Seven-hundred eighty-three students in introductory geology classes were surveyed at Northern Arizona University during the fall 2008 and spring 2009 semesters to evaluate perceptions and attitudes toward the sciences that are offered as undergraduate degree programs: Biology, Chemistry, Environmental Science, Geology, and Physics.

The results indicate that misperceptions exist regarding the field of geology. Geology was perceived to be low in prestige, low in difficulty and low-paying relative to biology, chemistry, and physics. In addition, geology occupations were perceived to pay less than students’ minimum salary expectations. Student perceptions of prestige, difficulty and pay are significantly correlated, with students tending to associate higher pay with greater prestige and difficulty (Hoisch and Bowie, in press).

The data show that the most popular science major at NAU, biology, is in the middle with regard to perceptions of prestige, pay and difficulty. Recruitment of science-inclined students into geoscience degree programs may be aided by providing information to students that corrects the misperceptions, such as salary data that show geoscientists are well paid relative to other science occupations (e.g. Geoscience Currents #24), and information that leads students to have higher and more realistic expectations of the difficulty of the geology degree program.