

GEOFORCE MONTHLY

Changing lives since 2005



Dr. Bent at a cenote in Mexico.

NEW DIRECTOR SPOTLIGHT: DR. JESSICA BENT

GeoFORCE would like to extend a warm welcome to our new director, Dr. Jessica Bent! In her own words, “I am an educator and researcher who believes every student, from every background, deserves an accessible, high-quality pathway to achieve success.”

With 13 years of experience building access for high-school and post-secondary youth, she passionately believes there are no achievement gaps, there are only opportunity gaps. As an Austin native, Dr. Bent is deeply connected to the communities GeoFORCE serves. To fully understand her commitment to her new position, we want to take you on a journey of Dr. Bent’s career pathway.

“Growing up, I always had the strong message that higher education was extremely important. That was something that no one could ever take away from you once you achieved it. I am one of the first of my family to have a Bachelor’s degree and the first in my family to have earned a doctorate.”

Although her family was very supportive of her pursuing her education, she had to navigate a lot of the systems on her own. Through her own experience, she gained insight into all the barriers students face when working towards higher education. She was fortunate to be a member of a non-profit organization, College Forward, that provided college application assistance. This really opened her eyes to the need of more passionate professionals who were willing to serve as mentors, advocates, and cheerleaders to help the next generation navigate these complex systems and empower students with all their options.

She attended Southwestern University where she completed a communications degree with a minor in environmental studies. It was there that she tapped into being an advocate for students by helping peers apply for financial aid and scholarships. She went on to pursue a Master’s in student affairs in higher education at Texas State University.

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Make sure you don't miss out on any of the events going on this summer, internship opportunities, or school year events!

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GEOFORCE
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Dr. Jessica Bent

DR. BENT CONT'D

While working towards her Master's degree, Dr. Bent worked as a college counselor for Austin ISD. She also worked as a summer employee for the Travis County Work-Based Learning/Summer Youth Employment Program. This is the exact same program that once provided Dr. Bent with her first job at the age of fourteen. GeoFORCE was also fortunate to have two interns from this program last summer.

She went on to work as a college and career counselor full time with Austin ISD before starting as the Associate Director of College Success Programs at the Ann Richards School for Young Women Leaders—all while beginning a Ph.D. focused on school improvement.

“That’s when I really started tapping into my love for STEM education. [The Ann Richards School] are all about really encouraging students to go into science, technology, engineering, and mathematic fields. At that school, it was especially cool to be smart. I was around other strong women leaders and really able to promote college and career access.”

From there, she had the opportunity to return to the Travis County Work-Based Learning/Summer Youth Employment Program to serve as the program administrator. One of her proudest accomplishments in that role was continuing to serve students when the COVID-19 Pandemic hit. She was integral in creating a virtual experience for students that still laid the foundation of what it means to be a professional.

In her roles at Ann Richards and Travis County, she discovered her passion for research and using data to tell stories of communities, amplifying their voices. After completing her Ph.D., she was brought on as the Director of Research at the Charles Butt Foundation, a philanthropic foundation focused on K-12 public education in the state of Texas. In this role, she focused more on the educator side of student support, finding ways to best serve those who serve Texas students. She worked to create public opinion polls for Texans and Texas teachers to better understand their perspectives and needs. Dr. Bent has numerous publications under her belt from her time in the Ph.D. program and in this role, amplifying voices from those she sought to support.

The GeoFORCE Program is a perfect culmination of all her passions and professional pursuits. In her new role, she is able to tap into research, student programming, and STEM education.

“It’s really an honor. I have so much respect for the GeoFORCE Program. There are so many amazing things this program has already done and I want to continue to build off of.”

Dr. Bent has already hit the ground running in her new role, creating meaningful connections and bringing new ideas to the table. Her goal is to spread the awareness, motivation, and inspiration for students to enter the geoscience field.

“The world can be chaotic, and we can be in spaces where there’s a lot of uncertainty. Something that is important to me in my leadership is to remain calm and levelheaded. I’m very much driven by our students deserving opportunities. A good leader seeks to figure out what the mission is and sees how the work we are doing aligns with our mission.”

All of us at GeoFORCE are excited to see the magic Dr. Bent brings to our program!

Photo: Dr. Jessica Bent



APPLY TO THE AGU BRIDGE PROGRAM!

Interested in graduate school?



The AGU Bridge Program offers access to a free common graduate school application shared with 45+ graduate geoscience departments across the U.S. Students from historically marginalized groups are encouraged to apply. Learn more [here](#).

Submit an application by 18 March 2025

IMPORTANT DATES

Here are a list of dates to keep in mind for **February** and **March**:

FEBRUARY						
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	

MARCH						
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

Future Students

Alumni

Current Students

Current Seniors

February 14 JSG Symposium

February 18 GeoFORCE U of H Social (Houston)

February 28 Student Registration Opens

March 13 GeoFORCE Longhorn Social

March 15 Math & Science Institute Application Opens

March 16 Summer 2025 Registration Opens

ENERGEO "MAKING ENERGY POSSIBLE"
VIDEO CHALLENGE
DEADLINE EXTENDED: END OF FEBRUARY!



MAKING ENERGY POSSIBLE

STUDENT & ALUMNI VIDEO CHALLENGE

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CHALLENGE HERE!