

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE OCEANOGRAPHY SOCIETY

Oceanography

CITATION

Mix, A. 2017. TOS—The times they are a changin'... Again. *Oceanography* 30(1):7–8, <https://doi.org/10.5670/oceanog.2017.102>.

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.5670/oceanog.2017.102>

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TOS—

The Times They Are a Changin’... Again

Was Bob Dylan our muse? Although he was really singing about something else, I’d like to believe he was thinking about global warming and sea level rise and the gathering of people in The Oceanography Society.

*Come gather ‘round people
Wherever you roam
And admit that the waters
Around you have grown
And accept it that soon
You’ll be drenched to the bone
If your time to you
Is worth savin’
Then your better start swimmin’
Or you’ll sink like a stone
For the times they are a-changin’.*

Bob Dylan, ©1963/1991

Anyway, Bob won a Nobel Prize in December, so let’s claim him. You all know the song and can read the rest of the lyrics to remember what it is really about.

The times are indeed changing as we enter a new year, with a new administration in Washington, DC, new challenges, and new opportunities. Changes in the United States have hit like a tsunami, and I’ve heard from many TOS members who are feeling pretty nervous. As I start my term as TOS President, I’d like to highlight some things that aren’t changing, and then some things that are.

First, thanks to strong and steady leadership from Past President Susan Lozier and a highly engaged Council over the past two years, TOS is shipshape and is riding on an even keel. We hope that won’t change. Member engagement and society finances are strong. Our journal *Oceanography* is highly ranked (third in impact factor of all ocean sciences journals), thanks to the stalwart efforts of lead

editor Ellen Kappel, and is entirely open access. And we are supremely blessed to have Jenny Ramurai continue as Executive Director. Jenny is the soul of TOS, and as I said in my comments before presenting the Jerlov Award to Curtis Mobley at the Ocean Optics meeting in Victoria, Jenny has a knack for making everything fun.

I spent the last year or so learning about the inner workings of TOS, and the most important thing I learned is that TOS is, as always, here for its members.

But who are the members? Did you know that TOS is, and has always been, an international organization? Although we are incorporated as a nonprofit in Washington, DC, and therefore bound by US law, our name is “The Oceanography Society,” not “the American Oceanography Society.” Our founders chose this name intentionally, and it gives us a global perspective. About one-third of our membership comes from outside the United States, and represents 66 nations. Of the past six meetings supported by TOS, half have been outside the United States (Canada, Spain, Scotland). All our members around the world are important to the Society and to the field.

We are a community unified by our love of the sea, and by our shared search for truth through rational inquiry and rigorous peer review. Oceanography is an inherently international activity, and our science thrives when minds, communications, and borders, are open. National interests sometimes involve science, but the science itself is apolitical. We stand by our principles and affirm the need for cooperation and collaboration in science, along with freedom of inquiry, freedom to publish and publicize scientific results, and the sanctity of scientific data.

Preserved well, our data age and grow in value like a fine wine.

But what of politics? We all have our own opinions, and from sitting in committees I can confirm that there is a broad range of views among our members. By our nonprofit charter, TOS is a scientific organization, not a political one. What does this mean? As an organization we are specifically disallowed from participating in political campaigns either for or against any candidates running for office, and “no substantial part of the activities of the corporation shall be... attempting to influence legislation” (TOS Articles of Incorporation, 1988). These specific restrictions, which are a provision in the US tax code known as “The Johnson Amendment,” have been true (since 1954) of all nonprofit organizations incorporated in the United States. Those of you watching current US news will be aware that there is discussion of repealing this amendment. We’ll see what happens with that.

It is worth noting that these restrictions do not apply to our individual members, who are, of course, free to influence legislation and engage in political activity as they wish (other countries may have laws that apply to our members there). Further, the Johnson Amendment does not infringe on the free speech of TOS to say pretty much whatever it wants about issues, as long as it isn’t about candidates running for office or specific legislation.

