (e.g., research and travel awards).
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GSA 2025 – See you in San Antonio!

We look forward to seeing you in San Antonio, TX, this October 19-22! There is a large number of sessions that we will be endorsing, in addition to at least one field trip focused on soils and geomorphology. **Keep your lunchtime open on Tuesday, October 21 for the SSPD annual business meeting.** The location is currently TBD, but we will circulate information closer to the meeting. You should be able to find the meeting location and time in the GSA Connects program as well.



Meet the Management Board

The SSPD is managed by several officers, including a chair (cycling from chair-elect, to chair, to past-chair), a secretary-treasurer (2-year term), and communications manager (1-year term). We also have two student officers that serve a 1-year term, offset so that one student is the senior representative and the other is the junior representative.

Current officers

Chair: **Dennis Terry** (doterry@temple.edu)

Chair-elect: **Michael Young** (michael.young@beg.utexas.edu)

Past-chair: **Arnaud Temme** (arnaud.temme@uibk.ac.at)

Secretary/Treasurer: **William Lukens** (lukenswe@jmu.edu)

Communications Manager: **Jiawei Da** (jiawei@utexas.edu)

Senior Student Representative: **Jarred Asselta** (assel022@umn.edu)

Junior Student Representative: **Joslyn Herold** (jiherold@memphis.edu)

Elections for officer positions occurs each fall via online ballot. We welcome all members to consider running in the next election – we want to foster a leadership that reflects the entirety of our division. Positions that will become open in fall 2025 include chair-elect (3-year succession), secretary/treasurer (2-year term, maximum 2 consecutive terms), communications manager (1-year term, maximum 2 consecutive terms), and student representative (1-year term, maximum 2 consecutive terms).