

A “Jobs in Geosciences” Speaker Series: Addressing What Geologists Really Do

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The geology department at Thomas Nelson Community College (TNCC) recently initiated a program to bring geologists employed in a variety of fields to campus. Noted both anecdotally and through survey data collected about perceptions and careers in geosciences, students often have misconceptions about what geologists actually do in their various job functions. To address these misconceptions, the “jobs in geosciences” speaker series was started. This was funded by a small grant from the TNCC Educational Foundation.

To date, the department has hosted four speakers. Each speaker has shared with students their daily responsibilities and the types of research they conduct, but also a bit of their educational background. The first speaker, Dr. Susan Barbour, presented a talk about her work as a mudlogger for Diversified Well Logging, Inc, drilling for natural gas in the Appalachians. Dr. John Galler, an environmental consultant from Tetrattech shared many intriguing fieldwork stories. Virginia’s state geologist, Dr. David Spears, shared the economic and political impacts involved with accessing wind energy off the Virginia coast. Carroll Ellis, III, a consultant with Dominion Due Diligence Group, shared with students his educational background primarily, including what he learned as he searched for geology related jobs immediately following graduation. Prior to the speakers’ lecture, students were invited to meet with the speaker informally where pizza and drinks were provided. The invited speaker then gives a talk followed by a question and answer period. Interested students may stay later to chat further with the speaker.

Students who have participated in these talks have given positive feedback. Many are introduced to non-academic geologists for the first time, and are fascinated by their research stories. Some students have been inspired to research geology job opportunities further, and to look for internships in the immediate future. More formally, students who have attended talks were asked to participate in a post-talk survey about their perceptions of geology careers. These post-talk surveys indicate that it is possible to see a positive shift in students’ perceptions, with data showing an increase in perceived prestige of geoscience related career fields.

Exposing students to geologists in the workforce gives students a true sense of what geologists really do, and students seem to really like it! The speaker series is also an easy way to encourage partnerships between the two-year college and local workforce communities. As such, this is truly a positive experience for both the students and the presenters.