

# Ruth Varner Honored by American Geophysical Union for Student Mentoring

**Sulzman Award recognizes Varner's excellence and  
innovative approach**

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Ruth Varner has been awarded the American Geophysical Union's 2015 Sulzman Award for Excellence in Education and Mentoring. Varner '93G '00G is associate professor of biogeochemistry at the UNH [Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans, and Space](#) (EOS) and in the department of earth sciences.

The award recognizes Varner's original and creative research program and her extraordinary record of mentoring students, especially undergraduates and women in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields.

Varner began mentoring more than 15 years ago as a research faculty member in EOS. She and colleagues from Mt. Holyoke College and Stockholm University developed a model of "cascade mentoring," which recognizes that the involvement of multiple mentors leads to successful student research. It's an approach she employs as director of the international Northern Ecosystems Research for Undergraduates (NERU), the National Science Foundation-funded program based at UNH, where students receive support from faculty, postdoctoral scholars, international partners and graduate students.

"The core component of our success is collaboration built on the ability to recognize and support the strengths of each individual member," says Varner.

Named in honor of Elizabeth Sulzman, a soil scientist and student educator at Oregon State University who died tragically in 2007, the award recognizes women in the AGU who are sustaining dynamic research careers in the biogeosciences, while excelling in teaching and mentoring young scientists.

Scott Saleska of the University of Arizona, who nominated Varner for the award, says Varner is a creative collaborator in research and a generous and talented mentor. “The dedication, commitment and enthusiasm she brings to making the NERU program a success knows no bounds,” Saleska says.

The NERU program focuses on the impacts of climate change on permafrost and lake environments in the Stordalen mire complex some 124 miles north of the Arctic Circle in Abisko, Sweden.

During the past four years, NERU, a collaboration between UNH and the [Abisko Scientific Research Station](#), has given 37 undergraduates from colleges around the nation the opportunity to cut their teeth on state-of-the-art climate change field research abroad and take coursework at UNH. Students typically come from colleges and universities that lack extensive research programs and opportunities.

In the program’s first three years, 28 undergraduates presented at the prestigious AGU Fall Meeting, and all seven of this year’s NERU fellows are poised to present at AGU in December.

Varner is also director of the UNH [Joan and James Leitzel Center for Mathematics, Science and Engineering Education](#).

EOS director Harlan Spence says Varner embodies the attributes that define an outstanding scholar — excellence in teaching, research and engagement. “Her mentoring seamlessly combines these elements, fueled by a passion for educating and inspiring the next generation of geoscientists,” Spence says.

And, notes Samuel Mukasa, dean of the UNH College of Engineering and Physical Sciences, “We are absolutely delighted to see one of our colleagues receiving such a prestigious award. Dr. Varner is exemplary in the way she balances a vigorous research program with dedication and full commitment to outreach activities.”

The 2015 Sulzman Award for Excellence in Education and Mentoring will be presented to Varner at the annual December AGU Fall Meeting in San Francisco.

[AGU Announcement of Varner’s award](#)

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