Preparing our Workforce (POW) Project
American Geosciences Institute (AGI)

Heather R. Houlton, AGI

One of the greatest challenges faced by soon-to-be graduates is the process of starting a career and identifying the best employment opportunity that fits both their strengths and motivations. Career advice is provided by individuals, either faculty or non-academic geoscientists, and that advice often reflects the singular experiences of that individual and the field in which they are employed. This interaction is a crucial insight for geoscience students, but such career mentoring can be made easier for the professional and more broadly applicable to the student.

The American Geosciences Institute (AGI) is developing a new program for geoscience undergraduate and graduate students to help them successfully transition into the workforce, called the Preparing our Workforce (POW) Project, which is being integrated into the joint AGI-AIPG Geoscience Online Learning Initiative (GOLI). The first component of these efforts is the POW Career Discussions online course, which guides professionals through a modernized process of effective communication about the diverse opportunities that geoscience careers offer. The POW Career Discussions course focuses on engaging students to evaluate their interests and strengths and then encouraging them to examine how this unique combination can lead them to effective employment. Since one of the greatest challenges for students is to recognize the breadth of geoscience career opportunities beyond the traditional major employment vectors, such as in the petroleum industry, academia, or the environmental sector, the course equips the professional with tools and knowledge to successfully engage students in broadening their world view. Likewise, the course also facilitates the bridging from the broad world of geoscience careers to the deeply informative experiences of an individual about their career and expertise.

In the fall of 2012, AGI piloted career discussions modeled after the POW Career Discussions course as part of the Workforce Program’s efforts to help fill the workforce supply gap. During this pilot project, AGI representatives traveled to different geoscience departments to present pertinent geoscience workforce and career information to Bachelor’s, Master’s and PhD students. The presentation facilitated discussions with the students about their perceptions on the geoscience job market and how to approach their career searches differently by “thinking outside the box.” Specifically, the presentation addressed the variety of geoscience professions available to students and discussed what skills are needed for these occupations, what trends are seen within the workforce and how to network effectively in the job search. To supplement the discussion, AGI provided free “Geoscience Career Guides” that contain an Infographic depicting a sample of the variety of geoscience occupations available in different employment sectors, sample job search activities, advice from practicing professional geoscientists and a tri-fold brochure with networking advice.

The keystone piece of these career discussions is this Infographic that AGI staff developed to represent the geoscience workforce in a cohesive interdisciplinary light. The Infographic helps students and those entering the workforce redefine what it means to have a career in geoscience. Having a successful geoscience career is not solely about mastering the technical fields of study, but additionally includes how one can seamlessly integrate interests and competencies to build a professional portfolio that will bolster the geoscience career. Recognizing the importance of emphasizing the transferability of skills across different fields is imperative to students’ and new hires’ employability as geoscientists. This image is not meant to be definitive, but rather is used as a tool to help those entering the workforce think “outside the box.” The colored rings signify the different sectors where geoscientists work. The wedges, in turn, represent the fields where geoscientists are employed and include different examples of occupations. Where the wedges intersect with the rings indicate that those fields are included in those sectors.

The POW Career Discussions course will get participants acquainted with the information and materials and is designed to familiarize practicing geoscientists with workforce statistics, communication and engagement strategies and networking tips to effectively facilitate discussion with the audience. Registration is now open for the course. Upon successful completion of the course’s activities and assessments, registrants will have access to the PowerPoint presentation and documents. In addition, AGI will supply all professionally printed materials to those interested in giving these career talks to geoscience students in their area. If you are an employed geoscientist and would like to register for this FREE course, please go to: www.agiweb.org/workforce and look for the POW registration link.

Preliminary evaluation of the use of the POW Career Discussions approach shows the program to be highly successful and effective in informing geoscience students about the plethora of traditional and non-traditional career opportunities. Students’ awareness of geoscience careers increased and participating faculty indicated that the presentations are one-of-a-kind filled with practical information, advice and anecdotes that introduced students to a new way of approaching the job search.

A critical discovery by AGI during the development of the initial POW
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If you are an active geoscience professional and would like to become more formally involved with the POW Initiative, see below for opportunities in which you can become more formally involved in successfully transitioning our students into geoscience careers.

1. Work with AGI staff to author an online course based on your expertise related to key geoscience workforce readiness skills.
2. Host a geoscience careers discussion with a geoscience department near you! Register for the POW Career Discussions course and become a discussion facilitator.

For any workforce-related or POW questions, feel free to go to AGI’s Workforce Program’s homepage at www.agiweb.org or contact AGI’s Workforce Development Specialist, Heather Houlton at hrh@agiweb.org.