

## MARKETING EARTH SCIENCE EDUCATION IN THE NETHERLANDS

Rapid dwindling in the number of students opting for Geosciences has been a matter of concern and debate in the recent years. In this context, I wish to bring to the notice of geoscientists some important revelations of a survey carried out on prospective students of Earth Sciences in the Netherlands to elicit their perception of Earth Sciences (Sneider and Spears, 2002).

The main findings are as follows:

- \* The important motivation for students while choosing a career is the future prospects and the financial rewards that a career would offer. Social relevance and how interesting a field is are not factors that influenced the choice of a career.
- \* Students are generally not aware of Earth Sciences.
- \* Earth Sciences are equated with physical and social geography, which do not have a high "standing" / "reputation".
- \* Positive image of Earth Sciences: It has both indoor and outdoor components, an international outlook and multi-disciplinary aspects.
- \* Negative image of Earth Sciences: Job opportunities are poor and confined to research organisations, oil companies etc.
- \* Earth Science students are nerds. The earth scientist is often a male, single, devoted researcher who is unaware of what happens in society; he does not care about his appearance. They do not like to belong to the group of earth scientists.
- \* Promotional materials used by Earth Science faculty members (University of Utrecht) should be catchy, avoid excessive written information and have spectacular images (like volcanoes).
- \* Students like to see images with computers and the Department's Internet address.

Important recommendations made are:

1. Promote Earth Sciences not by highlighting how interesting or relevant the subject is, but by focusing on its broadness and career opportunities.
2. Highlight attractive aspects like the opportunities for field-work, multi-disciplinary aspects, team work, and

the dynamic and interesting aspects of Earth Sciences.

3. Educate people about what Earth Sciences are: Write articles for popular journals, visit primary and secondary schools and try to incorporate aspects of Earth Sciences in school level teaching.
4. Scientists should shed the "nerd" image: "Dress as modern professionals rather than greasy scientists, and shave off those beards!" Show examples of Earth Scientists with successful and important careers. Provide female role models.

After these recommendations were incorporated by the Earth Science faculty members of the University of Utrecht in their Earth Science promotional activities, there was a 10% annual growth in the intake of students during the past two years – something that was possible only for the Earth Sciences stream in that University. In my opinion, what the survey has brought out is likely to be similar to the situation in India, and probably elsewhere too.

I had pointed out earlier that Geoscience teachers and professionals must take up Earth Science promotional activities. Activities under Recommendation number 3 above have been in operation in Mangalore University (Shankar, 2000) and at a few other institutions. However, these are sporadic and carried out in small pockets. I hope that there will be more promotional activities in India in the light of the findings and recommendations of the Netherlands survey. This would ensure that we would continue to have good earth scientists for the country in the decades to come.

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