GIS Professional Certification

By Kristen Hoffman, GIS Technician/Analyst, Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre’s Community Geomatics Centre.

What is a GISPP?
GISP is a certification for GIS (Geographic Information Systems) Professional created by the GIS Certification Institute that has been in operation since 2004. The purpose of the certification is to ensure that GIS Professionals push the limits of GIS capabilities, continually expand their skill sets and adhere to a code of ethics, making them stand out against their peers. GISP Certification is not a test. Rather, it requires that applicants provide a detailed portfolio of their accomplishments.

GIS Professional Certification is awarded to those applicants who meet the GIS Certification Institute’s requirements. These requirements fall under three categories: Educational Achievement, Professional Experience and Contributions to the Profession. The applications are reviewed by the GIS Certification Institute, which is an independent third party organization. The Institute is an amalgamation of non-profit GIS and geospatial technology companies including the Association of American Geographers (AAG), the National States Geographic Information Council (NSGIC), the University Consortium for Geographic Information Science (UCGIS) and the Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (URISA).

After obtaining a GISP Certification, the GIS Professional must follow a code of ethics designated by the GIS Certification Institute, as well as continue to expand his or her education and contribute to the profession of GIS and geospatial technologies. GISP Certification must be renewed every five years.

How to get your GISP
GISP Application forms can be downloaded from www.gisci.org.

Eligibility
To be eligible to apply for GISP Certification, the applicant must have 4 years or 48 months of professional GIS experience.

The Grandfathering Provision (only available until January 1, 2009)
There are three ways to be eligible to apply under the Grandfathering Provision. Either the applicant must have 8 years of GIS experience in data analysis, system design, programming, or a similar position, have 13 1/3 years of data compilation, teaching or similar experience, or have 20 years of GIS user experience. A combination of these three experience levels, adding to at least 200 points in the Professional Experience category on the application form is also acceptable. Candidates for the Grandfathering Provision do not need to complete the Educational Achievement and Contributions to the Profession sections of the application form.

If accepted, applicants under the Grandfathering Provision will finish with the same GISP certification as other applicants who were accepted with the regular application form. The Grandfathering Provision is only available until January 1, 2009. Any applications using the Grandfathering Provision after this date will not be accepted.

The GISP Application
The GISP Application contains three components: the Educational Achievement component, the Professional Experience component and the Contributions to the Profession component.

1. The Educational Achievement Component
The purpose of the Educational Achievement component is to create a goal for GIS professionals to work toward by continuing to expand their knowledge and education in the profession. Points are awarded for
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credentials (formal degrees, diplomas or certificates), GIS related courses, and conference attendance. The minimum number of points for this category is 30.

2. The Professional Experience Component
A minimum of 4 years or 48 months of professional GIS experience is essential for GISCI applicants. If the applicant does not meet this criteria, the application will be denied. Professional Experience is split into three sub-categories to represent different skill levels. The most points are awarded to positions with higher technical skill levels. For positions that are mixed between the three sub-categories, a percent of full time equivalent can be used to measure how much of the applicant’s experience falls under each tier. This way, the applicant collects as many points as possible for their experience level. Bonus points can be collected if the applicant has experience as a GIS supervisor or manager. Documentation is required to accompany this section, outlining the professional skills of the applicant to ensure the correct point values are awarded.

3. The Contributions to the Profession Component
This section is included in the GISP application so that professionals will continuously benefit the field of GIS. This section is concentrated more heavily upon during the recertification process so that more experienced professionals are pushed to contribute more to the profession. Professionals should be capable of scoring two Contribution points per year. Applicants are awarded points in eight categories:

1. GIS Publications
2. GIS-Related Professional Association Involvement
3. GIS Conference Participation
4. GIS Workshop Instruction
5. GIS Conference Presentation
6. GIS Awards Received
7. GIS Volunteer Efforts
8. Other GIS Contributions (e.g. GIS Event Organizer, Participant or Moderator).

Additional Documentation
Additional documentation that is required in the GISP Application process includes:

- An official college or university transcript if the applicant is claiming credential points in the Educational Achievement section
- An official transcript outlining specific course titles if the applicant is claiming course points in the Educational Achievement section

- A letter from the applicant’s supervisor on official letterhead stating that the application contains true information. A sample letter can be copied from www.gisci.org
- Any other required documentation for the Educational Achievement, Professional Experience, and Contributions to the Profession components

Additional items to support the application may include a GIS-specific résumé and formal job descriptions from employers.

Total Certification Points
Grandfathering Provision (200 points)
- Educational Achievement component – not required
- Professional Experience component – 200 points
- Contributions to the Profession component - not required

Regular Application (150 points)
- Educational Achievement component – 30 points
- Professional Experience component – 60 points
- Contributions to the Profession component – 8 points
- Plus 52 additional points in any combination of the above categories
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Where are the GISP’s?
There are 2,332 Certified GIS Professionals listed on the GISCI website as of August 27, 2008. Of these, 2,214 live in the United States. There are 88 in Canada, with a total of 24 GISP’s residing in Ontario. Worldwide, excluding the United States and Canada, there are 30 GISP’s residing in 24 different countries.

For more information on GISP certification, please visit www.gisci.org.

About the Author
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