

5 tips how geoscience students can increase their chances in the current job market

In July 2016 I posted an article about the Top 10 skills an explorationist should have and received a great amount of feedback and comments. Many people seem to be sharing the view that modern geoscientists should be able to adapt to job requirements by developing a variety of both hard and softskills.

Today, I would like to talk about how students can actually increase their chances of finding (some sort of) geoscience-related employment even in difficult economic times. I will be focusing on the mining industry, but similar can be said about other industry branches.

1. Choose an applied and practical MSc course at a recognised geological institution

It is of great importance, in my opinion, to choose an MSc course that both suits your interests, and also provides the required practical skills for a future career in industry and/ or academia. Not many institutions nowadays do actually offer tailored courses that boast highly practical modules, such as exploration geochemistry, drilling, etc. Shopping around will tell you soon enough that – unfortunately – many courses are more theoretical (genesis and microscopy of ore deposits) than offering anything practical.

My personal worldwide ranking (others might disagree) of mining-friendly departments offering suitable MSc's is:

Europe

- Camborne School of Mines, UK (not because I work there, but because mining-education is taken seriously)
- University of Oulu, Finland
- LTU Lulea, Sweden
- AGH University of Technology, Krakow, Poland
- TU Bergakademie Freiberg, Germany
- MU Leoben, Austria

Africa:

- University of Witwatersrand, South Africa
- Rhodes University, South Africa

Australasia:

- Curtin University, University of WA, CET – Australia
- CODES, University of Tasmania
- Indian School of Mines, India

Americas:

- Colorado School of Mines, Boulder, USA
- MDRU, University of British Columbia, Canada
- MERC, Laurentian University, Canada

2. Join geological associations and their student chapters

Many universities and geological departments are linked to professional associations – such as SEG, SGA, AAPG, etc. - through student chapters. These student chapters will allow you to take part in activities related to mining. Being part of a student chapter offers you a great deal: invited guest speakers from industry, residential and overseas field trips to exciting destinations, funding to attend conferences, networking through sundowner events and much more.

Join these associations and be part of the geoscience community.

3. Attend relevant courses during your undergraduate degree

The majority of undergraduate courses are pretty much focused on equipping you with basic geological knowledge. Use these three or four years to excel in geological fieldwork, rock and mineral recognition skills and attend applied lectures (engineering, ore deposits, hydrogeology etc.). Important is also to take part in non-geological modules or humanities. Those can be languages (very important), socio-economic studies, or business administration skills. Also try free webinars about topics you are interested in.

4. (Un)paid work experiences and an up-to-date CV

What will distinguish you from your peers in these difficult economic times is actual work experience. Working in a bar or restaurant is great, but if you can top this up with work experience in your area of expertise, it will be better. Consider unpaid work as well: even if you don't get paid a lot, experience is experience. Joining a company for a few weeks during your summer break allows you to get a feeling for how it is to work in your future profession and will get you additional skills that are normally not taught at university. After summer, you will already have something to add to your CV.

That's a lot better than doing nothing, right?

5. Work on your 'softskills'

Industry is looking for people who are not only good in what they do, but also who fit easily into a team. Studying hard for a 1st class degree only, is not enough. I personally prefer to consider someone with a 2nd class degree, who has the necessary soft skills, i.e. is practically minded and has participated in extra-curricular activities during their agree, e.g. engaged in a student chapter or association (see above), did voluntary work, travelled around the world, or even has a different background. For example, I

know at least two geologists who were car mechanics before. The amount of practical skills they bring into a geology job is just incredible.

As always, I am keen to hear your views and comments.

Regards

Benedikt