

## Ask Not...

We are all familiar with the famous words uttered just over half a century ago by one of our most revered U.S. Presidents, John F. Kennedy, during his 1961 Inaugural Address.

*"And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country."*

One of the most frequent questions that I hear as an advocate for the GISP certification program is "So, what is the point?" In addition to that question, I am sure you are asking yourself "what does the GISP certification have to do with JFK?" No, I'm not "off my rocker", maybe a little unconventional, but definitely still hanging on to the hand rails. So, hop on and enjoy the ride.

Admittedly, I had problems at first formulating an answer to the "what's the point" question in relation to the GISP certification. I can only draw upon my own experiences, motivations, and perspective. So I asked myself that same question. Yes, I hold a GISP certification. I also hold an Esri software certification. So, what is the point in holding either certification? I found myself reflecting back on my initial reasons for applying for the GISP certification. Why did I do it in the first place? Yes, I will admit that I snuck in just under the "grandfathering" deadline and that was a slight motivator, but it was not the only reason that I applied. As an aside, it was brought to my attention recently that there are some very experienced and intelligent individuals out there that qualify for the GISP certification, but they will not apply because of a misinterpretation of the "grandfathering" program that I just mentioned. Clearing the air on this one, the difference between the "grandfathering" portfolio application and the "current" portfolio application is point totals and point distribution. The idea behind having a different "grandfathering" application was that the expectations and requirements of this certification were not previously known by those in the geospatial industry. Those that have been in the industry for over ten years did not know that there was a need to keep track of all supporting documentation for education and training classes taken or attended, conference attendance or presentations, or publications. Yes, I'm sure we all had some. But if any of you have ever changed offices or jobs, you know that once you run out of packing tape or boxes, things such as "old" training certificates from years ago quickly become a non-essential document unless a future need is known. So in short, the "grandfathering" application was no walk in the park. It required the same type of documentation and details as the "current" GISP application; however, slight concessions were made on some of the point totals and distributions to take the "unknown" and "lost documentation" factors into account. If those using the "grandfathering" application did not have the supporting documentation to back up the qualifying activities and experience, the experience or activities were not allowed to count toward the certification requirements. The same is true for today's GISP application.

Consider the air cleared! Now that any misunderstanding in regard to the “grandfathering” program has been cleared up, “What is the point?”, “Why did I do it?”, and “Why do I care?” For me, there was an element of faith or hope involved in my decision to get the GISP certification. I realized that the GISP was a young certification program. But I had faith and an expectation that the members of the geospatial community would eventually embrace it as the premier GIS certification. I don’t recall asking myself, “What’s in it for me?” But living in the narcissistic society that I do, it might have been rumbling around in the back of my sub-consciousness somewhere. Regardless, I prefer to see the GISP certification as an opportunity to be a part of something bigger than myself, my job, or my company. As for the Esri software certification, I see that for exactly what it is – as software certification much like the Microsoft certification. The Esri certification indicates that I can utilize the GIS tools of the Esri software at a certain level of proficiency. The GISP certification indicates that I will know when to utilize those Esri software tools. Although they are complimentary certifications, there is a difference and a specific purpose for both certifications. “Do you know when to use GIS to solve a problem?” versus “Do you know how to utilize the tools of the Esri software to solve that problem?” They are a bit like salt and pepper - alone they are good, but together they are great!

The point is that we are approaching a critical crossroad in the geospatial industry. We all recognize that GIS is used as a tool in almost every industry including where to build the next Starbucks or which one to close as the case may be, or where to build a new power line or pipeline, and even monitoring and helping to reduce crime. People that use GIS can either choose to be known as a GIS Professional or as an Industry Analyst that uses GIS as a toolset to do their job. GIS can be wrapped into the job requirements of so many jobs today that it is in danger of being lost as a unique and skilled profession. That, my friends, is the point. How do you want to be recognized? Would you prefer to be known as a GIS Professional or say a Pipeline Safety Analyst or other similar analyst? This is the time to decide. What do you want to be or become?

The GIS Certification Institute, member organizations, and fellow GISPs have succeeded in creating a GIS profession that stands alone. GIS now has the strength to stand out as its own profession, or it can be engulfed by other industries as a tool - the choice to continue the growth of the GIS and Geospatial profession is ours, the geospatial community, and will be dictated by our action or inaction. What will it be? So my fellow Geospatial colleagues, JFK’s words still ring true and are applicable to our world of technology even five decades after they were first spoken: Ask not what your profession can do for you – Ask what you can do for your profession? The choice is yours.

In order for any profession to be successful, its members must be willing to work together and build a mutual and common sense of purpose. I believe that the Geospatial Community is capable of this cooperation and will continue to succeed in making the GIS and Geospatial Profession stand out among technological professions. And that, my friends, is the long, short, and straight of it.