

Annual Report on the Status of Geography in Virginia, 2002-2003
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Survey forms were mailed electronically to 21 institutions of higher learning in the commonwealth. Eleven responded including two junior/community colleges and nine public colleges/universities. Seven colleges/universities offer undergraduate majors in geography, and three offer graduate coursework. In addition, two of the colleges/universities have well-established geography programs that provide coursework for the general education programs of their institutions.

The mean number of under graduate courses offered is twenty and the mean number of graduate courses is five. A total of 9,400 students enrolled in geography courses at these institutions during the 2002-2003 academic year. With a mean faculty size of five full time and four part time, almost all institutions reported the challenge of instructing ever-increasing class sizes without a strong support system of teaching assistants or administrative commitment to hire more full time faculty. Of the institutions that offer a major in geography, the mean number of majors is 68. Virginia Tech graduated twenty students with master's degrees in 2003.

GIS, planning and environmental planning jobs topped the list of careers in which recent graduates have found positions. Additional career choices of recent graduates include secondary education, military, Peace Corps, government, consulting, remote sensing and economic development.

While still facing continued state budget challenges, some institutions have succeeded in hiring new faculty members, and others have the expectation to hire during the next academic year. Mary Washington has one temporary hire and anticipates hiring two faculty members in the next five years. James Madison University (JMU) hired a new faculty member this year. At Radford, one faculty on continual appointment was moved into a tenure track position, and Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) expects to hire a GIS person this year.

Despite heavy teaching loads, the geography faculty in Virginia is continuing to successfully acquire competitive grants, to publish in peer-review journals and to receive recognition for success in the classroom. Dawn Bowen at Mary Washington was listed in Who's Who Among American Teachers in 2002. Tom Allen at Old Dominion University (ODU) received a Fulbright teaching/research grant to Finland. Mary Kimsey at JMU and Christine Drake at ODU were each honored with their respective Provost's Award for Leadership in International Education. For two years running, Virginia Tech professors received the NCGE Distinguished Teaching Awards. These went to John Boyer in 2002 and to Laurence Carstensen in 2003.

All institutions report that geography is generally thriving with classes filled each semester and demand for additional courses growing. Many geography programs and departments meet an important service component by instructing courses for general education requirements or courses that meet requirements for other majors. Among these are GIS and remote sensing. GIS is increasingly viewed as an attractive aspect of the university curriculum. Two certificate programs at ODU are proving to be successful, one in GIS and the second in spatial analysis of coastal environments. VCU has successfully changed its undergraduate major in Urban Studies

to a B.S. in Urban Studies and Geography. Student interest in geography has grown during the past five years and the new major is a response to that demand.

Several departments and programs have participated in university restructuring. The geography department at JMU was pulled into a much larger department, the Department of Integrated Science and Technology. The geography program at VCU and its parent department (Urban Studies and Planning) were moved into the newly created School of Government and Public Affairs. At Virginia Tech geography was transferred from the College of Arts and Sciences to the College of Natural Resources. This move is viewed as highly positive because of increased opportunities for sharing expertise in environmental analyses and international development.

In closing, the institutions reported a very optimistic outlook for geography within their respective settings. Increased enrollments, successful teaching and research endeavors, a growing recognition for the value of GIS as a research and analytical tool, and successful efforts to respond to student demands for diversified geography courses bode well for the future of geography in Virginia.