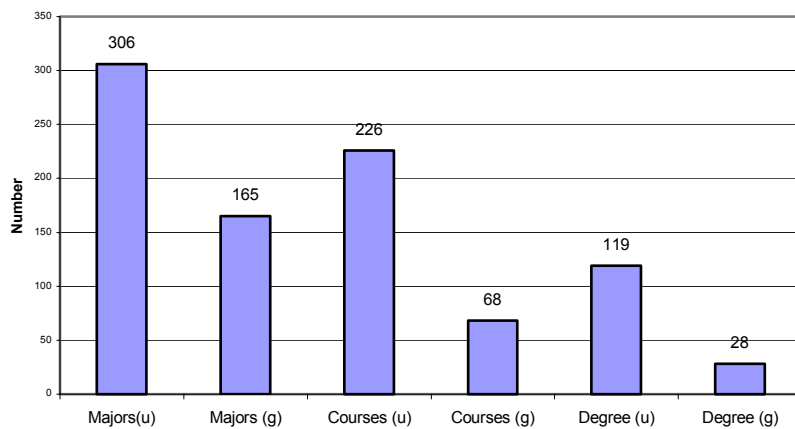


**FLORIDA**  
**Sharon Cobb, University of North Florida**

The state of Florida survived 4 hurricanes and the 2004 Presidential Election this year and the economy appears to be slowly rebounding with an increase in tax receipts through post-hurricane rebuilding. The threat of call-backs for higher education funding appears to be diminishing. Rhetoric from Governor Jeb Bush's office, the Florida legislature, and the State Board of Governors is placing increasing emphasis on higher education accountability, and outcomes assessment and measurement. The state plans to create Academic Learning Compacts where "universities will clearly identify what baccalaureate students will learn in terms of content knowledge, as well as communication and critical thinking skills, by the time they graduate" (Florida Department of Education, 2004). Many university educators are nervously waiting for State attempts to create a 'University FCAT' (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test) in a similar fashion to the tests that all 3<sup>rd</sup> through 10<sup>th</sup> grade students take each year.

Despite the relative lack of funding for higher education in Florida and Tallahassee rhetoric, geography appears to be in good shape. With an 80% response rate from all institutions, Florida geography graduated 39 students with a BA; 80 with BS; 8 with MA; 12 with MS and 8 with Ph.D. (see graph next page). Forty percent of respondents offer geography courses either in combined departments with geology or economics, or under the rubric of other disciplines such as international relations, environmental studies, or environmental science. Geography tracks or minors within these departments are attracting greater numbers of students. Notable was the first geography degree awarded (BA) within the International Relations Department at Florida International University. This program was initiated in Fall 2001 and the number of majors is growing rapidly with two or more graduates expected in Spring 2005. The department is also waiting for administration's response to change the name to the Department of International Relations *and* Geography.

As the graph on the next page illustrates, total number calculated from all survey respondents shows the size and productivity of the discipline with over 300 undergraduate majors and 165 graduate majors last year. 226 undergraduate courses and 68 graduate courses were offered. 198 undergraduate degrees and 28 graduate degrees were awarded. These numbers, however, pale in comparison to the 11,500 students enrolled in undergraduate geography courses (mostly non-majors). Although this number is disproportionately high when compared to all other measures, it does serve to increase exposure to the discipline and has resulted in several of the interdisciplinary departments developing minors, tracts or certificates in Geography.



Four institutions hired new faculty last year and three anticipate hiring in the 2004-05 cycle. Geography faculty in Florida have been productive in research with funding awarded from national agencies including NSF (including 2 six figure grants), EPA, National Imagery and Mapping Agency, Office of Naval Research, Moore Foundation (seven figure grant), and the National Geographic Society; regional agencies and private sector grants.

Geography graduate students have secured positions in a variety of institutions including higher education, government, planning, and environmental consulting/engineering firms. At least 2 PhD graduates will continue in higher education. Many undergraduates have accepted positions with GIS and Remote Sensing consultancy firms, with the military, other private consultancy firms and the Peace Corps.

In summary, geography in Florida is healthy, productive, and gaining increasing respect from other disciplines resulting in increased student enrollment and the development of new programs such as certificates and tracks. Two major trends in higher education have worked to the benefit of geography programs in Florida. First, increasing respect for GIS as an important spatial analytic tool has generated interest in geography, and second, the growing significance of inter-disciplinary collaboration and research has allowed for geography to become a relevant part of the curriculum due to the discipline's broad approach.