

**Southeastern Division of the Association of American Geographers
Annual Survey of Geography Departments in the Southeast
2003-2004**

State of Alabama

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Status of Geography State-wide.

The entire State-supported system of education in Alabama continues to have major budgetary problems. An ambitious plan to restructure property taxes and increase funding for education was decisively defeated by the voters. In response to stagnant funding, politicians have pitted K-12, against two-year colleges, against four-year Universities in an unproductive fight for limited resources. In order to find more funding for schools, just this last week the legislature passed a series of bills that may ultimately reduce the health benefits currently possessed by University employees. This, on top of salaries already significantly below both National and Regional averages, will make it increasingly difficult to attract and retain faculty.

On the positive side, thanks to many excellent faculty at institutions throughout the State, Geography is at least holding its own if not growing in importance. Much of this growth continues to be in geographic techniques, spurred by an excellent job market.

Summary data for the State:

Number of undergraduate courses: 200
Number of graduate course sections: 52
Number of students enrolled in all undergraduate courses: 6414
Number of students enrolled in all graduate courses: 286
Number of undergraduate majors: 232
Number of Master's students: 18
Number of full-time faculty: 27
Number of part-time faculty: 7

Auburn University.

Geography at Auburn is housed in the Department of Geology and Geography. Geography awards an undergraduate degree and currently offers 24 courses at the undergraduate level and 15 at the graduate-level. Some 1500 total students were enrolled in undergraduate classes and 75 in graduate-level. The unit has 25 undergraduate majors. The department is chaired by Robert B. Cook and has five full-time faculty and one part-time. The geography faculty are Philip L.Chaney, Cyrus B. Dawsey, Tom L. Martinson, Luke J. Marzen, Virginia Ochoa-Winemiller and David W. Icenogle. A new geography position is being advertised for this coming year.

Auburn reports that their program is experiencing renewed vigor following severe retractions during the 1990s. Student enrollments are up, and at present, a proposal for the establishment of a master's degree program is under review.

Jacksonville State University.

Geography at Jacksonville is housed within the Department of Physical and Earth Sciences, which also contains Chemistry, Physics, Anthropology, Archaeology, Geology and Environmental Science. Geography awards an undergraduate degree in geography and a certificate in Spatial Analysis Management. During the last year, they offered 54 courses at the undergraduate classes and 12 graduate level. A total of 1624 undergraduate and 61 graduate students were enrolled. The department currently has 83 majors. Most graduates find employment with planning agencies, water authorities, software developers and engineering firms.

The department is headed by Howard G. Johnson, and has four other full-time faculty: Thomas Baucom, Kelly Gregg, Miriam Hill and Ted Klimasewski. We will be hiring a replacement for Ted, who will be retiring at the end of this academic year. This year, Kelly Gregg was awarded the "Thomas Award", the University's highest award for community service. He also has a book in press with the University of Alabama. Dr. Baucom has been invited to teach overseas again, and has applied for his third Fulbright. He has also received two grants to produce materials in remote sensing and GIS. Dr. Hill is under contract with Intergraph to produce a book to support their GIS software products.

The department reports that geography is stronger at JSU than it has been for a number of years. The number of graduates has risen dramatically and has stabilized at a comfortable level. Graduates have been extremely successful in finding jobs in the profession or in securing graduate assistantships.

Samford University.

Samford awards an undergraduate degree in geography, teaching 18 courses during the last year. A total of 250 students were enrolled in all courses. The department has 10 majors. Most graduates have found work with Utilities or the Government. The department is headed by Eric Fournier, with a total faculty of three full-time and three part-time. The other faculty are Greg Jeane, Max Baber, Jeff Bassett, Mike Neilson, Carrie Landgraf and Steve McKinney. No new faculty hires are expected this coming year. Eric reports that enrollment in gen-ed courses is strong, but they are struggling to get enough majors and to fill their upper-level classes. They had hoped that a recent NSF grant designed to introduce GIS into other classes outside of GEOG might have added to their numbers, but the students have yet to materialize.

University of Alabama.

