Master of Arts in Geography

The Department of Geography, Geographic Information Science and Meteorology offers a Master of Arts in Geography degree, a GIS certificate and a certificate in community development and planning. The primary areas of faculty mentored graduate research include:

- Planning
- Transportation
- Spatial analysis
- Environmental GIS applications
- Social GIS applications
- Remote sensing
- GIS visualization
- Cartography
- River science and geomorphology

Program Location:
Macomb

Contact Information
Questions about the program:
Department of Geography,
Geographic Information Science
and Meteorology
Graduate Coordinator
(309) 298-1648
geography@wiu.edu
wiu.edu/cas/geography

General admission questions:
School of Graduate Studies
(309) 298-1806 or (877) WIU GRAD
Grad-Office@wiu.edu
wiu.edu/grad

Admission Requirements
Applicants must meet regular admission requirements of the Western Illinois University 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, to be considered for graduate assistantship. The GRE is not required for admission to the program, but highly recommended for students seeking an assistantship.

Students must have a working knowledge of the fundamentals of geography as a discipline and must take additional coursework if they enter the program without prior coursework in the following: introductory human geography, introductory physical geography and cartography. Deficiency coursework must be completed prior to starting the master’s program or during the first semester of coursework. The master’s in Geography is one of the integrated baccalaureate and master’s degree programs on campus.

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

Completion of the Geography master’s 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) professional plan. The thesis option (3 sh) seeks to answer a question 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 professional plan requires students to complete an internship and extended courses.

Career Opportunities
For more than 50 years, department graduates have pursued career paths in education, business and government. The growing demand for professionals with Geographic Information Science (GIScience) training has resulted in strong career opportunities for geographers with the ability to use geospatial technology to process, analyze and represent data in maps and images. Today public and private organizations are turning to geography and GIScience to predict flood paths, analyze crop planting sites, identify locations for retail expansion and much more. The types of organizations hiring graduates of geography programs include disaster response companies, agribusinesses, transportation firms, land use planning agencies, natural resource management organizations, historic preservation firms, construction companies, real estate firms and sustainable energy companies, as well as local, regional and federal governments.

Faculty Expertise
Faculty members hold doctoral degrees from distinguished universities across the United States and are actively engaged in research published and presented in venues of national and international significance. Since 2010, department members have been awarded $522,000 in highly competitive
National Science Foundation grants which have given students opportunities to conduct guided, hands-on scientific research. Faculty members have also been published in a wide range of peer-reviewed journals individually and jointly with students. Given the global nature of geography, the department prides itself in its diversity and broad range of competencies.

Graduate Assistantships
The department offers multiple graduate assistantships to accepted students providing tuition waivers and monthly stipends in return for work under the supervision of faculty mentors. Applicants with GIS experience may have the opportunity to work in the GIS Center, where they can build strong portfolios working on real-world GIS projects. Graduate assistants are not required to teach, and all degree-seeking domestic and international students can apply. Multiple scholarships are also available to geography graduate students.

Graduate students with full-time assistantships are required to work 20 hours per week and be enrolled for at least 9 sh per semester.

Post-Baccalaureate Certificates
The department administers the post-baccalaureate Community Development and Planning Certificate in consultation with the WIU Department of Economics and the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs (IIRA). 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 open to all WIU graduate students. Similarly, the department administers the 18-sh post-baccalaureate GIS Analysis Certificate program, which is designed to train students to become qualified GIS analysts in their specialty fields or disciplines. Participating departments include Biological Sciences; Recreation, Park and Tourism Administration; and Sociology and Anthropology. For Gainful Employment Disclosure, visit wiu.edu/grad/gainfulemployment.

Featured Alumni
Richard D. Ostrowski is a GIS technical specialist with National Information Systems Cooperative in Lake Saint Louis, MO. The company develops and supports software and hardware solutions for its member-owners who are primarily utility cooperatives and telecommunications companies across the nation. Ostrowski provides GIS support for the company. He received his Master of Arts in Geography in Summer 2014.

“The Geography graduate program at WIU was a great experience. It allowed me to have an opportunity to further learn GIS, while being empowered to apply this knowledge to real scenarios in the local community, through an internship with the GIS Center. This, along with the mentorship from my advisor and committee members, prepared me for the challenges that exist in a professional career. This allowed me to obtain, and excel in, a GIS position upon graduation.”

— Richard D. Ostrowski, 2014, GIS Technical Specialist
National Information Systems Cooperative, Lake Saint Louis, Missouri