
HIGH SCHOOL GEOGRAPHY IN SOUTHERN ILLINOIS

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Geography is steadily becoming an established fact in the high school curriculums of southern Illinois. During the last five years alone courses in this subject not only have been lengthened in schools but many other schools have added it to the curriculums. Most of the schools now offer a year of geography; two have reached the point where two years of work have become necessary. This growth of geography in the curriculum is found in both the small and large high schools of the area.

At least three factors are partially responsible for this development. First, more and more superintendents and high school principals are becoming aware of and interested in geography. Many of these administrators have taken some work in the subject and appreciate its value. Secondly, some high school teachers in other subject-matter fields, especially the Social Studies, realize that students could profitably use additional training in geography. In a number of other high schools, geography has been introduced by teachers whose major is history, biology, etc. Thirdly, this growth in geography is usually present in high

schools where the person teaching it has been properly prepared. A geography class usually is boring and a failure when taught by one who is not well prepared or interested in the subject matter.

The trend toward developing two years of geography in the four-year high schools in southern Illinois is in keeping with the growth of geography in the schools of larger cities in the northern part of the State and in the high schools of Wisconsin.

Southern Division. In the Southern Division of the Illinois Educational Association consisting of fourteen counties, there are fifty-eight accredited four-year high schools. In securing information concerning the amount and kind of geography taught in these schools the following methods were used: 1) questionnaire, 2) interviewing freshmen students enrolled in the Southern Illinois State Normal University, and 3) going through the Illinois Directory. The last method sometimes proved unreliable because where the Illinois Directory indicated no geography taught, questionnaires revealed that a year's work was being offered.

The following list of facts taken from the survey apply to geography offered by the fifty-eight accredited four-year high schools during 1938-1940 (the two-year period is used since some small high schools alternate their two courses of geography):

- A. 47 of the 58 schools offer geography.
- B. 17 schools offer a year of geography.
- C. 2 schools give 3 semester courses.
- D. 2 schools give two courses of a year's duration each.
- E. 26 schools offered a semester course.
- F. Only 11 schools out of the 58 did not offer geography.
- G. In six of the counties all the high schools offered geography.

Sifting the information a little further revealed the following:

- A. 37 schools offered Commercial, Economic, or Industrial Geography.
- B. 20 schools offered Physical Geography.
- C. 2 schools taught a semester Conservation course.
- D. 1 school offered Political Geography.
- E. 3 schools taught General Geography.
- F. 1 school offered a year of World Geography.
- G. 1 school offered just a Geography course.

According to the questionnaires, teachers admitted that a Physical Geography course should precede an Economic Geography course, but that this is not always the practice. As revealed in the outline above, thirty-seven high schools offer Economic Geography and only about half of them offer Physical Geography.

Teachers indicating a need for more geography usually put Conservation and Physical Geography at the top of the list. One of the greatest handicaps to putting more Conservation in the high school curriculum is the lack of good texts.¹ The chief objection to teaching Physical Geography is the need of equipment. However, a properly trained teacher should make use of the local natural resources with nature furnishing the laboratory equipment.

Political Geography was seldom mentioned in the questionnaire. The writers believe that this subject would have been indicated more often were it not for the fact that Political Geography is a comparatively new thing in the United States. It has been taught at the Southern Illinois State Normal University as a recognized Political Science and Geography course only since 1938. During the fall of 1939 the Eldorado High School offered the first Political Geography course in southern Illinois and as far as we know, the first in the State. Concerning this course Principal Dodd writes,

"This course (Political Geography) affords an opportunity for a high degree of integration among such courses as history, civics, economics, and high school geography. In the past, these courses have been considered independent of one another in spite of teachers' insistence to the contrary. Since there has been no body of information available to weld the course contents, Political Geography as taught in this school, stresses the relations existing between Physical Features and Political Happenings. It acquaints the pupil with the effects of political and military campaigns upon national boundaries and upon various forms of government.

"After the completion of the first course, I am convinced that Political Geography will not be discontinued and am inclined to believe that the amount of time devoted to it will be increased as soon as the facilities for doing so are made available."²

By offering a year of Physical Geography, as a basis of geographic study and following this course with a year of Economic Geography, the Harrisburg High School is setting a fine example for other schools in Southern Illinois. During the fall of 1939, two full-time and one part-time teachers taught eight classes of Physical Geography and one of Economic Geography.

The Herrin High and the University High School at Carbondale offer courses in Conservation. Marion High School is pioneering in this area with a year of World Geography. Hurst-Bush High School is using J. Russell Smiths' book, *Men and Resources*, for a year's course.

Information gleaned from the questionnaires reveal that some schools could

make more use of visual aids such as the use of specimens, local resources, field trips, slides, films, maps and charts in the teaching of geography.

The text book situation is interesting. In most of the Economic Geography courses, recently published texts such as, *The Working World* by Whitbeck, Durand, and Whitaker, *Nations at Work* by Packard Sinnott, and Overton, *Economic Geography* by Colby and Foster, and *Economic Geography* by Staples and York, are used. However, the Physical Geography texts are often old publications. Whitbeck's *High School Geography*, Davis' *Elements of Physical Geography*

and Dryer's *High School Geography* are still being used as texts in some schools. Fortunately, a more recent book *New Physical Geography* by Tarr and Von Engel is used in more than half of the Physical Geography courses.

Summary. In conclusion it may be said that geography in southern Illinois is being recognized more and more as a vital functional subject and an important part of the high school curriculum. Geography is beginning to receive the recognition it educationally deserves and which it has been receiving in other states and in the countries of Europe for a long time.

¹For more detailed information concerning Conservation as a high school subject see Barton, T. F., "Teaching Conservation in the High School", *The Illinois Teacher*, Volume 38, p. 71.

²A signed statement issued by Principal T. Leo Dodd to Mr. J. Ward Barnes who offered the course.