

I am a Geographer ...

Rob Gell, AM FRGS FEIANZ

Company Director

Our communications business, bhive Group, is a small business that services a range of communications needs, from environmental strategy development to the use of mobile devices and video as primary communications tools through to text analytics. I am also involved with a number of non-profit organisations (including as GTAV Patron since 19??), committees and agencies where my direct training and understanding as a geographer of the complex, interconnected issues that we face in our modern societies is very important. Having the knowledge to know that important questions haven't been asked when a solution to a problem is required is a very valuable thing to be able to do. Geographers have this skill.

My Geography studies occurred at the University of Melbourne between 1971 and 1974 and resulted in a BSc(Hons), Physical Geography major. My early career as a weather presenter clearly utilised my capacity to understand maps and diagrams. Despite the way commercial television stations promote weather presenters, the real skill of a weather presenter is not how much they know about the weather (they all have the same information essentially); it's a matter of being able to make sure the viewer understands what tomorrow's going to be like and that is a presentation skill.

I don't directly work with other geographers in our business but I certainly engage with geographers (and like sciences) in a range of sectors and with organisations I am involved with. I'm a member of the Victorian Coastal Council where my understanding of coastal geomorphology and coastal processes is directly used. I was a member of the Australian Conservation Foundation council in the 1990s (environmental geography); I was on various boards of Greening Australia for more than a decade in the early 2000s (landscape restoration) and Chair of the Western Port Biosphere under UNESCO's "Man and the Biosphere" program for a decade too (ecologically sustainable development).

It is interesting how the dominos fall. I went to university to become a geologist after the mining boom of the 1960s. In my first year I took Physical Geography 101. The regular lecturer was on sabbatical leave and we were taught by an inspirational young tutor who made sense out of things



through fascinating field trips, his high level of knowledge, enthusiasm and enjoyment of the discipline. I did a bit more geology in subsequent years but the interdisciplinary nature of Geography had hooked me. Developing a "sense of place" became my mantra. The parallel process was that this was at the time of the first "environment revolution". Rachel Carson, Paul Ehrlich, Garret Hardin, The Club of Rome and "A Blueprint for Survival" were all brand new and on our reading lists. Coupled with the Vietnam War it was a pretty dynamic time. That was the cornerstone. I then had an opportunity to teach physical Geography and environmental science in the tertiary sector after my degree – that was where my understanding of what being a geographer meant and where my real interest developed. The next unexpected step was an opportunity to develop my presentation skills coupled with the knowledge to present weather on television. That was my career for more than thirty years and where my interest in communications developed.

I believe that geographers have the capability to work in a very diverse range of fields. Geography graduates are not siloed like some other disciplines, so communications certainly, but being able to understand the complex interlinkages of the systems that surround us, from natural systems to transport networks and from climatic conditions to city development patterns are increasingly valuable assets.