
Competition compilation: Why study Geography, Earth or Environmental Sciences?

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"In today's current climate it would be stupid not to!"

The GEES Subject Centre's Student Essay Competition generated 48 entries from GEES students who, almost universally, showed considerable passion for their subject. These essays provide many interesting and sometimes amusing quotes which have been compiled here under the main themes that emerged from their writing.

On subject matter

The majority of the entrants demonstrated passion and emotion towards their degree based on their global environmental and societal concerns and the relevance of these to our present and future.

"It is often said that hatred is borne of ignorance, but Geography is a subject that promotes understanding, aiming to contest ignorance. Knowledge of various social groups encourages respect and acceptance of others."

"To understand the world around us and to put that understanding to use for the benefit of humanity."

"We mustn't forget that no matter what we study or what job we do, we are still dependent on our planet."

"This is why geology interest me. It is an endless and epic story that our society relies upon for its very survival, the workhorse of science."

"I sincerely hope our future leaders are geographically literate."

"...environmental awareness ...of environmental issues has thrust Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences to the forefront of many people's consciences. With celebrities toting eco-friendly hybrid cars, supermarket giants reducing polythene bay use and people using the phrase "carbon footprint" on an almost daily basis, it is hard not to recognise the fact that the state of the global environment is finally a global issue."

The interdisciplinarity and breadth of their studies was also shown to be important to our students.

"Even if you have never compared the world's climatic regions or considered the best ways to tackle malaria in sub-Saharan Africa, studying geography, or indeed any course that will further enlighten you on the processes that mould our world and infiltrate into our daily lives, will be an experience of immense value."

"...my point is that environmental science is a discipline that requires knowledge in all areas, allowing new and useful perspectives."

"...in answer to the question "Why Geography?", my reply over the years has evolved from a rather pathetic "Umm", to being simply "because everything, in some way, relates to Geography."

"The interdisciplinary nature of the course means I'm always doing something different. One lecture I might be discussing sustainable development in African nations whilst the next might be a lab class testing water quality, then on to learning about storm systems. The variety is refreshing and always picks up my enthusiasm."

"Geography is indeed 'colouring in' as it paints a picture of the world that integrates our understanding of the environment and humanity ..."

On fieldwork

An excitement of the exploration, adventure and romance of fieldwork, a love of landscape and the personal relationships built through fieldwork were central in the students' enjoyment of their studies.

"Fieldtrips are definitely a positive aspect of the subject - It's about getting out there, seeing and learning things for yourself."

"If like me you dream about the incredible icy expanse of Antarctica and following in the footsteps of polar explorers, geophysics is the way to get there."

"When a researcher tells of his near-death experiences in an African rainforest you cannot help but want to follow in his footsteps."

"It is understandable that coring for glacial sediments by getting caked in mud and losing the feeling in your fingers in the name of Geography does not seem very appealing; but strangely it is."

"...week-long field trips in isolated youth hostels are the perfect setting for life-long friendships."

"It was one of the most amazing and enlightening experiences of my life, an unforgettable mix of good friends, good food and hard work."

On skills and careers

Our students thought that their GEES degree was beneficial in providing them with rich skills development opportunities and freedom in career opportunities.

One of the main skills an employer is looking for is the ability to work well in a team. What better way to practice this than through the joy that is fieldwork.

"If you want a career set out for you from the start geography is probably not for you. However, if you want to engage in something that will open you up to novel and intriguing experiences and skills which allow you to formulate your own career path, then geography ticks all of your boxes."

"I can already see how much my communication, group work, presentation and organisational skills have improved, and also how important they are when it comes to planning for my future."

"... the unique abilities that geographers possess. For example, the ability to develop, and understand and manage complex, even conflicting, systems or modes of operation..."

"...future students of geography, earth and environmental sciences are going to be looked to for the solutions to Earth's problems."

We would like to thank all those who submitted essays. The three winning entries and selected runners up can be found on the GEES website at <http://www.gees.ac.uk>

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