

Q&A for A-Level students considering a geography degree

Compiled by Emma Browning, Intern at the Geographical Association in Summer 2010

What do I need to think about when considering a geography degree?

Aside from either having an interest in geography and more than likely studying it at A-Level, ask yourself are you *good* at any of the following; Maths, Physics, Science, Sociology, Computer software / Computer science, Politics, International Relations? If so, note that there is a deep place for these subjects at the centre of geography. Are you *interested* in globalisation, poverty, inequality, sustainability, weather, climate, ecology, geology, conservation and the environment? There is also a deep place for these centred within and around geography

The next consideration requires you to research and grasp the vast differences in the content of a geography degree throughout the various universities. The broad nature of the subject gives scope for lecturers to research the elements that interest them the most. This in turn creates the basis of the modules taught at university. It is important to research the lecturers that work at each university. The key to selecting the right university for you is by being honest with yourself, which topics do you enjoy and what elements motivate you? Follow this up with finding a university that hold the modules that will continue to provide you with enjoyment and motivation by researching what they actually offer undergraduates.

What choices do I have when studying a geography degree?

The choices offered to you as an undergraduate depend on the university you attend, and these can be vastly different. Wherever you study geography it will carry many options for you to make up your degree with a selection of what you are good at and what you are interested in, in an almost 'pick and mix' fashion. The first year normally covers a mandatory selection of modules that covers a range of geography taught at that university. In second year you can select different modules to complete that suit your continuing interests and third year is very similar. The interesting aspect to being a geographer is that you become unique because of this ability to own your own selection of geographical knowledge.

What future can I have with a Geography degree?

Following your degree, when applying for jobs, you should look beyond the title of your degree and concentrate on the modules you completed and sell those to prospective employers. Not only will you hold a unique mix of quality knowledge but you will also hold a set of skills that all geography and most degree students have, such as research, analysis and report writing. Most geography students are encouraged to complete fieldwork and this experience and opportunity is also unique and can hold a wealth of interest to a prospective employer, not only that but you will have a different perspective of the real world that isn't straight from a text book.

The truth about geography is that you (as the owner of geographical knowledge) need to recognise what lies within its capacity and then remember this when you leave university to use as a key attribute and selling point to your skill set. Don't forget the range and adaptive nature of this subject. If you don't recognise this then you have to assume that nobody else will and the real qualities of your geography will be lost. Anybody who considers a geography degree worthless does not understand the depth and range

of the subject, and its potential is then unrecognised. In my view geography needs to be proudly owned by its geographer.

The following is a summary of my journey to geography:

I once lived in London. It broadened my mind and scope for opportunities in life, however over a period of time the work-hard-play hard lifestyle became un-holistic. This recognition directed me away from urban living to an expedition on an African island where I experienced a place and met people that would change my life forever.

I discovered during conversations with local residents of this island that certain fundamentals of life, even over a different continent and culture, do not change. I naively thought that this expedition would enable me to teach the residents something useful and inspiring, the reality however was the reverse. The residents of my temporary home in Mkwiro Village taught me more than I could have ever taught them, these people are and will always be one of my inspirations.

This cultural and environmental experience evoked a natural inquisitive thirst for knowledge of the world around us, and I craved the ability to intelligently question our place within it. I sacrificed the security of my job for pursuance of a geographical career. I have found that geography degrees hold a diverse range of module choices that allows students to create a unique degree that suits their interests, importantly, the skills and knowledge acquired are diverse and highly employable, all modules are relevant and current to world issues from local to global scales, and these affect the lives of everyone.

There is geography to every part of your life; every page of a newspaper, every fashion followed, tree that grows, food that is consumed, government decision made. *What will inspire you, to have a different view?*

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