

## POINT OF VIEW: GEOGRAPHY AND PLANNING

### *Geographers: Planners of the Future*

Cindy Aaronson

With today's decreasing job market for college graduates, students more and more seek majors which train toward a career related to their discipline. Geography is such a field. There are many meaningful job opportunities in geography; planning, for example, is among the most popular. City, regional, rural, and environmental planning are new horizons for geographers.

John Stafford, Chairman of the Geography Department at University of South Florida, finds the geography major popular because it offers an internship program and provides courses at night to attract the already employed.<sup>1</sup> "Geography doesn't train you to be a geographer solely," said Stafford. "It trains you to do a lot of other things," including the tasks required of planners. The department at USF is the largest in the Southeast based on the size of the undergraduate program, even though the staff is relatively small.

Graduates from the USF program have entered many traditional and non-traditional careers: A local realtor hired a geographer because of his background in land use; the South Florida Water Management District employs ten geographers; Walt Disney World has a geographer working in grounds management; the Air Force offers opportunities for geographers because of their abilities in map reading.

The USF program specializes in land use, and most of the graduates go into planning. The Hillsborough County Planning Commission has, out of a staff of sixty-five, twelve who have bachelors and/or masters degrees in geography. One of these, Mary Leffler, is a community planner. According to her, "Geography trains you to look at land and people. It's natural to take the geographical perspective and put it into urban planning."

### *Geography and Planning: Some Notes of Caution<sup>2</sup>*

Robert L. Keber

About one planner in five has an academic background in geography (a major or minor).<sup>3</sup> Obviously, the planning profession sees value in geographic training. In spite of this success in placing geographers (if a person with a minor can be called a geographer), the future should be viewed with some caution. First, the position of geography as a training ground for planners is not secure. Given a slight shift in planning philosophy, public administration, sociology, political science, or economics could easily supplant geography as the leading producer of social scientists going into planning. Often a planning program resides in the geography department because of internal university politics, not because of the intrinsic merit of geography. Secondly, training in geography alone is not sufficient preparation for a professional planner. The training must be multi-disciplinary, with a view toward employment in government. Geographers must not over-sell the merits of geography. A final caution is that the ties linking geography and planning will be jeopardized if geographers are perceived to be oriented to non-professional pursuits. Already there are signs that geographers employed as planners affiliate with AIP, not with the A.A.G. If planning is to continue as a viable job market for geographers, geographers engaged in training programs should be affiliated with a professional planning organization as well as with the A.A.G.

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1. For a description of the program see R. C. Holmes, "Applied Geography at the University of South Florida," *The Florida Geographer* 11 (July, 1977): 19-21.
2. Originally published as the summary to "Geography and Planning: Some Notes of Caution" by Robert L. Keber in *Transition, Quarterly Journal of the Socially and Ecologically Responsible Geographers* 8 (Spring, 1978): 22. Reprinted with permission.
3. Paul F. Mattingly, "On the Value of Geography in Planning Practice," *The Professional Geographer* 26 (1974): 310-14.