

DO THEY TEACH THAT IN A UNIVERSITY?!

The authorization of a PhD degree is evidence of the continuing growth of geography

By DR. RALPH E. OLSON

Last fall the Oklahoma Regents for Higher Education authorized the University of Oklahoma to grant the PhD degree in geography. In so doing the board added OU to the list of approximately 25 colleges and universities in the country which regularly offer terminal degree training in this field.

Probably some individuals reading the newspaper account of the Higher Regents' meeting were surprised, having associated the field of geography only with elementary studies. I recall an automobile trip across Kansas a few years ago which included a gasoline stop at a small-town filling station. The gas pump attendant, on noticing the faculty parking permit on my windshield, commented: "So you teach at the University of Oklahoma. What do you teach down there?" I told him that I taught geography. His jaw dropped in obvious surprise, and his reaction was brief and pointed: "Geography! Do they teach *that* in a university? Why I had geography in *grade school!*"

Geography as a branch of organized knowledge has been around for a long time. Man has always been curious about his physical and social environment and, for very practical reasons, has needed to understand the opportunities and limitations presented by this environment. Because geography concerns itself with description and analysis of both the natural features of the earth, such as landforms, water bodies, climates, vegetation, and soils, with human features of the planet, such as population distribution, ethnic and political differentiation, and economic activity of a spatial nature, academicians have always had difficulty in trying to pigeonhole it as either a natural or social science. Intrinsicly and unavoidably it is both, or at least it should be.

In one sense, the history of geography begins with the ancient Greek philosophers, travelers, and map makers—with Thales of Miletus, Pytheas of Massilia, Eratosthenes, Strabo, and Ptolemy. In another sense, geography—this

Our Visiting Professor from Canada

The department of geography has had several visiting professors in recent years (see page 14). In the past school year Dr. William C. Wonders spent two semesters in the department as a visiting professor. Dr. Wonders, who heads the geography department at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, was a Senior Foreign Scientist Fellow at OU, and his one-year stay was sponsored by the National Science Foundation.

Dr. Wonders specializes in Canada and Scandinavia and in rural and urban settlement. This spring he taught courses on Scandinavia and on urban settlement patterns. The latter course offered a particularly interesting field for development in Oklahoma. Students in the course, Geography 340, prepared seminar research papers on such subjects as urbanization among the Five Civilized Tribes, the significance of petroleum in the urban geography of Oklahoma, the urban geography of Lawton, and urbanization in Oklahoma. "These were but a few of the topics that were suggested," Dr. Wonders says. "The students were allowed flexibility in choosing a topic for their papers. We were interested, for example, in finding out how the discovery and development of oil has affected settlement in towns like Ponca City and Bartlesville. We wanted to see if there have been distinct urban patterns in such towns because of oil." During the fall semester research conducted by Dr. Won-

ders and his students in the course in rural settlement uncovered two or three types of houses that are characteristic, if not peculiar, to Oklahoma. One was the four-square



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house. It is small and square with four rooms. Its roof forms four equal segments from a central chimney. Houses of this type are found throughout much of rural Oklahoma though in declining numbers.

"Another type was the two-room ranch house or log house," he says. "The original form of the house has been modified today, but you can still recognize it. The house was a small two-room building with an open central passage separating the two rooms. In addition there was the small structure called the 'shotgun house.' This is a good example of how the discovery of oil affected the construction of different types of houses during the era in Oklahoma. These houses, many of which are found in the east central part of the state, were quickly thrown up to help ease the housing problems for oil field workers." Dr. Wonders and his students also delved into the impact of early Indian tribes upon Oklahoma's rural settlement patterns. "Most of the early Indian tribes were nomadic and had no lasting impact upon settlement patterns," he points out. "It was not until the coming of the Five Civilized Tribes that the state had a large enough Indian population to develop significant patterns of settlement." This was Dr. Wonders' second fellowship tour outside of Canada in the past three years. In 1962-63 he spent 14 months at Sweden's Uppsala University. He has been on the faculty at the University of Alberta for 12 years. Dr. Wonders holds bachelor of arts and doctor of philosophy degrees from the University of Toronto, Canada, and the master of arts degree from Syracuse University, Syracuse, N. Y.



The geography department faculty is (left to right) Dr. John W. Morris, chairman; Edward L. Myles, Dr. Ralph Olson, the author; Dr. Harry E. Hoy, Dr. Arthur H. Doerr, Dr. William C. Wonders, visiting professor (see story on opposite page) and Dr. Stephen Sutherland.

time as a continuing, developing branch of higher academic studies—begins with the appointment of Karl Ritter to a chair of geography at the University of Berlin in 1820. By the end of the 19th century geography had been widely recognized as a legitimate branch of higher education in the universities of Europe, and it was beginning to appear with some frequency in the curricula of American colleges and universities.

