The Department of Geography offers the Master of Arts degree oriented on a core of balanced training in four areas: (1) theory and methodology, (2) physical geography, (3) cultural geography, and (4) regional planning. The requirements are highly flexible, allowing a student to arrange programs of study that will serve as a basis for further graduate study or to prepare for positions in industry, business, or government. It is possible for students, through internship experiences and/or specific course combinations, to enhance their career opportunities in areas such as regional and rural planning or geographic information systems (GIS).

Admission Requirements
Applicants must meet regular admission requirements of the School of Graduate Studies and have at least a cumulative GPA of 2.75 for all undergraduate coursework or a GPA of 3.0 or higher for the last two years of undergraduate coursework. Students must have completed 24 semester hours (sh) in Geography. The GRE is not required for admission to the program.

Students completing the Master of Arts (MA) degree in Geography must have a working knowledge of the fundamentals of geography as a discipline. Students must take additional coursework if they enter the program without prior coursework in the following: Introductory Human (Cultural) Geography, Introductory Physical Geography, Statistics, and Cartography. Students must complete deficiency coursework prior to starting the MA program or during the first semester of coursework.

Degree Requirements
A minimum of 32 sh of graduate credit is required for the MA degree, 9 sh of which may be electives from outside the department.

Completion of the MA in Geography program is contingent upon the fulfillment of specific course requirements and the completion of one of three degree options: (1) thesis, (2) applied project, or (3) two-paper. The thesis option (3 sh) seeks to answer a question that is relevant to an area of geographic inquiry. The applied project option (3 sh) is intended for students whose career aspirations are best served by gaining practical experience in the design and solution of a geographical or planning problem and presentation of the results. Both options require a research proposal to be presented and the completed thesis/applied project to be defended to faculty and students. The two-paper option, which is not worth any semester hours, requires students to write and defend two papers before a committee of three faculty members.

Career Opportunities
The MA in Geography program reflects an attempt to prepare students to be professionals in the private or public sector or to become future educators. For over 50 years, the Department of Geography has had a proud tradition of producing quality graduates who hold positions in education, industry, business, and government. Many of our graduates go on to pursue advanced degrees. In fact, among non-PhD granting institutions, Western’s Geography department ranks in the top 20 in the U.S. in the number of graduates going on to earn a PhD.

Some of the positions in which graduates are employed are Urban Planning/Community Development, Tourism Development, Economic Development Specialist, GIS Specialist, Remote Sensing Specialist, Cartographer, Weather Forecaster, Health Services Planner, Environmental/Natural Resources Conservation, Teaching/Faculty Member, Geographer, and Transportation Planner.

Faculty Expertise
Of all of the full-time faculty members, six are trained as human geographers while another six are trained in physical geography or meteorology. Within human geography, three faculty members have expertise in urban and rural development and planning, which is an emphasis of the graduate program in Geography. Within physical geography, three faculty members have expertise in weather and climate. Given the global nature of geography, the department prides itself in diversity. Faculty members have been actively engaged in research that has been published and presented in venues of national and international significance, and they have also been published in a wide range of refereed journal articles.
Graduate Assistantships

All Geography graduate students are eligible to apply for a competitive number of departmental graduate assistantships. Graduate students with full-time assistantships are required to work 20 hours per week and be enrolled for at least 9 s/h per semester. Additional assistantships may be available in the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Center, but applicants must be familiar with GIS applications. Graduate assistants receive a tuition waiver and a monthly stipend.

Western Illinois University is an Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity employer with a strong commitment to diversity. In that spirit, we are particularly interested in receiving applications from a broad spectrum of people, including, but not limited to, minorities, women, and individuals with disabilities. WIU has a non-discrimination policy that includes sex, race, color, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, religion, age, marital status, national origin, disability, and veteran status.

Facilities

The department maintains the Atmospheric Science and Climatology Laboratory and two Geographic Information and Spatial Science Laboratories. The department also houses a GIS Center, which serves as the GIS management center (spatial data creation and repository) for McDonough County, the City of Macomb, and Western Illinois University. The Leslie F. Malpass Library contains a repository of geographical data in paper and digital formats and is thus a vital resource to the department.

Distinctive Features

Approximately half of the graduate students in the program have interests in the area of community development and rural or urban regional planning. Other students pursue careers in GIS, and the remaining students are interested in environmental issues. The employment outlook for geographers with GIS training is very high. The employment outlook for rural planners is highest for those with diverse training.

Post-Baccalaureate Certificates

The Department of Geography administers the post-baccalaureate Community Development Certificate in consultation with the Department of Economics and the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs (IIIRA). The mission of this 18-sh certificate is to instill in students the knowledge and skills necessary to prepare for a career in the field of community development. The certificate is earmarked for returned Peace Corps Fellows (PCF) who form an integral part of the PCF program in community development, a unit of the IIIRA at Western Illinois University. Similarly, the Geography and Biological Sciences departments administer the 18-sh post-baccalaureate Environmental GIS Certificate program, which is designed to provide students with an understanding of environmental data collection, reporting, and analyzing. For Gainful Employment Disclosure, visit wiu.edu/grad/gainfulemployment.

Featured Alumni

Mr. Stephane Leblond is a GIS assessment specialist with Marcel Sirois, Inc., an engineering consulting firm in Quebec City, Canada. He uses his GIS knowledge to help the company address spatial and engineering problems associated with industrial production, disaster management, conservation, and much more. Mr. Leblond received his Master of Arts in Geography in spring 2012.

Contact Information

For admissions process and general program information, contact the School of Graduate Studies, Western Illinois University, 1 University Circle, Macomb, IL 61455, (309) 298-1806, (877) WIU GRAD toll-free, Grad-Office@wiu.edu, wiu.edu/grad.

For specific program questions, contact the Graduate Coordinator, Department of Geography, Western Illinois University, 1 University Circle, Macomb, IL 61455, (309) 298-1648, geography@wiu.edu, wiu.edu/geography.