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Geoscience Jobs 2002: Who, What, and Where? -- Part Two

In a continuation of last month's article, we will complete the discussion of the six categories that I derived from the information found in the 479 openings which were submitted to the HGS Job Hotline website during 2002. The reason that I decided to compile all of this information in the first place, was to help provide some answers for the frequent questions that I have been getting, concerning the geoscience job market--essentially, the "who, what, and where"? I also thought that it may help those who are actively searching for a job, to get a glimpse into the most current trends.

If you recall, last month we covered: (1) Job Categories, (2) Ad Submitters, and (3) Minimum Experience Levels. This month, after a brief review of the highlights of last month's article (which will be used again later), we will continue where Part One left off, and cover the last three categories: (4) Job Status, (5) Minimum Education Requirements, and finally, (6) Job Location.

A Brief Review of Part One

(1) Job Categories: I found that there were nine main types of jobs in this category--Geologists, Geophysicists, Geoscientists, Support, Information Systems personnel, Sales, Managers, Petrophysicists, and Miscellaneous. Nearly 65% of the positions posted on the website were for the individuals most directly responsible for geoscience data analysis/processing, and interpretation--the Geologists, Geophysicisists, Geoscientists, Petrophysicists, and Managers. Of the remaining 35% of the total positions, over half of them were for Support personnel.

(2) Ad Submitters: The companies who submitted the ads, were separated into two groups: Tier 1 companies (oil companies), and Tier 2 companies (service companies, universities, search firms, etc.). Tier 1 and Tier 2 companies were almost evenly split for the number of positions which were submitted, with oil companies having the slight majority. A large portion of the oil company positions were handled by search firms.

(3) Minimum Experience Levels: The experience requirements were subdivided into seven levels: 0 years, 1-4 years, 5-9 years, 10-14 years, 15-19 years, and 20+ years, along with NI (no information given). Within the 1-4 year level, the Support category had the largest number of positions. The relative number of positions for Geologists, Geophysicists, and Geoscientists remained fairly consistent for the 1-4, 5-9, and 10-14 year experience levels. Nearly half of the 479 positions were submitted for personnel with a minimum experience level that ranges from zero, to four years. The intermediate experience level, with five to 14 years, accounted for 43.6%. The remaining 6.3% of the positions required a minimum of 15+ years of experience.

That concludes the review of Part One, and now we will continue with Part Two.....

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(4) Job Status

The Job Status category is defined by whether an opening was offered as Permanent Employment, a Contract position, or a Contract/Permanent position (a position which was open to either contract or permanent employment, with no preference for either). The companies in this last category were either flexible in the position, or preferred to hire someone initially as a contract person, which then could lead to permanent employment later, if things work out for both parties. For those seeking permanent employment, I call this the "Try me before you buy me" method.

I often find this flexibility in contract positions as well. As a longtime consultant, and one who favors contract positions, I find that most of my contracts are initially for periods of about three months. Because of this, I would have to say that I have a lot of experience with the "Try me before you buy me" method, and highly recommend it as a way to establish yourself in a new company. I would also venture to say that almost every one of these "short-term ventures" has led to longer contracts, and even offers of permanent employment, as time progressed further. For those seeking permanent employment, I wholeheartedly suggest that you expand your potential opportunities by giving this method a chance, for a potential exposure to long-term employment.

From a quantitative standpoint, slightly over 21% of the positions, which were listed in 2002, were for either the Contract, or Contract/Permanent categories (96 Contract and 5 Contract/Permanent). The more technically-oriented geoscience positions (Geologists, Geophysicists, or Geoscientists) accounted for 57 of these 101 positions. Furthermore, 66 of the 101 positions were offered to candidates in the 1-4 year experience category. It was also interesting to note that a large majority of the contract positions were listed by search firms.

With 378 of the 479 positions (almost 79%) open for permanent employment, it doesn't look like the companies are heading toward an all-contract, or outsourced staff any time soon, even though to some, it does seem like it occasionally.

(5) Minimum Education Requirements

I thought that another interesting factor to evaluate, would be the Minimum Education requirement. For those considering graduate school in the near future, this would give them more information to help determine the actual demand for Masters and Doctorate degrees (see Figure 1). While just over half of the positions did specify that a college education was required, many did have a preference for advanced degrees. Fifty-two positions listed an advanced degree as a minimum requirement (47 with a Master's degree, and 5 with a Ph.D. degree). Conversely, 13 positions were also listed with a minimum of a High School degree!

