

Awards and Citations

Presentation of the 2016 Schuchert Award of the Paleontological Society to Alycia L. Stigall

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It is a privilege to be able to stand here and present my first graduate student with the Charles Schuchert Award. Being a mentor to students like Alycia is undoubtedly the most satisfying part of being a professor. She is a highly deserving Schuchert awardee, not only for her incredible scientific acumen, but also because of her quality and integrity as an individual. This merit is further buttressed by the tireless work she has performed as a scientist, educator, and mentor, and in the service she has done on behalf of our society and discipline. It was an amazing professional opportunity to have such an outstanding student early in my career. Alycia arrived possessing not only a superlative academic background, but also a coveted NSF graduate research fellowship. While at the University of Kansas she went on to win another prestigious graduate fellowship and attain many notable firsts, including becoming the first person to apply geographic information systems to macroevolutionary analyses of the fossil record, and the first paleontologist to use ecological niche modeling: two important techniques in evolutionary biology and paleontology. Alycia has since gone on to train paleontologists around the world in niche modeling. Moreover, she made major contributions to macroevolutionary theory by extending the study of speciation modes, and exploring the impact that invasive species have had on ancient ecosystems. All of this work, as well as field projects in Antarctica, Africa, and North America, continues to the present day. On top of this, she has also become an internationally recognized expert on brachiopods. And as Alycia likes to say, if there is one thing that this world doesn't have enough of, it's internationally recognized experts on brachiopods.

Beyond her incredible research skills, Alycia has done an exceptional job as a mentor and teacher at her native Ohio University. It is truly stunning to contemplate all that she has achieved.

When you spend time with anyone, you definitely get to learn more about them, and Alycia is no exception. For instance,

I came to find out that she actually liked country music, a secret so deep and dark she would only share it with me in a "Subway" sandwich shop in Grinnell, Iowa. There is also Alycia's profound aversion to huckleberries. I too developed an aversion to huckleberries after watching that "Tombstone" movie where Val Kilmer, spoiler alert, is compelled to shoot that annoying guy he kept calling "huckleberry." However, I can say that I diverge with her on country music, except for some Rolling Stones' songs from the 1970s. Seriously though, one of Alycia's eminent qualities is not only is she capable of working extremely hard, but she always insists on standing up for what's right: this has been especially true in supporting opportunities for women in paleontology.

Seeing your students go on to great success is the academic equivalent of seeing your own children's success: something that gives great pride and joy. I've been incredibly proud of my children, and I'm incredibly proud of Alycia: so thank you for doing such a great job, first as a student, now as a colleague. In closing, let's consider the apposite words of the famous actor Rod Steiger, spoken when he lost the academy award that everyone expected he would win for his part in the 1964 film "The Pawnbroker." He remarked: "Never take happiness, never take your talent, for granted. Never in any walk of life, take for granted your capabilities. Each minute and second of life is a challenge—so ... let this be a lesson to you. Happiness has to be earned and respected. Rewards must never be taken for granted." Or, in other words, to quote actor and comedian Steve Martin: "I've had a good time tonight, considering I'm going to die someday."

Well, on that note, what more can I say but "congratulations Alycia!"

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