

APPLIED GEOGRAPHY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA¹

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Several years ago, L. Dudley Stamp, one of Britain's leading geographers of this century, stated:

[Geography's] interest is to describe and reflect the physical build and the natural resources, the sequence of human occupation and social organization - which have built the world we know, and will change and develop it in years to come. To know and understand these causes and their certain or probable effects is vital in all planning for the future; and this is the field of applied geography (2).

This report focuses upon this kind of geography as it pertains to university life.

Geographers at the University of South Florida are conscious of their responsibility to serve the region in which they reside. The Department offers course work in applied geography at the undergraduate as well as the graduate levels. While several courses of a general nature ranging from conservation of natural resources to urban geography may have units of an applied nature, it is especially at the senior and graduate levels that courses with a strong emphasis on the application of geographic principles are found. This is the case with such courses as cartography, aerial photo interpretation, urban planning, water resources management, field methods, meteorology, and the very special internship program described below.

Several members of the faculty have a keen interest in applied geography which is reflected in both their research endeavors and services rendered especially to the Southwestern Region of Florida. Three members of the geography staff, including the chairman, participated in a study on the impact of off-shore oil exploration on the coastal zone of Florida. One geographer is investigating on-farm water management problems in an underdeveloped area of the world. Several members of the department are engaged in local community activities through serving on technical and citizens advisory committees especially concerning natural resources planning. In addition, the department provides weather information obtained from its meteorological station to the community at large.

Because of the department's interest in applied geography, it has been relatively easy to initiate and sustain a student internship program with the aid of local public agencies. This program was started by the present chairman several years ago and has now grown to where two faculty members are involved in expanding and supervising the program on two of the campuses. Likewise the number and variety of agencies accepting interns has grown to where now approximately twenty agencies participate. These organizations include city and regional planning agencies; and environmental groups focusing on water, soil, and forest resources, pollution matters, and solid waste disposal. At the present some six to eight students per quarter enroll in this program at the Tampa and St. Petersburg campuses.

The mechanics of this internship program are described in an announcement from the department chairman to interested students:

The purpose of the internship in geography is to provide a meaningful work experience and an opportunity to utilize geographic techniques, insights, and methodologies in problem solving. To be eligible for consideration a student must have completed thirty or more hours of geography and be a graduate student or senior. Because the success of the program is closely related to the quality of students involved, a careful screening of candidates will be necessary. Although a fairly good grade point average will probably be a major advantage, other qualities to be considered will include attitude, motivation, and maturity. Each student selected for the program will be expected to work a minimum of twelve hours per week for a public agency. No salary will be paid but the agency will be responsible for supervising and evaluating the student's performance. In addition, several brief written progress reports, a final major summary paper, and an oral review will be required. Grades will be assigned on the basis of the job evaluation and the written reports. Depending on the circumstances, a student may be permitted to repeat the internship a second quarter.

Upon successful completion of this program a student can earn up to five hours of credit.

This program benefits the students and the respective agency alike. Most students who have participated in the internship program have been offered full time positions with the agency or a similar organization upon graduation. Likewise these agencies find it advantageous to utilize geography students in order to disseminate a good name for themselves within the University community; obviously they also appreciate having free semi-trained technicians.

A few negative points should also be mentioned. One issue that continuously confronts the department as well as the student is insuring that meaningful work is scheduled for the student intern. In many cases this comes more naturally in a small agency where the student has a better opportunity to learn the entire operation and observe how diverse programs are handled and decisions are made. At times, especially in the larger planning offices, a student becomes pigeonholed into one menial job such as coloring land use maps or conducting "windshield surveys" of an area, but even this latter task has its merits in the training of a geographer. There are also some legal questions such as the possible violation of the minimum wage law, and assessment of liability for an accident or injury to a student on the job.

In summary, geographers at the University of South Florida, by utilizing their knowledge, skills and insights to confront fundamental questions facing their community, have been able to apply their discipline to public policy issues. The department provides a service to the community as well as to students by relating academic training to the solving of real-world issues.

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- (1) This report was presented at the annual meeting of the Association of American Geographers in Salt Lake City, Utah, April, 1977. The author is grateful to the Chairman of the Geography Department of the University of South Florida, John Stafford, as well as Harry Schaleman and Harry Kim for critical comments on an earlier draft of this report.
- (2) L. Dudley Stamp, *Applied Geography* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1960), frontispiece.

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