A living history reflection on the shaping of the future geoscience profession

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The COVID-19 pandemic has been uniquely disruptive to social, economic, and educational frameworks, bringing about sweeping changes, both temporary measures to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances as well as permanent changes in the way people work and learn. Through AGI’s NSF-supported Geoscience COVID-19 Impacts survey (Award #2029570) that began in May 2020 and will continue through December 2022, we have tracked how geoscience workplaces and learning environments have adapted to the changing pandemic situation, including the permanent changes that have occurred with respect to work and learning environments. As part of the study, we conducted a suite of oral history interviews in 2022 to capture the experiences of geoscience employers, academic departments, faculty, recent geoscience graduates and post-doctoral fellows during the pandemic. This presentation delves into these experiences to explore the rich experiential fabric of geoscientists as they navigated impacts to work and research activities and implemented strategies for overcoming pandemic-related challenges, fostered and discovered new opportunities for work and research that arose as a result of changes brought about by the pandemic. From these experiences, we will also reflect upon how these experiences are shaping the future directions of the geoscience profession.

Virtual platforms

Strategies

Adaptability

Networking differently

Opportunities

Looking ahead

Challenges

Remote access

Lab access

Childcare & Eldercare

Teaching

Onboarding

Data analysis

Literature review

Remote work

Hiring

Learning

Fieldwork

Travel

Lab work

Personal connection

Supportive actions

Redefine projects

Self-direction

Mental toughness. Like, you know, having the ability to focus on your own thing for a long time without a break, without having to share your space with other people or any of that stuff. But it was also a good kind of personal challenge — remote graduate student.

We had a lot of additional hours, additional extra, you know, you could spend more time with your family. And if you were working remotely, you had more control over your schedule. So it’s a work from home thing, you know, you had more control over your schedule. And if you’re a student, you had more control over your schedule.

Another important theme was self-direction. Many participants noted that they were able to work more independently and take on new responsibilities during remote work. This allowed them to develop new strengths and gain confidence in their abilities.

Opportunities

For the seminar series, actually I think moving forward we might still keep it online but also bring back some of the in-person opportunities that we didn’t have. We had to cancel our summer field class last summer and so that was a big loss for us.

I don’t think this is something that would go away for sure. We’re going to have a lot of virtual presentations. I am not giving any oral exams, you know, I am not giving any final exams anymore. I am working remotely in my office and going out of the building and that kind of stuff, even though this is a good kind of personal challenge — remote graduate student.

Remote work is definitely on the upswing. It means that people are more likely to work remotely, that people are more likely to work from home. And I think it’s going to stay. It’s going to stay. I think it’s going to stay. I think it’s going to stay. I think it’s going to stay.

We have reimagined our remote work strategies, including potential for remote instruction and virtual options for student interactions.

We are working on strategies to help students navigate remote learning, including virtual field trips and online content.

Onboarding is proving to be a challenge. Not from a technical perspective, but just having to adjust to the new environment and adjust to the new culture. And it’s not just for students, it’s also for faculty.

We have provided support for remote workers, including waiving course requirements for students and adjusting promotion and tenure guidelines.

We have revised our remote work policies, including potential for remote instruction and virtual options for student interactions.

We have had to change our recruitment strategies, including virtual interviews and online content.

Strategies for navigating pandemic impacts

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