

Book on marine sediments meets with good reviews

BY JIM RAPER

The textbook, "Geochemistry of Marine Sediments," written by Professor David Burdige and published by Princeton University Press, debuted with excellent reviews in August.

He can relax now and accept the congratulations of his colleagues in the Department of Ocean, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, but the creation of the 600-page book was a lot harder than he thought it would be when he took on the project five years ago.

"I had my dissertation and 40 or so scientific papers I had written. I also had my lecture notes," Burdige said, with a smile. "I naively thought that all I needed to do was to take my lecture notes and put in some more nouns and verbs.

"If I had known when I started what I knew six months into the job, I would never have taken it on. But by six months in, I was already committed."

Burdige, whose research focus is on biogeochemical processes in estuarine and marine sediments, has garnered both praise and gratitude from colleagues who read the manuscript or reviewed advance copies of the \$85 book (\$68 in paperback).

"This is undoubtedly a major contribution to the field. David Burdige's scholarship is cutting edge," wrote man-

uscript reviewer Bernard P. Boudreau, who is on the oceanography faculty at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia.

Other reviewers called the book "a wonderfully exhaustive review spanning all aspects of marine sedimentary geochemistry" and a "much needed update" in this field of study. One text that has been widely used in the field was published in 1980, and, according to Burdige, "Although the theories in that book are still valid, we know a lot more about sediment biogeochemistry today than we did in 1980."

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Richard Murray, an earth sciences professor at Boston University, wrote that the book "is poised to become the standard text on the subject for years to come."

Sediment biogeochemists study a complex amalgam of processes related to some of the hottest topics in the news today, such as petroleum exploration, the carbon cycle and global warming, pollution of our waters and harmful algal blooms. Burdige gets high marks from reviewers for clarity and generous back-

ground material that stimulates newcomers and experts alike.

About a year after he signed the contract with Princeton University Press to write the book, Burdige took a semester-long sabbatical, and planned to churn out most or all of the manuscript during his four months of freedom from the classroom. That did not happen. Instead, the writing inched ahead over a couple more years, with Burdige learning on the job, so to speak. "I had this notion that I should not send out chapters for comment as I finished them, that the book

was too interconnected," he said. "If I had it to do over again, I would have saved myself some time by sending out chapters along the way."

When he did finish his first draft of the manuscript two years ago, he was not nearly so far along as he hoped to be. Princeton sent the book to three expert readers, one of whom, Boudreau, lavished attention upon the project.

"He really took it upon himself to comment on the science and to take a first pass at copy editing. In a couple of

places, he made me rethink the science. The book is much better because of him," Burdige said.

A little over a year ago, Burdige sent in the revised manuscript, and then set to the task of preparing the 130 illustrations, graphs and other figures in the book.

"Again, this took more time than I thought because the graphic folks at Princeton were a bit particular about the file format of the figures," he said. "ODU graphics people, Debbie Miller (who has since retired) and Don Emminger, were phenomenal with their help here. It is truly amazing what all it takes to complete a project like this."

Burdige said quite a few colleagues are using the book in classes this fall, and that the publisher is promoting it currently. "Actually, word travels pretty fast in our small community (within biogeochemistry). Fortunately – and unfortunately, too – I was working on the book for so long, lots of people know about it because they had to listen to me bemoan the writing of it."



BURDIGE