

PROPOSAL TO THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY
FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A FLORIDA GEOGRAPHIC ALLIANCE

Edward Fernald, Tom Dunthorn, and the Florida Geographic Education Task Force

[This article concerns the proposed creation of a Florida Geographic Alliance. At present some fifteen states have geographic alliances and receive support from the National Geographic Society. To develop the concept of a similar alliance in Florida, Ed Fernald and Tom Dunthorn worked with Ms. Kim Love of the NGS Geographic Education Program. A Florida Geographic Education Task Force was formed (1) and planning was underway following the FSG meeting in Bradenton. A planning proposal was presented to the NGS and the Florida Department of Education and funding was received from both agencies to create a proposal to be submitted to the NGS for formal alliance status. That proposal, with minor editorial changes, follows. Editor.]

Introduction

This request is for establishment of a Florida Geographic Alliance to increase and improve geographic education in the state. The Alliance will provide a vehicle for coordination and communication among Florida's classroom teachers, academic geographers, public school administrators, and geographic and social studies education organizations. Concerns of the Alliance will include courses for credit, workshops, development of curriculum, availability and evaluation of classroom materials, development and evaluation of teaching strategies, and other professional outreach activities.

In Florida, the Department of Education, the public schools, and the post-secondary educational institutions all recognize the need for improving geographic education in both the state and the nation. Although some efforts were being made within the Florida Department of Education and some support was evident in the Florida Legislature, it became obvious that more concerted efforts were needed to improve the quality of achievement by the Florida students in geography.

During the spring of 1987, Florida received a grant from the National Geographic Society for the establishment of a Task Force in Geographic Education. This task force had the support of many people and organizations, such as the Florida Society of Geographers, the Florida Department of Education, local school teachers and supervisors, and professors from community colleges and the State University System as well as from private colleges and universities. A special commitment was given by the State Commissioner of Education Betty Castor to match any support given by the National Geographic Society for the establishment of the task force (2). The task force was established and included geography professors, Florida Department of Education administrators, local school district supervisors, and classroom teachers from throughout the state. Through August, evaluation of the task force meetings has been unanimously positive and its achievements significant. For example, nine of the presentations at the Florida Council for the Social Studies meeting in October were given by members of the Florida Geographic Education Task Force and several reports will be made to both the Florida Association of Social Studies Supervisors' meetings and the Council's meetings. In addition, a suggested content outline for workshops and an introductory credit course for teachers have been developed. Several in-service sessions have been held and classroom

materials have been shared. Each has included the geographic themes supported by the National Geographic Society. The work of the task force, while successful, must be continued and the best way for that to be done is for the Florida Task Force to become part of the National Geographic Society's Alliance Network.

The Alliance Region

Florida consists of sixty-seven counties, and each county represents a school district. The Florida Department of Education has a social studies program specialist who is responsible for coordinating geographic education activities in the state. This program specialist maintains communication with a person responsible for coordinating social studies education, including geographic education, in each district. The Alliance Region will be the state of Florida. The Alliance will use the existing coordinating structure, supplemented by resources of the Florida Society of Geographers and individual professors from the community colleges and the State University System and private colleges and universities.

Goals Statement and Work Plan

General Objectives

The Florida Geographic Alliance will develop a coalition composed of educators, geographers, community and business leaders, and other interested citizens dedicated to developing support for geographic education in the state. That support will include:

1. Assistance to educators in implementing geography-based curriculum.
2. Opportunities for professional development and information exchange for teachers (regionally based Alliance meetings).
3. Implementation of a state center for geographic education to coordinate in-service activities and house research-based activities for geographic education statewide.
4. Awareness projects including an Alliance newsletter as well as local, regional, state and national media recognition.
5. Recognition by and inclusion of local, regional, state and federal elected representatives in Alliance activities.
6. Development of local, state and regional fund-raising to supplement Alliance activities.

The objectives of the Florida Alliance will be to enhance the geographic awareness of Florida's kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) students by increasing appreciably their fund of geographic knowledge and by increasing their ability to think geographically. We wish to place a higher priority on geography and geographic methodology in the school curriculum and to improve methods of geographic instruction at every level from kindergarten through the 12th grade.

