american geosciences institute

10 May 2012

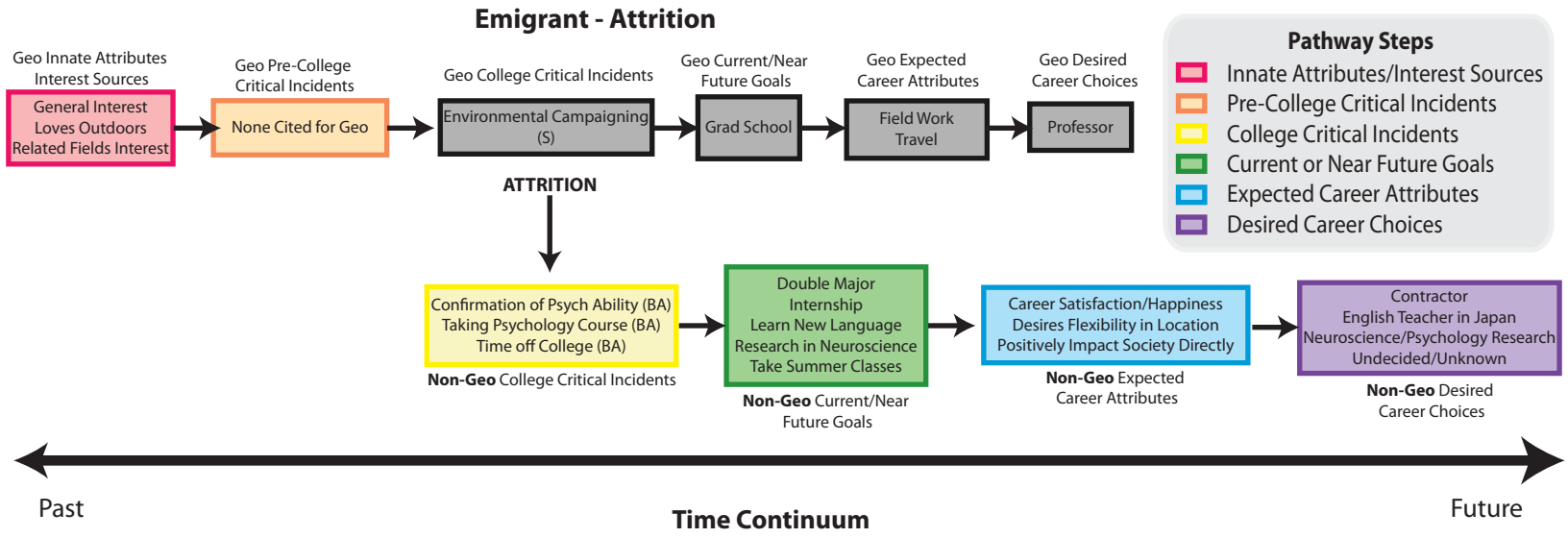
GEOSCIENCE CURRENTS

No. 58

Geoscience Academic Provenance Series II

Emigrants: An Additional Population Group

AGI found that only 33% of sophomore geoscience majors graduate with their geoscience degree, with the majority of attrition occurring during sophmore and junior years (AGI Workforce Report, 2011). Unfortunately, data explaining this phenomena are still limited. AGI is trying to understand this issue by identifying success metrics that ensure retention, through its National Student Exit Survey. That survey instrument will evolve to address the attrition questions in the future. Currently, Houlton's Geoscience Academic Provenance* follow-up study identified one additional population group that sheds light on geoscience attrition. Emigrants are students who were originally geoscience majors that later switched into a different discipline. Therefore, their pathways are informative for understanding this elusive attrition problem that the geoscience community faces.



One student from the original study dropped the geoscience major. He decided to pursue a degree in psychology and neuroscience. Above describes two pathways: first is his geoscience pathway from beginning to his original plans, which are now in grey. His new pathway for psychology is illuminated in color.

Specific reasons he cited for dropping the geoscience major and career pursuit:

1. Perceived lack of job opportunities in the geosciences.

2. Perceived lack of flexibility of where a geoscientist can become gainfully employed.

* See Geoscience Currents #45-48
This is the second in a series of three
follow-up Currents on Geoscience Academic Provenance.

- Heather R. Houlton