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Geoscience Currents #83: The Challenges of Comparing Data on Minorities in the Geosciences

Much of the national data related to the geosciences in higher education come from federal datasets through the National Science Foundation and the Department of Education. Minority data are typically found through the Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). While this dataset is useful, it is important to understand the functional definitions used for collecting the data, particularly when looking at minority enrollments and awarded degrees.

Before collecting data for the 2010-2011 academic year, the Department of Education changed their definitions related to the different racial groups, which in turn, changed the data. Therefore, it is difficult to compare older data with the new data for 2011 and 2012. AGI recognized the challenges in reporting the percentages of minorities completing a geoscience degree, so AGI's Geoscience Student Exit Survey contains a section on student demographics which allows for the students to self-identify by race, ethnicity, and gender. This Currents compares the percentages of geoscience degrees awarded by racial group using the most recent IPEDS data and Exit Survey data and discusses the issues related to the comparison to IPEDS data.

For more information about minority enrollment in the geosciences, see Currents #83 at:

www.agiweb.org/workforce/currents.

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The American Geosciences Institute is a nonprofit federation of 50 geoscientific and professional associations that represents more than 250,000 geologists, geophysicists and other earth scientists. Founded in 1948, AGI provides information services to geoscientists, serves as a voice of shared interests in the profession, plays a major role in strengthening geoscience education, and strives to increase public awareness of the vital role the geosciences play in society's use of resources, resiliency to natural hazards, and interaction with the environment.