

Inclusive geoscience instruction

To the Editor — Physical disability is considered as one of the least recognizable, yet most potent, factors in educational marginalization¹. Given the visual, tactile and experience-based nature of the geoscience curriculum, barriers to students with disabilities seem higher than in other disciplines; even among the various physical sciences, geoscience has the lowest enrolment of students with physical disabilities².

Low levels of inclusion are somewhat understandable, given considerations of logistics and safety when placing students into the uncontrollable, natural field-based environments that form an integral part of geoscience experiential learning. Yet, regardless of the challenges, many students with disabilities are pursuing their interest in the geosciences. Course instructors need be knowledgeable enough to adequately accommodate these students in mainstream instruction.

A collaboratively developed^{3,4} course aiming to assist geoscience instructors in accommodating students with disabilities and developing alternative activities for lessons,

labs and field trips could begin reducing the barrier of inaccessible education. The course is informed by current research⁵ on the external, physical barriers to students with disabilities, as well as the internal, personal and social challenges faced by these students. The unique aspect of the course's delivery is the presentation of content from students with disabilities, who offer personal experience and examples of instructional practices for accommodation and inclusion. These first-hand perspectives come from students who have overcome the barriers related to their physical disabilities to engage in and complete all geoscience requirements, including field-based learning.

This instructional development course will be presented this year at two conferences^{6,7}, and will be offered at no cost to participants. By increasing access to such courses, and training geoscience instructors in how to increase student inclusion and access to course content and activities, we hope to reverse the trends of very low participation rates of students with disabilities in geoscience programmes^{2,5}. □

References

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