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Shall We Convene Another TOS-Style Meeting?

Next year, The Oceanography Society (TOS) will celebrate its twenty-fifth anniversary. Thus, it is an appropriate time to examine whether the Society is meeting the needs of its members and/or whether we need to change the way we are doing business.

TOS was conceived to enhance interdisciplinary communication among oceanographers both through organizing meetings and publishing this journal. We have fond memories of the early TOS meetings that were organized around a limited set of research themes. There were no multiple concurrent sessions to choose from, no possibility of getting lost in the chaotic people flow between sessions, and there weren't any 12-minute talks that often only presented a drive-by view of research projects.

Instead, all meeting participants attended plenary morning sessions on a single research theme. Talks were of sufficient length to contain a comprehensive presentation of a research topic, and we heard a series of talks on the physics, chemistry, geology, and biology of a particular oceanographic feature or process (e.g., eddies, seamounts, air-sea interactions). We all listened to talks outside of our own discipline and learned a few new terms and findings that we may not have known about before. In the afternoon, there were no oral presentations; instead, everyone attended a poster session where scientists presented their findings on the research theme of the morning plenary.

For a variety of reasons, TOS stopped this type of meeting format after 2005. Attendance at TOS meetings had dropped, in part because the larger Ocean Sciences meetings began to have more interdisciplinary sessions, based on funded multi-PI projects. While many of us have participated in and enjoyed these sessions, they do not provide the breadth and depth of the old TOS plenary-theme mornings, and they of course compete for attendance with the multiple other concurrent sessions. Note that for the 2012 Ocean Sciences meeting where TOS is the lead organization, on the morning of Wednesday, February 22, there will be five plenary sessions—scheduled specifically to infuse the “TOS style” into this meeting.

So I ask you, should TOS consider organizing a meeting in the “old” format, with limited topic themes, a morning set of plenary talks, and an afternoon of poster sessions? Would you like to see this type of format incorporated into a larger Ocean Sciences meeting for one to two days of the meeting week? I would be interested in your views so that TOS can continue to develop ways to best enhance communication and scientific exchange in our oceanographic community. Please email your comments and suggestions to info@tos.org.

Regards,



Mike Roman, TOS President