

THE SEISMOGRAM

News and info to help our student and early-career scientists advance their careers

Seismological Society of America:
Advancing Earthquake Science Worldwide

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Ask an Expert: Andrew Michael on the Art of the Abstract

How can you make sure your research stands out in a crowd? SSA President Andrew Michael offers his advice: *it's not about the abstract, it's about the title.*

It's time to write your abstract for the 2018 Annual Meeting (**Submission Deadline: 24 January 2018**). Seismology of the Americas, the Society's first joint conference with the Latin American and Caribbean Seismological Commission, offers a chance to get your work in front of a new audience. With several concurrent sessions, some creativity will help your work get noticed.

My favorite abstract reads, in its entirety, "Yes." That pithy bit comes from Gardner and Knopoff (*BSSA, 1974*), which presents a key ingredient in seismic hazard assessment and has 1,000 citations on Google Scholar. But the abstract would be meaningless without its title, "Is the Sequence of Earthquakes in Southern California, with Aftershocks Removed, Poissonian?" In a meeting program that title would be a fantastic teaser. It gives us the main question being addressed and the region being studied. Want to know more? Then come to the talk.

Notice that I didn't write, then read the abstract. SSA meetings now feature close to 900 presentations, and the collected abstracts are about the length of the Tolstoy's "War and Peace," but without a comprehensive story arc. I'm guessing that few people read their way through all the abstracts—your title has to grab the attention of those who merely skim through the program.

The first readers of your abstract are important: the session conveners who decide if your work belongs in their session—whether as an oral talk or a poster. Some scientists prefer a poster for the ability to show large, high-resolution images or the opportunity for in-depth discussions with colleagues. But many people hope to land a talk. Either way, the abstract is your opportunity to further sell your work by focusing on what makes it novel, important and exciting. Why will your presentation change how other



people do their work or understand our Earth? You can provide details about the method, parameters and numerical results, but also emphasize the impact of your work.

Last year, I think I did well with the title "Forecasting Aftershocks and the Complexity of Implementing Simple Models." It presents the topic and what I hope is an intriguing paradox. But for the recent Eastern Section meeting, I used the rather dull title "Update on USGS Aftershock Forecasting Activities." Fortunately, with only one session, people were stuck hearing my talk. In retrospect, I could have titled it the more intriguing "USGS Aftershock Forecasts are Heading East," and maybe more attendees would have looked forward to it.

For more information on making a submission to Seismology of the Americas, visit seismology2018.org. I wish you luck and look forward to reading your title (and maybe your abstract) this spring.

SSA President Andrew Michael, a geophysicist with the U.S. Geological Survey's Earthquake Science Center in Menlo Park since 1986, combines observations of earthquake processes and statistical models to determine long-term and short-term earthquake probabilities, to evaluate proposed earthquake prediction methods, and to better understand how stress and structure function as part of the seismogenic process. A graduate of MIT and Stanford University, he has authored over 80 papers and reports.

Have a burning career-related question for an SSA expert in a future issue? Email seismogram@seismosoc.org with "Ask an Expert" in the subject line.



Travel Grant Program Expands Beyond SSA

If there's a scientific destination you've been dreaming of, SSA can help get you there.

Starting in February, all students who have been SSA members for at least one year are invited to apply for travel grants to any workshops or small meetings in the U.S. or abroad that directly support their study of earthquake science or seismology.

SSA will accept applications 1-28 February for travel between 1 April and 30 September 2018. Be on the lookout for an email with more details on this exciting new program designed to help advance our science worldwide.

See You at AGU

Attending the 2017 AGU Fall Meeting in New Orleans next week? Do drop in and see us—and bring your friends who have yet to join the Society.

The SSA crew stationed at Booth 2044 will be offering free SSA student memberships throughout the event (11-15 December 2017). And don't miss our special wine and hors d'oeuvres reception at 4 p.m. on Tuesday. Help us raise a glass to seismology!

Stay in Touch

SSA welcomes your feedback on our content as well as your ideas for future issues at seismogram@seismosoc.org. Send us your thoughts, and be on the lookout for the next issue in February!



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