

# 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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## What's the best career advice you've ever received?



What words of advice have stayed with you and helped light the way in your career?

Maybe they came from a one-on-one with your mentor, a letter from your parents or a chance encounter with a researcher whose work you've followed. Perhaps it was something a professor said during class or part of a pep talk from a friend.

Chances are that if these words helped you, they could also assist an SSA colleague who is facing a career crossroads or just looking for a little guidance.

Share the words of wisdom with us via email at [info@seismosoc.org](mailto:info@seismosoc.org) by 31 October. We'll publish selected responses in our December issue. We'll also send published contributors a special thank you gift for their time.

## Your Questions Answered: How Do I Find a Good Mentor in Academia?

You asked. Here are answers from **John Ebel**, professor and senior research scientist, Weston Observatory of Boston College, and founding editor-in-chief of SRL; **Jonathan P. Stewart**, professor and chair of the civil and environmental engineering department at University of California, Los Angeles, the William B. Joyner Memorial Lecturer for 2016 and the 2018 recipient of the Bruce A. Bolt Medal; and **Seth Stein**, the William Deering Professor of Earth and Planetary Sciences at Northwestern University.

**John Ebel:** I am always urging my students, particularly undergraduates, to go to scientific meetings, to meet faculty at those meetings and to get to know them and their research. The same is true of graduate students who are looking for a postdoctoral position. There are many very qualified faculty today at all kinds of universities, which means that students will learn a lot of science no matter where they go. However, graduate schooling and postdoctoral positions are almost a form of apprenticeship, where one learns both the technical aspects of the work as well as the many other human elements that make a successful scientist. It is the technical aspects of one's learning that go on a resume and help one find a job, but it is the other human elements that one must learn to be happy in the job that they find. These human elements can come from one's mentor, from the other faculty at one's institutions and from the graduate students and postdocs with whom one interacts.

**Jonathan P. Stewart:** A good mentor requires two principal attributes: They should be authorities in the field and they should genuinely care about the students in their care. Students can judge the latter attribute from interactions in class. An assessment of the former is more difficult for students new to the field: Is their work used beyond their institution? Are they active in the field you want to study? Take the time to find a good mentor, they will help you during a critical phase of your professional and personal development.

**Seth Stein:** Because science is a very personal process, scientific careers are shaped significantly by early-career interactions with mentors. Decades later, most scientists easily recall lessons they learned, both about science and about how to do science. Typically, the most crucial interaction was with their graduate advisor or advisors.

As a result, a key aspect of graduate study is finding an advisor or advisors whom you would work well with. Because everyone is different, there is no best match or way to find an advisor. My advice is to seek someone to work with, not for. Someone who sees themselves as an advisor, not a supervisor. Someone who sees you as a young scientist to help nurture, not as cheap labor for their projects.

In considering a possible advisor you might look at several things. Are you interested in what the advisor is doing? Would he or she be interested in advising you on a topic that interests you? How do current students feel about their advisor? Are they doing science that they want to or that they were told to? Are their talents, ideas and interests respected? Are they given credit for what they do? Are they publishing papers, giving talks at meetings and otherwise participating in the scientific community? If the possible advisor is senior enough, what have his or her former students done?

Naturally, identifying a potential advisor and then agreeing to work together are just the first steps. Making the relationship work involves effort on both sides.

***Have a career question you want answered?*** Send it to [info@seismosoc.org](mailto:info@seismosoc.org), and we'll do our best to address it in a future issue.

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## **David M. Boore on SSA's impact and why his work is not a job**

*Seismo-gram caught up with David M. Boore – USGS emeritus geophysicist and 2018 recipient of SSA's Harry Fielding Reid Medal – to talk about his career and advice for students and early-career scientists.*

### **Achieving a work/life balance**

"It depends on the person and whether or not they have other interests," Boore says. "I love the outdoors and being physically active, so I've always had something to turn to."

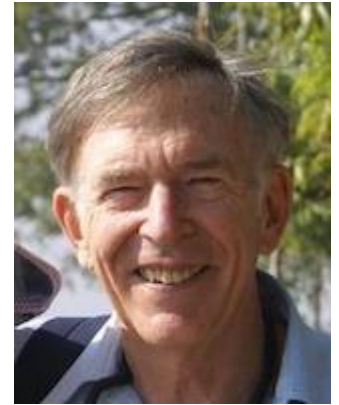
Another piece of advice: make time for your loved ones.

“My wife is the most important part of my life. She put up with all the evenings and weekends spent working because I was able to balance it by going off backpacking or going on trips with her.”

### **The power of SSA membership**

SSA's Annual Meetings and journals have played a major role in Boore's career.

“The meetings provide a great opportunity to meet with colleagues from around the world, discuss and share things, get feedback on research and even develop a network of friends,” he says. “I've done a lot of collaboration with people in other countries I've met at SSA meetings.”



The same can be said for *BSSA* and *SRL*. “I think people learned about my work and my name from those journals,” adds Boore, who recalls foreign students coming to work with him at the USGS after reading his work in an SSA journal.

### **Collaboration**

Boore thrives in collaborative environments and he's made it a point to be open with his research. He posts his results, methods and software on his website, free for anyone to download, because it fosters collaboration.

“I get lots of questions from people in other countries and students, and I always try to respond as quickly and as thoroughly as I can.”

### **Advice for student and early-career scientists**

“It sounds kind of hokey,” he says with a laugh, “but find something you love doing.”

“You have to be excited about your work. You can't just treat it as a job. When you get excited about research, you think about it all the time – in your sleep, while going about your daily activities. It's like a mystery you're trying to find the answers to.”

*David Boore will receive the 2018 Harry Fielding Reid Medal at the 2019 SSA Annual Meeting in Seattle. To learn more about his work, visit [daveboore.com](http://daveboore.com).*

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## **Reminder: Apply for an SSA Travel Grant in November**

We want to see you--and your research--at the 2019 Annual Meeting in Seattle next April!

Once again, SSA is providing travel grants to help its international and student members and those living in European Seismological Commission member-states take part in the the Society's flagship event. Travel grants cover the cost of meeting registration and provide a modest cash award.

All applicants must submit an abstract as first author and be prepared to present their work in either an oral or poster session at the meeting. Student applications require a letter of support from a faculty advisor. Applications will be accepted from 1 November through 30 November 2018.

Look for more information soon on the Annual Meeting site at [seismosoc.org/annual-meeting/](http://seismosoc.org/annual-meeting/).

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## Stay in Touch

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Send your feedback on this newsletter or ideas for a future issue to [info@seismosoc.org](mailto:info@seismosoc.org).

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