As in many American institutions of higher learning, geography at the University had its beginnings in close association with geology. Geology came to OU in 1900 with the appointment, at an initial salary of \$400, of Charles N. Gould, a vigorous young man said to be “daffy about rocks,” who had just received his MA from the University of Nebraska.

By 1912-13, when the University had reached the ripe old age of 20, Prof. Charles H. Taylor, director of the School of Mining Geology, was offering courses on Oklahoma Geology and Geography and the Economic Geography of North America. About 1910 a world-scope course in Economic Geography was first offered in the department of economics, and in 1916-17 this course was being taught by a young assistant professor, Arthur B. Adams, who had encountered J. Russell Smith at Columbia University and who using as a textbook the first edition of Smith's *Industrial and Commercial Geography*. Geography of sorts appeared in still another quarter of the University in 1917-18 with the introduction of History 106a by Professor James S. Buchanan, later president of the University.

After the end of World War I, with Oklahoma's awareness of the world heightened by the returning servicemen, the University decided that, with geography already being taught in the departments of geology, economics, and history, perhaps the time had come to hire a geographer. The initial appointment of a teacher trained primarily in *Dr. Olson is professor of geography and a former chairman of the department of geography.*

geography was that of Clyde J. Bollinger, a young man of 33 who was then taking graduate work under R. D. Salisbury and Harlan Barrows at the University of Chicago.

In 1921-22 the department of geology was changed to the department of geology and geography, and in 1923-24 the geography courses were listed separately and a major program in geography was announced. Ruel B. Frost, who later achieved national recognition as head of the geology and geography department at Oberlin College, and John L. Page, who went on for a doctorate at Clark and still teaches at the University of Illinois, seem to have been the first two graduates in geography at the University, receiving their BAs in 1926.

With the addition in 1927-28 of C. Warren Thornwaite, a graduate of Central Michigan Normal School in Mt. Pleasant, the geography program was further elaborated. Prof. Thornwaite, who went on to complete a PhD at the University of California in 1929, introduced a course in cartography within the geology and geography department and added a regional course on Africa and Australia. For the first time in 1927-28 graduate credit could be earned in geography, and the *General Catalog* lists an Advanced Human Geography course open only to graduate students, as well as a graduate Seminar and Research for Master's Thesis. From 1927 until 1945, geography was classified in the “mathematical and natural sciences group” of the College of Arts and Sciences, although the beginning course was still not approved for fulfillment of the freshman science requirement. Enrollment in courses above the survey level was extremely small, often fewer than five students in those early years, but a small group of majors was being inspired by the vigorous teaching and research activities of the two-man staff to pursue advanced studies themselves. The first MAs were granted to Mrs. Exie

Continued on the next page

Chauncey Campbell and Miss Minnie Smith in 1930.

Enrollment began to show a marked increase after 1929-30 when the new College of Business Administration, under Dean Arthur B. Adams, began requiring a six-hour sequence in geography. Geography 41, the first course in this sequence, was entitled Principles of Human Geography, upon the insistence of the Arts and Sciences College dean, although its content closely resembled that of the old five-hour Physical Geography course which the department then dropped. The second course provided for the College of Business Administration was Geography 42, Economic Geography. From 1930 to 1950, these two courses were taken by all students in the College of Business Administration, and in certain of those years the students taking them comprised more than 90 percent of the total enrollment in geography. In the academic year 1947-48, the writer's first at the University, 649 students took Geography 41, 512 students took Geography 42, and only 90 students were enrolled in all other geography courses combined.

The increase in enrollment, particularly of returning war veterans, after World War II necessitated immediate enlargement of the teaching faculty at the University. Three new associate professors of geography were hired in this early post-war period, Harry E. Hoy (PhD, University of Nebraska, 1940) in 1946, Ralph E. Olson (PhD, Clark University, 1946) in 1947, and John W. Morris (PhD, Peabody College for Teachers, 1941) in 1948. In line with a national trend at major universities in the country, geography was given separate departmental status on Jan. 1, 1948, with Prof. Hoy as its first chairman. The rotating chairmanship principle at the University brought Prof. Olson into the administrative chair in 1956, and he in turn was replaced by Prof. Morris in 1964. The other tenure-holding members of the geography staff are Arthur

H. Doerr (PhD, Northwestern University, 1951), who came to Oklahoma in 1951, and Stephen M. Sutherland (PhD, University of Illinois, 1961), who joined the staff in 1958 as a replacement for Prof. Bollinger, then approaching retirement. Edward L. Myles, who earned his MA at the University in 1960 and is now a candidate for the PhD at Michigan State University, was appointed to the staff as an instructor in 1964. Mrs. Joan Sutherland, who has a master's degree in geography from the University of Indiana, has done some teaching in the department on a part-time basis.