Surprisingly, 194 of the 479 positions didn't list any education requirements at all. Based on the content of those ads however, I believe that it was probably assumed that most of them had specialized skills that required a college degree. Especially, since many similar positions are already filled with candidates with degrees.

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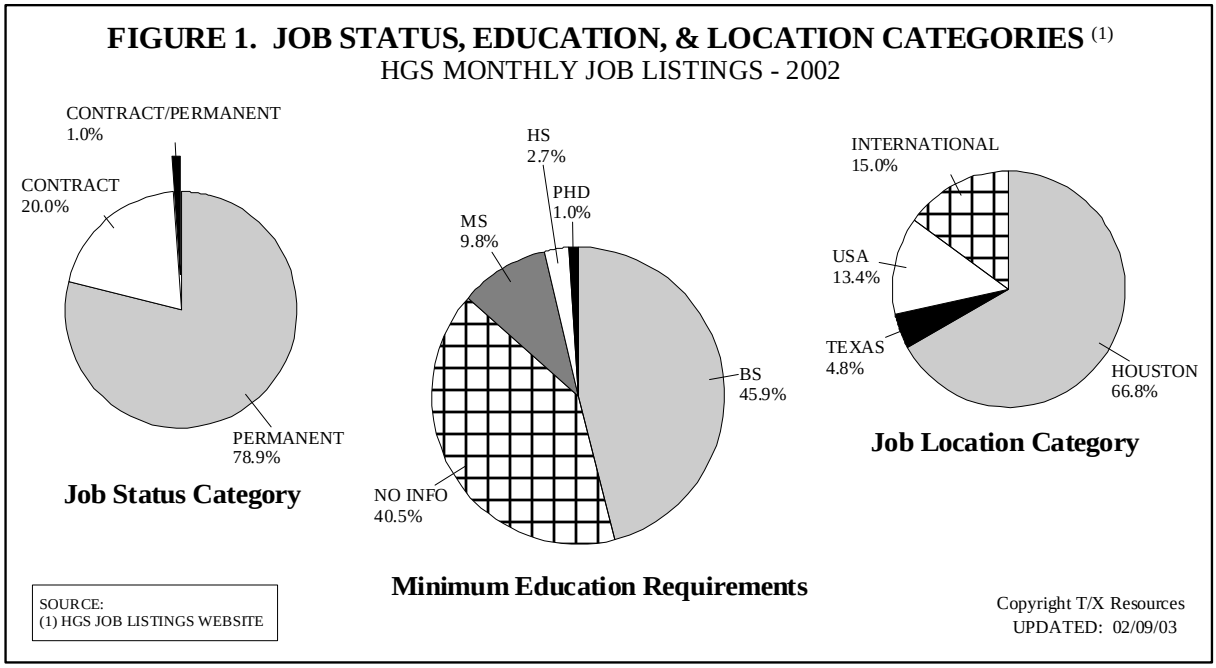

(6) Job Location

The Job Location category highlights the geographic preferences for available positions. Slightly over two-thirds of the jobs were located in Houston. Twenty-three positions were to be located in the state of Texas, but outside the city of Houston. Another 64 jobs were in the U.S., but outside Texas. Finally, in a strong showing for the international sector, 72 positions were listed outside the U.S. At this point, I think that it is appropriate to illuminate some related information, gathered from our website "hit" counter. Our website lists regular visitors from over 40 countries, located on every continent, except Antarctica, and is truly the hub of the oil industry, for available geoscience jobs.

The Perfect Candidate

During the process of sifting through all of this information, I became curious about what common characteristics would lead someone to having the best chance of finding a job, from all of the positions that were listed--"The Perfect Candidate". In reviewing all of the categories, here's what I came up with. They would most likely be a Geologist, and having acquired a Bachelors degree, would be seeking permanent employment, for a position requiring a minimum of one to nine years of experience. They would probably increase their chances of finding a position in their field of qualification (geoscience data analysis/processing, or interpretation), by using a search firm. There's an even chance that they would be interested in working for either a Houston oil or service company. Additionally, one of the more important factors these days, and not quantified in this work because it was almost universal within the job ads, would be a knowledge and proficiency in the use of computers.

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For those of us out there who don't fit these "Perfect Candidate" criteria, don't be dismayed! As I have mentioned previously, most of the categories were for the minimum requirements that the companies were looking for. I would guess that in many cases, they were not the qualifications that were actually hired. For example, in the minimum experience levels, over half of the positions were listed for candidates with 0-4 years of experience. But, how many recent geoscience candidates have entered the oil industry within the last four years, to fill these openings?

As always, it is our constant responsibility to demonstrate our other abilities and talents, which the companies may not have even realized would be of value to them.

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