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Many geographers pursue rewarding careers in business, local, state, or federal government agencies; nonprofit organizations; and education. If you do a search today for job related to geography, many of the job titles are going to include “GIS” (geographic information systems), “Geospatial”, “Planner”, “Analyst”, “Environmental”, and “Engineering”, but not geographer. Lines between geography, science, and engineering have blurred in the workplace. As technology has advanced, and more and more geospatial professionals are being employed, and more are needed.

The Geo-Literacy Coalition, which includes the National Geographic Society, Google, CH2M Hill, Esri, and the U.S. Geospatial Intelligence Foundation, recently highlighted the following data from two studies released in 2012 by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and Oxera Consulting:

BCG estimates that the U.S. geospatial industry generated $73B in revenue last year, with half a million high-wage jobs. Oxera puts the global revenue number at up to $270 billion per year. Both studies estimate that the industry is growing at between 25-30% per year, and that in order to support this rapid growth, we need a workforce trained in geospatial technology.

As with many technology-based industries, a looming talent shortage demands greater emphasis on, and promotion of, technical education and training at all levels. In the case of the geospatial industry, this talent shortage can be traced in large part to our nation’s failure to provide students with basic geography skills as part of their K-12 education. As a result of this failure, young Americans are not developing an interest in pursuing geography-related careers, and high paying jobs in the geospatial industry are going unfilled. The Geo-Literacy Coalition is concerned that a lack of support for geography education will result in a decline in U.S. production of location-based technologies, putting American businesses at a competitive disadvantage.

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Designed and produced by the Cartographic Services Laboratory at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Derek Alderman, Cartographer, with assistance from Kurt Butefish, Coordinator of the Tennessee Geographic Alliance. R01-1038-143-002-15

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