The University of Alabama offers both an undergraduate degree and a Masters degree in Geography, and a BS in Environmental Science. During the 2003-2004 academic year, the department offered 43 courses/59 sections for undergraduate credit and 23 courses/24 sections for graduate credit. Total course enrollment totaled 2,040 students. The department has 44 undergraduate geography majors, 34 undergraduate environmental science majors and 18 students pursuing the Masters.

Comparatively limited data exists regarding jobs for their undergraduates, but they have excellent data for the MS students. A recent examination of the employment status of their MS students over the past three years found virtually 100% had gainful professional employment. Their jobs ranged from traditional planning positions (municipal, regional) to straight GIS jobs (Intergraph, Harris). The department's sense is that the job market remains quite amenable to those graduates with a solid technical training. In fact, the MS program loses too many students to the job market prior to graduation.

The Department is chaired by Gerald R. Webster. There are 10 full-time faculty and 2 part-time. The full-time faculty are Hobson Bryan, Bobby Wilson, David Weaver, David Shankman, Jeff Richetto, Luoheng Han, Joe Weber, Seth Appiah-Opoku, Bobbi Webster and Jerry Webster. Part-time teachers are Amanda Espy-Brown and Craig Remington. They have been given the okay to hire a geomorphologist, with the ad appearing in the next JIG.

During the last year, Luoheng Han was named a College of Arts and Sciences "Leadership Board Faculty Fellow", given an "Outstanding Advisor Award" and was named "Outstanding Chinese Scholar in the Southern United States" by the People's Republic of China. Gerald Webster was awarded the "Richard Morrill Public Outreach Award" by the Political Geography Specialty group of the AAG.

The Department of Geography at UA continues to make progress in spite of the institution's fiscal problems. Their planning and techniques options are thriving, and they hope to have their physical geography program in better shape by Fall 2005 with their new geomorphology hire. They are handicapped at UA because they do not have a Ph.D. program, and resources are typically first allocated to those departments offering doctoral degrees.

University of North Alabama.

The University of North Alabama awards an undergraduate degree in Geography. Last year, they taught 45 courses at the undergraduate classes and one graduate level. Approximately 1,000 undergraduate students enrolled in all courses, and about 30 graduate students. They have 70 geography majors. Almost all of their graduates go into GIS/technology related jobs. 99% of their graduates have jobs before or by the time they

graduate from UNA. Only one during the past year does not have a job, and that is because he elected to live in Costa Rica for a while before pursuing a career.

The department is chaired by Bill Strong, and has 4 full-time and one part-time. The faculty are Lisa Keys-Mathews (finishing her Ph.D. at the University of Memphis), Greg Gaston and Francis Koti. Francis Koti joined the department in August, having received his Ph.D. from West Virginia University. During this last year, Keys-Mathews and Strong received a University grant for field research in Costa Rica. Greg Gaston received the Craig Professorship award.

The department reports that they continue to attract students, especially to geography techniques. It helps that 99% of their graduates get geography related jobs at or near graduation, and this information circulates among many students. They get good press in the Student newspaper and in the local Time Daily newspaper (owned by the NY Times).

National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE).

The NCGE continues to be housed at Jacksonville State University. The Executive Director is Michal L. LeVasseur, the Associate Director is Allison Newton. The NCGE works to enhance the status and quality of geography teaching and learning. To meet its mission, the NCGE: promotes the importance and value of geographic education; enhances the preparation of geographic educators with respect to their knowledge of content, techniques, and learning processes; facilitates research on geographic education; develops, publishes, and promotes the use of curriculum, resource, and learning materials; and cooperates with other organizations that have similar goals.

The NCGE is pleased to announce that their 2005 annual meeting will be held in Birmingham next October. This is the first time that the national meeting has been held in the South and will be a great opportunity to showcase papers dealing with the region. A variety of fieldtrips will be conducted to nearby sites of interest, including “Little River Canyon National Preserve”, “Historic Mobile, the Gulf Coast and the Mobile Delta”, “Birth of the Blues”, “Downtown Birmingham walking tour”, “The Civil Rights Trail”, “Alabama’s Iron and Steel Heritage”, Talledega: the Geography of NASCAR”, “The U.S. Space and Rocket Center”, “The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute”, “Cahaba River Canoe Trip”, “Ruffner Mountain Mines Hike” and “Mercedes Auto Plant Tour”.