So I will say it again—oceanography is an inherently international activity, and our science thrives when minds, communications, and borders, are open. This has always been the case, and this has not changed, and we are free to advocate for those principles.

Some things about TOS are changing, in good ways. First, TOS is growing. Rapidly. Our diversity is increasing, reflecting positive efforts at inclusion. For example, of current members who joined in the first two years of the society, 91% were male and 88% were from the United States. At the beginning, in spite of its international charter and the best of intentions, TOS was effectively an American boys' club.

In contrast, of our members who joined in the past two years, 56% were female and, independent of gender, 35% were from outside the United States (in addition, some within the United States were not US citizens, but we don't track that).

We have not yet reached gender parity overall (44% female), but we are on a good path. Our international profile continues to grow (now totaling 31% non-US). The TOS Council is approximately gender balanced, and includes international representation. We have not tracked ethnicity, and we are trying to do a better job there. We can be happy that our efforts at increasing diversity are succeeding, but we will keep working at it, and at promoting equal opportunity and equitable treatment as our young oceanographers move through their careers.

Our expanding membership reflects

the growing realization, especially among our early career scientists, that we will succeed as a field only if we band together around our shared goals and needs. TOS is a collaborative member-driven organization, and it shows. That gives me hope for the future.

Nevertheless, we have all observed the challenges faced by our younger generation. In response, we have made some changes. TOS membership is now free to all students, and we have reduced membership costs for early career scientists in postdoctoral positions. We want to empower the new generation to organize and to reinvent the field and the Society to better fit their needs.

This year we will roll out a mentoring program, first in prototype form and hopefully later as a larger program, designed to pair students with senior scientists in academia, government, and the private sector, and to conduct a conversation across national boundaries about careers, life, and exciting new directions for oceanography. Students, please watch the TOS web page for announcements. Senior scientists, please volunteer as mentors—we need your help. This is an “all hands on deck” activity.

Recognizing that young people may face financial hurdles in completing their dissertation research and transitioning

to careers, we have launched the TOS Career Opportunity/Student Travel and Research Support (COSTARS) Fund. Voluntary donations are rapidly building this fund toward our initial goal, and we will soon be able to offer some support for graduate students to attend biennial Ocean Sciences Meetings, to join professional development workshops and conferences, to travel for needed research at specialized off campus facilities, and to explore career opportunities including internships in industry, government, nongovernmental organizations, and other ocean-relevant settings. We encourage everyone to donate (see link below). This is a great opportunity for those of us with established or completed careers to give something back and help our young people.

I'll say more about our growing program with the private-sector oceanography community and other initiatives in future columns.

So, we live in interesting times. Some things are changing, and some things are staying the same. One thing that will never change is the character of the TOS membership as a community of scientists who support each other as colleagues and as people, without biases regarding national origin, gender, ethnicity, belief systems, or any of the fascinating and complicated things that make us human. The people who create the science come first, and that is my favorite thing about TOS. It is why I joined in 1987, it is why I stayed, and it is why I am thrilled and honored to start my term as TOS President. I want to hear from you, so that TOS can understand your joys and concerns, represent you and better serve your needs. We are here for you.

I write from Oregon, in early February, as a hard rain is falling. I'm ready to start swimmin' and I hope you are too. Gather 'round.


Alan Mix, TOS President

TOS COSTARS

Do your part to support the next generation of ocean scientists!

One of our new programs, focused on our student members, is the TOS COSTARS fund (Career Opportunity/Student Travel and Research Support). Opening soon, this fund will help graduate students to present their work at scientific conferences, to collaborate with colleagues at other institutions and to investigate career opportunities. We are still in fundraising mode and we encourage contributions, remembering the help that we all got along the way. Donate now to the TOS COSTARS Fund and help graduate students prepare to enter the workforce!

To learn more about TOS COSTARS or to make a donation, go to:

<https://tos.networkforgood.com/projects/22497-tos-costars-fund>