

## Essay for Geoscience Departments Workshop

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by Al Trujillo, Associate Professor and Chair, Earth Sciences Department

Palomar Community College

1140 W. Mission Rd.

San Marcos, Ca. 92069

[atrujillo@palomar.edu](mailto:atrujillo@palomar.edu)

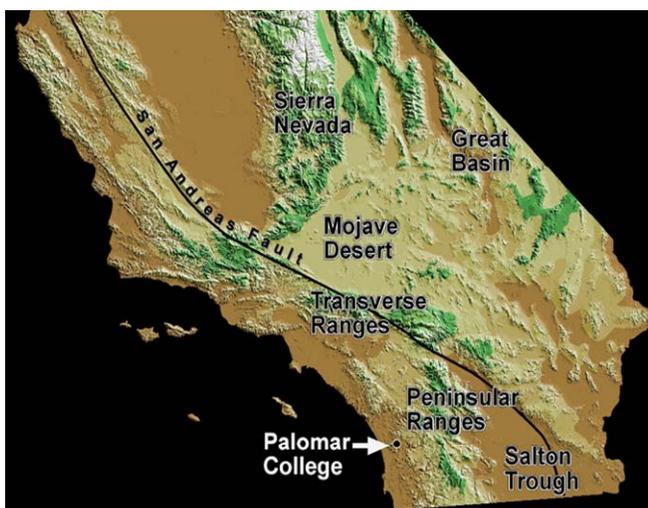
### What Makes Palomar's Earth Science Department Such a Strong Geoscience Department?

Palomar Community College is a public two-year community college in northern San Diego County, California. Palomar's district covers an area of 2555 square miles (an area slightly larger than the state of Delaware) that includes a population of nearly 750,000. Palomar is one of the largest of the state's 108 community colleges and has an annual enrollment of more than 30,000 part-time and full-time students.

The Earth Sciences Department at Palomar enrolls over 3000 students each year and includes the disciplines of astronomy, geography, geology, and oceanography. It also includes a vocational program in aeronautics. One of the key strengths of the Earth Sciences Department has been its strong field programs.

The Earth Sciences Department at Palomar College has been committed to field-based and other experiential education modes for over 40 years. Faculty in the Earth Sciences Department share a common vision of the importance of field studies to quality instruction. Due to our prime location with rapid access to a variety of field sites, we have been offering a steadily increasing variety of in-class and weekend field trips, multi-day field courses, and other hands-on experiences to our students. These field experiences incorporate a wide range of costs, distances, physical environments, and academic levels.

Our success in offering field experiences is closely tied to strategies that maintain and enhance student interest and administrative support for field experiences. For example, our success in generating wide student participation is closely linked to promoting field experiences as an integral part of learning and providing a wide range of field opportunities. In addition, we have developed effective and specific logistical procedures that optimize organization and safety in the field.



At Palomar, we have been fortunate to have had strong administrative support for our field programs. One of our strategies of proactively maintaining this administrative support is to participate in the hiring process of administrators. Another strategy is to emphasize the pedagogical value of field instruction within our curriculum. For instance, we note that field experiences address key core skills in communication, cognition, information competency, social interaction, and personal development and responsibility that are difficult to address in typical classroom settings.

Even with good student participation and strong administrative support for field instruction, the following issues are items of concern:

- increasing bureaucratic regulation from agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service and the National Park Service that can hinder access to field locations
- rapid urbanization limiting access to nearby field locations
- an increasingly less traveled and more urban student population that has little experience with the outdoors
- increasing legal considerations
- increasing costs

In spite of these issues, the Earth Sciences Department at Palomar College continues to maintain a vibrant field program.