UW-Madison Department of Geography

1. **What do Geographers study?**

Geography is a remarkably diverse field that provides broad training in the social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences. Geography literally translates to “Earth description,” meaning geographers seek to understand the diverse natural and human features that comprise Earth’s surface, and how societies interact with the biophysical world and imbue places with meaning. Geographic knowledge is essential for understanding social and environmental change in a globalized society. Our department offers two majors: Geography, and Cartography and GIS, and many students major in both.

**Geography** majors choose a concentration in one of three thematic areas: human geography, people-environment geography, or physical geography.

**Human geography** is broadly concerned with the spatial organization and differentiation of people, society, and human activities across Earth’s surface. Human geographers study a wide array of issues, including, but not limited to, urbanization, war and human conflict, globalization, refugees and human migration, and social movements.

**People-environment geography** straddles the social sciences and natural sciences, and is concerned with how and why humans interact with the biophysical environment and for what consequences. People-environment geographers study environmental justice, agrifood systems and hunger, urban sustainability, and ecological degradation, among many other topics.

**Physical geography** is the holistic study of Earth’s major natural systems. Physical geographers study how the atmosphere, biosphere, hydrosphere, and lithosphere interact to produce unique ecosystems and physical landscapes across Earth’s surface. Notable topics of interest among physical geographers include, but are not limited to, climate change, soil development, landscape dynamics of streams and glaciers, and vegetation change.

**Cartography/GIS** incorporates geography, cartography, spatial analysis, and related fields such as geovisualization, geodesy, geocomputation, cognition, and computer science. Cartography/GIS majors study digital technology and the theory behind this technology to help people work with geographic information.

2. **What kinds of jobs do geographers and GIS scientists typically pursue?**

Geography prepares students for employment in a variety of public, private, and nonprofit fields, both domestically and abroad. Geographers often go into fields associated with environmental conservation and management, urban planning, economic development, and international policy. Professionals trained in GIS and cartography are in high demand by federal agencies, state and local governments, and private firms for data analysis and the visualization of geographic information. More information about geography-related jobs can be found at the [Association of American Geographers](http://www.aag.org) website.

3. **How can I get involved in the Department further?**

The [UW Geography Club](http://www.geography.wisc.edu) brings together geographically minded students in an informal setting, and seeks to show how geography plays a major role in our lives and can lead to a rewarding career. The Club does a mix of social, academic, and volunteer activities - usually but not always involving geography.

For more info contact: Joel Gruley, Undergraduate Advisor, jgruley@wisc.edu.