Major changes in geography course offerings have been made since World War II. The College of Business Administration which once required six hours of geography of all its students now has no specific requirement, although a fair number of business students still elect geography courses. The course with the largest enrollment in recent years has been Geography 1, Physical Geography, which was introduced and approved as meeting a group science requirement in the College of Arts and Sciences at the beginning of the academic year 1954-1955. Of the approximately 800 students enrolled in geography courses in the first semester of 1965-1966, about 340 were enrolled in this four-hour laboratory course. More than 200 additional students were enrolled in geography courses which specifically fulfill elementary or secondary teaching certificate requirements.

The number of geography majors has increased to nearly 50, about half of them on the graduate level. More than 60 students have completed MA degrees in the department, and graduates are in demand as college teachers, government research scientists, and skilled employees of private business firms. The new PhD program, which went into effect in the spring semester, will further enlarge the responsibilities and opportunities of the University of Oklahoma's department of geography

END

Additional Milestones in OU Geography

1903—Nation's first PhD in geography granted by U. of Pennsylvania.

1915—Prof. Jerome Dowd, chairman of economics department, introduces a course on South American trade, ancestor of today's more specialized courses on foreign areas. The economics department two years later, as a response to resource problems of WWI, offers a course in Conservation and Regulation in War Times.

1916—A. J. Williams, V. E. Monnett, and C. E. Decker join geology staff. Williams assumes instruction in meteorology in 1918. 1917—Economic Geography of the U.S. is taught by Prof. Monnett, who later becomes director of the School of Geology.

1920—Prof. Bollinger, first geography-trained teacher at OU, arrives, begins teaching Geography of North America and Geology and Geography of Oklahoma, formerly taught by Prof. Monnett, establishes courses on General and Regional Geography and Latin American Geography.

1923—George E. Woods joins staff, but appointment is not permanent. Two new systematic courses, Agricultural Geography and Industrial Geography, are introduced as well as courses on Europe and Asia and a Research Problems course.

1924—Four curricular changes: A 5-hour physical geography course. (It was handicapped in not meeting freshman science requirements and not being open to those who had taken Geology I, one of the requirements for geography majors.) A 2-hour course for teachers offered in the education curriculum. A 2-hour course in Climatology. Business Geography "primarily for economics majors."

1925—Miss Ruth McDill temporarily joins staff, replacing Prof. Bollinger, on a sabbatical. The Physical Geography course becomes acceptable substitute for Geology I. 1928—Leslie Hewes, chairman of the geography department at Nebraska, receives his BA degree here, remains as a graduate assistant.

1930—John W. Morris, present chairman of the geography department here, receives his BA.

1931—Arthur R. Hall, who holds a high position in the CIA, receives his BA.

1932—Prof. Hewes named instructor, is associate professor in 1936 when he leaves for Nebraska.

1934—Allen Belden becomes an instructor, is assistant professor when he leaves for government service in WWII. He subse-

quently becomes chief of the research branch in the Office of Geography, Department of the Interior.

1935—Prof. Thornwaite resigns to join Department of Agriculture. He and Prof. Bollinger during the Dust Bowl days become interested in climatology as research field. Prof. Thornwaite later achieved worldwide eminence in both theoretical and applied climatology. Prof. Bollinger publishes widely in the field of planetary climatology.

1946-1966—In its "boot camp" role OU holds several teachers in the department for short times: Gladys Braden (46-47), Frank Palmer (47-48), Allan Rodgers (48-50), T. K. Chang (50-51), Nicholas J. Schmitt (51-52), Gordon Lethwaite (53-54), Robert Janke (60-62), Robert Price (61-62), James King (62-64). Dr. Herman Ugarte, University of Arequipa, Peru, and Dr. Mohamed Al Sayyad, Ain Shams University, Cairo, UAR, are visiting professors in 59-60 and 63-64, respectively. Dr. William C. Wonders, University of Alberta, Edmonton, is visiting professor the past school year. Dr. Doerr served as a visiting professor at the University of Philippines in 58-59, and Dr. Hoy at the University of Cairo, in 61-62.