

The Evolution of Building a Diverse Geosciences in the United States

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Since the 1960s, the United States has had numerous systematic efforts to support diversity in all parts of society. The American Geosciences Institute has had active ongoing research and diversity promotion programs in the geosciences since 1972. Over this time, the drivers and goals of promoting a diverse discipline have evolved, including in the scope and definition of diversity. The success of these efforts have been mixed, largely driven by wildly different responses by specific gender and racial subsets of the population. Some critical cultural barriers have been solidly identified and mitigation approaches promoted. For example, the use of field work in promotion of geoscience careers and education programs is viewed as a distinct negative by many African American and Hispanic communities as it equates geoscience as non-professional work. Similarly, efforts at improving gender diversity have had great success, especially in the private sector, as life-balance policies and mitigations of implicit biases have been addressed. Yet success in addressing some of these cultural and behavioral issues has also started to unveil other overarching factors, such as the role of socio-economic and geographic location.

Recent critical changes in the definition of diversity that have been implemented will be discussed. These include dropping Asian races as underrepresented, the introduction of the multiracial definition, evolution of the nature of gender, and the increased awareness of persons with disabilities as a critical diverse population. This has been coupled with dramatic changes in the drivers for promoting diversity in the geosciences in the U.S. from a moral and ethical good to one of economic imperative and recognizing the way to access the best talent in the population as the U.S. rapidly approaches being a majority minority society. These changes are leading to new approaches and strategies, for which we will highlight specific programmatic efforts both by AGI and other leading US geoscience diversity efforts.