Specific Objectives

Year One. The objectives during the first year of the Alliance are to:

-Continue the work of the Florida Geographic Education Task Force under the title "Florida Geographic Alliance Steering Committee."

-Increase awareness of the members of the Florida Society of Geographers, the Florida Council for the Social Studies, and the Florida Association of Social Science Supervisors of the needs of geographic education in Florida schools.

-Continue to inventory, develop, and evaluate materials and teaching strategies in geographic education.

-Develop teams consisting of a professional geographer and a professional educator to serve the various districts.

-Utilize the services of the Association of American Geographers, the National Council for Geographic Education, and the Florida Society of Geographers in order to identify geographers who might serve as resource people to the Alliance.

-Develop and conduct a series of in-service teacher training courses to meet the needs of the individual districts. These would include a suggested content outline to fit different delivery schedules such as, but not limited to:

1. Residential workshops/institutes
2. Commuter workshops/institutes
3. A series of ten-hour blocks in the district
4. Courses with a once-a-week format
5. Summer institutes

Outstanding teachers who have been trained in these five courses of instruction will, where practical, train other teachers to achieve a multiplier effect.

-Work with the institutions of higher education toward the full implementation of course credit for school teachers. This credit should be applicable toward accreditation in geographic education, extension of teaching certificate, or application toward a graduate degree. This would require working with the State University System common course numbering committee as well as with individual departments of geography and social studies education throughout the state.

-Establish and support regional networks of teachers.

-Plan and conduct workshops in geographic education in appropriate and convenient locations.

-Work with the school districts to implement course performance standards.

-Work with the Commissioner of Education to develop an energetic program to solicit funds from the private sector for the encouragement and implementation of a higher quality of geographic education in the state of Florida.

-Gain an understanding, through in-service teacher education, of the geographic character of Florida as a state and its relative position physically and culturally to the other states of the nation and the countries of the Caribbean Basin.

-Gain an understanding, through in-service teacher education, of the interrelationships between Florida and the rest of the world.

-Encourage state and local competitions in the form of geographic education "brain bowls" and related academic competitions.

-Evaluate and encourage legislation beneficial to geographic education.

-Develop a Geographic Alliance newsletter to facilitate the dissemination of news and new ideas for better geographic education, including instructional technology.

Year Two. The objectives during the second year of the Alliance are to:

-Continue programs initiated in the first year.

-Continue the goal to establish geography as a separate course wherever possible in the curriculum and improve geographic education in other applicable courses.

-Develop a public/private partnership conference on geographic education.

-Develop in-service geographic education programs to meet the needs of persons from private sector groups such as chief executive officers, marketing personnel, or business people who would be interested in a specific foreign country. These services would be self-supporting and would improve the public's perception of the importance of geographic education.

Year Two and Beyond. The goals in the second and subsequent years will be to continue the above activities in order to assess the need for the development of a Center for Geographic Education in Florida.

Climate for Educational Change

For many years geography, as a subject within the Florida public school curriculum, was recognized as important but did not receive dedicated resources for implementation and improvement. In 1987 a number of factors have changed that situation. The results of geographic testing, formal and informal, have brought the problem of geographic illiteracy to the attention of school administrators and the members of the Florida Legislature.

During the 1987 session of the Florida Legislature, geography was included in the legislation establishing the minimum performance standards in subject areas designated as areas of critical need. This program requires testing of geographic knowledge in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11. Legislation also provides money for in-service teacher training activities.

Increased commitment to the development of geographic education in the state of Florida has also come from The State Geographer, the Social Studies Program Specialist, and the Florida Society of Geographers. A very important personal commitment was made by the new Commissioner of Education Betty Castor to the Florida Geographic Education Task Force and to individual representatives from the National Geographic Society. In addition, a number of commit-

ments of support and requests for help have come from district social studies supervisors and principals. After years of frustration, it appears that 1987 is the beginning of a long-term commitment to geographic education.

Alliance Membership

Key individuals in the Florida Geographic Alliance will include Dr. Edward A. Fernald, The State Geographer, the Director of the Institute of Science and Public Affairs and professor of geography at Florida State University, and chairman of the present Florida Geographic Education Task Force. Tom Dunthorn, Social Studies Program Specialist, will be the key representative of the state Department of Education to the Alliance. In addition, the present members of the Florida Geographic Education Task Force will serve as the steering committee of the Alliance.

