GeoFORCE “Rocks” HISP

GeoFORCE Texas, a college preparatory program that introduces the wonders of geology to middle and high school students, is coming to the Houston Independent School District (HISD). The program provides week-long summer academies and two- to four-day field courses. The summer field trips travel to outstanding geological sites around the country such as the Grand Canyon, Zion National Park, Mt. St. Helens and more. Study programs to help students understand these natural wonders are blended with coursework in preparation for college and development of writing and presentation skills. GeoFORCE also provides experience in leadership and teamwork.

The Jackson School of Geosciences at the University of Texas at Austin developed GeoFORCE to address near future staffing needs of the “great crew change,” as baby boomer geoscientists retire leaving insufficient numbers of new graduates to take their place. GeoFORCE also fosters diversity by providing educational opportunities for minority and underprivileged students. Students are recommended by their teachers and complete a rigorous application process. If accepted, students must maintain an overall B average in math and science courses to remain in the four-year program.

Origins in the Rio Grande Valley

The Jackson School started GeoFORCE in 2005 in partnership with Southwest Texas Junior College in Uvalde. The program initially targeted students throughout the Rio Grande Valley, a rural and predominantly Hispanic area with very low college enrollment. GeoFORCE started with 80 students entering the 9th grade and then added a new class each year as the preceding group advanced. The program now has 320 students in grades 9-12, hailing from small towns throughout southwest Texas.

To introduce students to college education and further encourage them to study math and science, GeoFORCE organizes field seminars to exciting localities coast to coast—from the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., to Crater Lake in Oregon. Professors and research scientists from the Jackson School provide learning exercises at each locality and administer daily tests, including a final exam. Each summer program ends with a graduation ceremony and dinner for participants and their families. Students perform skits highlighting their new skills and knowledge, and they bask in recognition for their achievements.

The GeoFORCE program has been phenomenally successful. This summer, the rising 12th grade academy will provide more learning adventures in geoscience while assisting these students in making the transition to college. Many will be the first in their extended families to continue their education beyond high school.

Coming to Houston

In partnership with the HISD, the Jackson School arranged to extend GeoFORCE to students in Houston in 2008. A fast, two-year startup is planned, with programs for 9th and 11th grade students beginning this year. These will continue as 10th and 12th grade programs are added next year to complete the four-year curriculum.

Teachers have nominated students from 25 HISD schools, and final selection of participants is made by a subcommittee of former HISD teachers. The ethnically diverse HISD student body will broaden the GeoFORCE experience with participants of African American, Hispanic, Asian and Caucasian heritage.

GeoFORCE Houston is managed by the Jackson School in collaboration with an advisory council representing the following organizations:

GeoFORCE “Rocks” HISD continued on page 45
The Jackson School organizes and staffs all activities. Professors and research scientists prepare and lead the field trips and learning exercises, with participation from other geoscience professionals. The program is presented at no cost to the students. All travel, lodging and other expenses are paid from sponsorships funded by more than a dozen organizations, including oil companies, the Texas Workforce Commission and others.

Adventures in San Antonio and the Canyon Lake Gorge
To lay the groundwork for GeoFORCE Houston, an Educator Workshop was held in San Antonio on February 12-13, for HISD teachers, administrators and members of the Advisory Council. Following a bus trip from HISD headquarters, the group spent the afternoon at the Southwest Research Institute (SwRI) in San Antonio. Dr. Wesley Patrick and SwRI staff hosted the group in technical lecture and lab tours. HISD educators learned first hand about high impact programs in a broad spectrum of geoscience disciplines, from nuclear waste management to astrogeology. The program focused on geoscience careers, covering new and interesting vocations that await bright and motivated students in their classes.

The educators were off bright and early the next day for Canyon Lake gorge. There they were treated to a walking tour of the gorge, which was carved over a six-week span in 2002 by raging floodwaters of the Guadalupe River. Following an introduction to the history and heritage of the gorge by Cinde Thomas-Jimenez from the Gorge Preservation Society, the group was treated to a guided tour. Dr. Bill Ward, a longstanding expert on the Cretaceous of the area, and Dr. David Ferrill, who is mapping the gorge for SwRI, led the group through excellent new Glen Rose exposures to find faults, examine fossils, and try to match their stride with that of well preserved dinosaur footprints. Leaders guided discussions along the trek on diverse topics including environmental impact of development on ground water recharge, faults as conduits or barriers to fluid flow, and changes in life through geologic time. The educators welcomed the adventure, which provided an introduction to the kinds of experiences that await their students in GeoFORCE.

Join the Fun
The Houston Geological Society provides input through the Steering Committee to guide GeoFORCE, and HGS members have participated in GeoFORCE activities and discussed careers in geoscience with the students.

Come join the fun—your enthusiasm and experience can make a difference for these bright young youngsters. Check the website http://www.jsg.utexas.edu/geoforce/ for information on coming attractions. To join a GeoFORCE activity (some are local) or lead a discussion with students on geoscience careers, contact HGS Representative Chuck Caughey (Chuck.Caughey@ConocoPhillips.com) or Jackson School coordinator Danielle Horton (DHorton@jsg.utexas.edu).

JOB OPPORTUNITY
An Independent E&P Company having affiliates actively engaged in petroleum exploration operations in North America, Africa, Central Asia, Middle East and Far East is seeking experienced geoscientists. The Group has offices in USA, Europe, Middle East and Asia. The selected candidates will be based in Houston, Texas. Job duties include interpretation of Gulf of Mexico 3-D seismic data and prospect generation for drilling and review and evaluation of 2-D and 3-D seismic data for joint ventures in Gulf Coast Region. The applicant must have 5+ years offshore Gulf of Mexico experience and knowledge of latest geophysical methods and tools. Desired qualification is a degree in geology or geophysics. Salary is competitive with excellent package of benefits including overrides and a chance to share in success of the Company.

Send resume to: hrop123@yahoo.com