

# The Slawson Award

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Advancing geography  
and geographical learning

## Troy Sternberg

### Education

- B.A. Communications, University of California, Los Angeles, 1981
- M.Sc. Range Sciences (Hons), Texas Tech University, 2004
- D.Phil Geography, Oxford University, 2009

### Current position

Postdoctoral researcher, Oxford Rock Breakdown Lab, Oxford University, UK

### Slawson Award

Troy received the Slawson Award in 2006 for his project ***Nomadic Geography: Pastoral Environments in the Gobi Desert, Mongolia***

Troy investigated how bio-physical factors and herder action determine the pastoral environment in the Gobi Desert, Mongolia. The Inner Asian region experiences changing climates, evolving land use practices, and socio-economic transition that impact the natural and human geography. Research focused on drought, degradation and the extreme winter conditions that define pastoralism in Mongolia and examined pastoralists' perception of, and interaction with, their environment.

Troy found that while endemic, drought events were independent of extreme winter conditions and did not exacerbate their impact. Degradation was not found at water points as vegetation cover decreased with distance from water. Though remote sensing showed a decline in vegetation cover over time, it did not establish desertification in the region. On the Steppe traditional mobile livestock practices improve livelihoods and remain an effective management approach. Herders are economically motivated, differentiate on multiple dimensions, and value communal land stewardship. However, the future of pastoralism is uncertain as herders settle, the population ages, and children become educated. His study emphasized that the interaction of physical and social environments defines pastoralism in the Gobi Desert.

The Slawson Award enabled Troy to do field work in Mongolia in 2006-2007 and broadened the project's perspective and dissemination through its association with the Society. Results of fieldwork formed the basis of his D.Phil thesis which resulted in four articles on the environment and two on pastoralism. Troy has ongoing interest in developing rural water access, quantifying drought and degradation, and placing Mongolian pastoralism and the Gobi environment in a broader global context.

### Since the Slawson Award

Troy received his D.Phil in 2009 and began work at the Oxford Rock Breakdown Lab investigating the role of ivy on historic stone walls in England for English Heritage. His passion is to create a centre focusing on desert and dryland regions as environments that are best understood and engaged with as unique and organic entities.