Although the Florida Department of Education will be the submitting administrative institution, the Institute of Science and Public Affairs at Florida State University will support the Alliance along with the Florida Council for the Social Studies, Florida Society of Geographers, Florida Association of Social Studies Supervisors, individual universities and community colleges, and school districts. As fiscal support is developed from the private sector, it is anticipated that organizations such as chambers of commerce and other private sector groups will become associate members. Other key individuals will be professional geographers and educators who make up the consulting teams. The steering committee will be made up of representatives from various parts of the state and will represent public school classroom teachers, district administrators, university and community college geographers, and the state Department of Education. Also serving on the steering committee will be Jan L. Tucker, President of the National Council for the Social Studies.

Outreach Activities

Florida State University is a leading university in the preparation of teachers in the southeastern United States. The university prepares teachers, administrators, human services specialists, and other professional personnel for a full range of educational endeavors in both public and private settings. The university prepares persons to conduct research that contributes to the continual assessment and improvement of educational practices so that significant outreach efforts in geographic education can be identified. Members of the Department of Geography and the social studies education areas of specialization, including the chairman of the Geographic Education Task Force, have throughout their careers been involved in teacher education and preparation.

The leadership of Florida State University within the Florida Alliance should not be construed to de-emphasize the strong contributions of the eight other universities in the State University System, private universities such as Stetson University and the University of Miami, and the various community colleges. The work now being done through the Continuing Education Programs and the Teacher Education Centers of the State University System will be greatly enhanced by the increased activity and participation of the Florida Geographic Alliance Network.

Summary

In the state of Florida, geographic education is being spotlighted in the year 1987. The interest and attention are genuine, built on a solid base, and destined to continue throughout the years. Individuals and institutions at every level of the education process in the state as well as the private sector are involved.

A discretionary grant from the National Geographic Society, matched by support from the Office of the Commissioner of Education, has allowed the Florida Geographic Education Task Force to begin a solid program to improve geographic education in the state. The State Legislature has committed its continuing support through inclusion of geography in the Minimum Performance Standards Program which requires testing and outreach programs. Commitment from a variety of resources in the state ensures the success of this effort. The additional support of the National Geographic Society will allow a quicker and more effective implementation of quality geographic education in a growing state (approximately 12 million people) through the Geographic Alliance Network.

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1. The members of the Florida Geographic Education Task Force are Rodney Allen (Social Studies Education, Florida State University), Tom Boswell (Geography, University of Miami), Bruce Bradford (Geography/Geology, Stetson University), Doyle Casteel (Social Studies Education, University of Florida), Ron Cold (Law Education, Dade County Public Schools), Tom Dunthorn (Social Studies Specialist, Florida Department of Education), James Elliott (Social Studies Supervisor, Seminole County Schools), Edward Fernald (Institute of Science and Public Affairs, Florida State University), John Foster (Mowat Middle School, Lynn Haven), Jessie Heasley (Social Studies Supervisor, Orange County Schools), Mike Hollander (Golden Gate Middle School, Naples), Beth Kirk (McMillan Junior High, Miami), Pat Kixmiller (Miami-Dade Community College - North), David Lee (Geography, Florida Atlantic University), Allen Lippert (Geography, Manatee Community College), Kim Love (National Geographic Society), Marsha Miller (Edward H. White Senior High, Jacksonville), Peter Muller (Geography, University of Miami), Linda O'Brien (Lakeview Junior High, Winter Garden), Arthur Olson (Educational Research, University of Central Florida), Louis Paganini (Geography, University of Florida), Clinton Rouse (Social Studies Supervisor, Volusia County Schools), Harry J. Schaleman, Jr. (Geography, University of South Florida, St. Petersburg), Ron Schultz (Geography, Florida Atlantic University), Dewey Stowers (Geography, University of South Florida, Tampa), Warren Tracy (Director, Social Studies, Duval County Schools), and Jan Tucker (Social Studies Education, Florida International University).
2. FSG President Jeanne Fillman-Richards thanked Commissioner Castor for her support of geography in Florida. Ms. Castor's reply has been printed on page 41.

