THE FLORIDA RESOURCES
AND ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS CENTER\(^1\)

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The Florida Resources and Environmental Analysis Center (FREAC) is a unit within the Institute of Science and Public Affairs at Florida State University. FREAC originally developed in the Geography Department but eventually expanded to include other physical and social science disciplines within the university. The spatial analysis methodology of the geographer has been continually in the forefront of the activities of the Center. One of the goals of FREAC has been to match university resources with the public needs of the state and local governments in Florida. Examples of studies completed in the last few years include: the use of state-owned lands as a resource, patterns of energy consumption in Florida, the development of a geographic information system for the state, a number of land use and resource mapping and analysis projects, comprehensive plans for cities and counties, land use impacts of hazardous waste, development of a resource decision-making process model, and an analysis of water management in the state. Geographers have directed most of these studies. The multidisciplinary nature of the Center encourages geographers and geography students to interact with individuals of other disciplines, and, perhaps more importantly, members of other disciplines are able to learn about the abilities, interests, and competencies of geographers.

At Florida State University, the Center's activities continually fund six to fifteen geography students in a "hands-on" research assistant/internship experience. Students learn about developing grants, the politics of grant-getting, and many aspects of geographic research. In some cases, they become very adept in using cartographic and computer techniques.

On numerous occasions, agencies for whom projects were completed by the Center have employed post-graduate students. A frequently reported remark is, "we liked these geography students because they have a broad background and they don't need training in research or problem solving after they get to the agency." Generally, these students have advanced rapidly in the state and local agencies.

As a result of the applied research undertaken by the Center and the Geography Department, the Florida State University personnel department has become aware of the capabilities of geographers, and state agency personnel are confident in the tasks geographers can successfully complete. Because agencies have confidence in the Center, Florida State has become the depository both for the LUDA geographic information system in the state of Florida and the only statewide aerial photography set used by state government.

The success of the Center's applied geography program makes state support for other projects easier to obtain. A very important aspect of the Center is a philosophy of accountability in both value and quality of output.

Presently, a Center staff member is executive director of the hazardous waste program. Hazardous waste is a serious societal problem and one which will continue to receive substantial funding despite cutbacks in funds in other areas. It is a problem area where geographers must work with members of other disciplines, yet one in which they can make significant contributions.

The Center has prepared a new comprehensive atlas of Florida, published in the fall of 1981,\(^2\) and the state has appropriated funds for a Florida Water Atlas, which the Center will work on. In addition, applied geographers worked with
legislative reapportionment, data acquisition and research into the feasibility of using Department of Revenue ownership information as a source of resource management data.

The geographers of Florida State University believe that in the present time of decreasing funding, societal problems will not go away. There is still an opportunity for geographers to undertake applied studies with public agencies at all levels. The public agencies have been convinced that working with the university is an effective way to use public dollars. In the first place, the agencies save dollars because the university can complete a job on time, within budget, and at a high level of competency for less money than the agencies would spend with outside contractors. In Florida, the Attorney General’s office regards FREAC as a state agency and therefore it is not required to meet the competitive negotiation provisions in the Florida constitution. Besides the initial savings of money, the university will use over 50 percent of the contracted dollars to pay for higher education costs such as research salaries, equipment, and student assistantships. The same dollars get a third use: the university can train students in practical, applied ways, which will allow them to move into both the public and private sectors at high competency levels.

FREAC is one of eleven research centers of the Institute of Science and Public Affairs of Florida State University. The director of the Institute is also the Executive Director of the Florida Resources and Environmental Analysis Center. The present co-directors of FREAC are Frank Unger, a geographers (for administration and technical affairs), and Roy Herndon, a nuclear physicist (for research). Some twenty-seven professors from seventeen departments have worked for the Center and as many as 110 students have been employed during one academic quarter, although the average is forty-seven. For more information about FREAC, write: Dr. Edward A. Fernald, Executive Director, Florida Resources and Environment Center, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida 32306.

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1. This article is reprinted with minor revisions from the AAG Newsletter, vol. 16, no. 6 (June 1, 1981): 6-7, by permission of the Association of American Geographers.

2. The lead article of this Florida Geographer describes the Atlas of Florida.