

THE HEALTH OF GEOGRAPHY IN TWO-YEAR COLLEGES IN THE SOUTHEAST

Patricia E. Kixmiller

"The status of geography in the two-year colleges in the Southeastern Division is somewhat improved over the last few years."¹ This statement opened Harry Schaleman's 1976 report on the status of geography in the two-year colleges in the nine states of the Southeastern Division of the Association of American Geographers (AAG). The results of my 1978 survey for the AAG suggests, on the contrary, that geography is on the decline in this region.

The survey consisted of seven questions. The first four dealt with the number of geography courses taught at the institution, frequency of the offerings, and the enrollment per course. Information was also solicited as to whether the respondent taught only geography or other disciplines as well. The remaining questions solicited comments concerning the status of geography at their institution and the possible role the AAG might take to strengthen that status.

The survey disclosed that 68 percent of the schools who responded include geography in their curriculum. The most popular courses are: regional geography (taught in 45 percent of the colleges), physical geography (24 percent), introduction to geography (20 percent), human geography (15 percent), conservation of natural resources (8 percent), and economic geography (6 percent). Approximately 5000 students a year register for geography courses distributed as follows: Tennessee (31 percent), Florida (30 percent), Alabama (12.5 percent), Georgia (9.5 percent), North Carolina (9 percent), Mississippi (4 percent), South Carolina (2.1 percent), Arkansas (1.9 percent), and Louisiana (none).

Of the twenty schools that responded stating that geography was not included in their curriculum, eighteen said that they had never included geography and had no intention of doing so in the future. Only two schools, both in Tennessee, indicated that they were interested in including geography in their curriculum. Secondly, of the sixty geographers who responded to my survey, only three were teaching geography full-time. The remaining fifty-seven were teaching the range from two courses a year in geography to three a term. These part-time geographers also teach history, political science, sociology, biology, chemistry, psychology, environmental science, coal mine reclamation (!), physical education, astronomy, geology, economics, anthropology, physics, calculus, pre-calculus, and English. It appears that a geographer in the two-year college must, of necessity, be a jack-of-all-trades. Notably, of the three full-time geographers, two are employed in Tennessee two-year colleges. Perhaps Tennessee is the only state in the region where geography is growing in popularity. Quite a few part-time geographers are also working either part-time or full-time in college administration.

Of the geographers who responded, 77 percent were men. The majority of the women worked with a male counterpart; where there was only one geographer employed by a college, that geographer tended to be a man. This is not really surprising as geography still remains a man's field. The majority of the two-year colleges in the Southeastern Division employ only one geographer and in 10 percent of the schools who responded to the survey, this person is not a full-time faculty member.

The complaints of my two-year colleagues remain the same. First, there is a lack of communication among geographers both within and between states, which leads to a feeling of isolation. Second is the problem of educating administrators, teaching colleagues in other disciplines, and the public at large regarding the nature and importance of geography. This can be an

especially frustrating task when one is the only geographer employed by a college. One of my respondents, Mary Triplette, put it beautifully when she wrote, "Too many persons still consider geography to be what they had in the fourth grade." She goes on to say that geography is perhaps more relevant today than many of the social sciences generally offered in the curriculum, but that this fact has not been made clear. She feels, as do many other geographers, that a major image change needs to take place.² Third, there is a problem in finding suitable textbooks for world regional geography at the community college level. Too often the reading level is too high, the presentation too dry, and balance in regional emphasis lacking. This may not present problems for the student with a background in basic place location and a university reading level. But the majority of the students in the two-year and community colleges have no idea where places are located and read at the high school level or lower.

These complaints have been aired year after year with no visible action forthcoming to solve them. I would like to suggest two possible solutions to the problem of communication. First, a division newsletter should be written by the two-year college coordinator for colleagues in the community and two-year colleges. Second, the division two-year college coordinator should appoint state coordinators to facilitate communication within their states and between the states and the division.

In conclusion, the Southeastern Division has a number of geographers in the two-year colleges who are valiantly struggling to preserve geography as part of the curriculum in their colleges, but all of this struggling will be for naught if solutions are not found for the problems discussed above. As I stated, I feel geography is declining in the two-year colleges in the Southeast. This is based on the comments received from the survey respondents as well as the poor response to the survey. Most of the respondents indicated that enrollment in geography has declined in the past two years and as a result the number of courses and sections has also declined. The poor response to the survey could be blamed on several possibilities: 1) geography is no longer taught at the school, 2) there is a geographer, but he/she no longer teaches geography, 3) the school no longer exists, and 4) apathy on the part of the geographer at the college. The previous survey yielded a 90 percent response, this one only 32 percent. Approximately 100 schools included geography in their curriculum according to the 1976 survey, but only fifty-five schools did in 1978. Therefore, one may conclude that the health of geography in the two-year colleges of the Southeast is not good.

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1. Harry J. Schaleman, "Commission on Geography in the Two-Year Colleges, AAG, Southeastern Division," University of South Florida (Unpublished Report), 1976, p. 1.
2. Mary Triplette, Southwestern Technical Institute, Sylva, North Carolina, personal communication, 1978.

Harry J. Schaleman, Jr., who wrote "The Status of Geography in Florida's Community and Junior Colleges" in the previous number of *The Florida Geographer* was not identified among the list of contributors to that issue. He is associate professor and director of geography at the St. Petersburg Campus of the University of South Florida. Our apologies, Harry.