

Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services

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EXAMINING BOARD OF PROFESSIONAL GEOLOGISTS, HYDROLOGISTS AND SOIL SCIENTISTS

PROFESSIONAL GEOLOGIST SECTION

BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL GEOLOGIST IN WISCONSIN - A STUDENT GUIDE

Anyone who offers to practice or practices as a professional geologist in Wisconsin must be licensed as a professional geologist (PG) in this state. More than 20 other states also require licensure or registration. The purpose of this regulation is to protect anyone who uses the services of a geologist. It accomplishes this by assuring minimum competency among practicing geologists by enforcing minimum education and experience requirements, setting minimum passing scores on two examinations, and requiring letters that speak to an applicant's abilities as a geologist as well as job performance. Licensing is done by the Professional Geologist Section of the Examining Board of Professional Geologists, Hydrologists, and Soil Scientists, which is appointed by the Governor and administered by the Department of Safety and Professional Services. Registration or licensure in a profession is also required for the practice of engineering, hydrology, and soil science.

In addition to being responsible for licensure, the Professional Geologist Section investigates complaints against licensed professional geologists. The Department investigates complaints against persons practicing geology without a license. Areas of overlap allow people in more than one profession to work on certain problems. For example, engineers, hydrologists, or soil scientists might have the knowledge to solve some water problems. Other problems clearly require the expertise of a person from one specific profession. A code of ethics prevents licensed geologists from practicing outside their area of expertise. The code of ethics also regulates a geologist's interaction with the public and government agencies.

Because licensure is not allowed without experience, most beginning geologists practice under the direction of a professional geologist during their first five years. The expectation of many consulting firms is that you will apply for licensure when you meet the experience requirement. If you practice in other states that require licensure, you will need to apply separately to each state.

There are three steps to registration as a professional geologist in Wisconsin: education, experience, and examination

Education

A bachelor's degree in Geology or equivalent course work, including at least 30 semester hours or 45 quarter hours is required. The course work must include credits in at least 4 of the following areas: geochemistry or geophysics; geologic field methods; geomorphology or glacial geology; hydrology or hydrogeology; mineralogy; petrology or petrography; stratigraphy or sedimentology; and structural geology. Courses in other areas of geology may be included to make up the 30 credits. You will need to submit official transcripts of all college course work that you have taken.

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Experience

Five years of professional experience doing geology (not just associated activities) are required to apply for registration. Two of those years must be under the supervision of a licensed professional geologist in Wisconsin. If you are registered or licensed in another state when applying, then two years of supervised experience may be under the supervision of a registered or licensed professional geologist in another state. Working part time while attending school is not considered as part of the work experience, nor is summer work experience done before the receipt of the bachelor's degree. Graduate degrees allow a one year (total) reduction in the experience requirement.

If you have experience, but not under the supervision of a licensed professional geologist, peer review is another option for licensure. This requires an extra year of experience and certification from three practicing geologists familiar with the applicant's work that the candidate meets qualifications for professional licensure in Wisconsin.

Both options also require references from five individuals, three of whom are competent to evaluate your ability and past performance. One person must be a professional geologist in Wisconsin or, if you are already licensed or registered in another state, a licensed or registered professional geologist from that state.

Examinations

Wisconsin uses two national exams, as do most other states with licensure or registration. One is an exam that covers fundamentals of geology and the other is the principles and practice exam. Members of the Professional Geologist Section assist in composing these exams every year. Passing scores represent minimum competency as determined by regulators from across the country. The distribution of subject areas is based on a national survey of professional geologists. Details of the breakdown of subject areas and sample exam questions can be seen at the ASBOG web site (www.asbog.org).

Fundamentals Exam

To qualify to take this exam, you must be a second semester senior with at least 24 semester (36 quarter) geology credits completed. The exam is multiple choice, with about 110 questions. We recommend taking this exam during your senior year or soon after graduation because it contains material similar to what is covered in undergraduate classes. The exam is a closed-book exam.

Principles and Practice Exam

To qualify to take this exam, you must meet the educational and experience requirements for licensure except that the length of experience required to take the exam is one year less than that required for actual licensure. This exam concentrates on solving problems similar to those you might encounter in professional geological practice.

Examinations are given by the Department in March and October. There is a 60 day deadline to register for the examination.

Need more information? The Wisconsin Professional Geologist Section's licensing requirements may be found at: <http://dsps.wi.gov>.