

## **The Place of Geography in Higher Education in the United Arab Republic**

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Geography occupies an important place in both the elementary and secondary schools of the United Arab Republic so it is not surprising that geography is a well known subject at the college level.

Higher education in Egypt is largely a creation of the twentieth century. Although the University at Alexandria was a foremost seat of learning in classical times and was a depository of knowledge throughout the Dark Ages, the present University at Alexandria is an institution of stature because of a recent re-awakening in higher education. The universities of Egypt are patterned after those of England and France. The university is a collection of more or less autonomous Faculties. The usual ones are Agriculture, Arts, Commerce, Dentistry, Education, Engineering, Law, Medicine, Pharmacy and Science. Within each Faculty are several departments. The Geography Department at Cairo University is in the Faculty of Arts but it is in the Faculty of Science in at least one university and in the Faculty of Education in another. The United Arab Republic however is not alone in not always knowing where to put geography.

Egypt has four major state-supported universities and two new ones that began operations in the first semester of 1962-63. In addition, the ancient Moslem University of Al Azhar in Cairo has expanded its faculties beyond religion and Moslem Law to include other fields. Its past and present function has been largely devoted to training Moslem students from all over the Islamic world. A majority of the students have been foreigners. As its offerings become wider no doubt a large percentage of its students will be Egyptian. Another university of considerable importance is the American University of Cairo. It is the lone survivor of a group of colleges under foreign direction and support. Since American University has been willing to comply with the laws decreed since the revolution of 1952 by accepting more Egyptian faculty members and administrative personnel and by offering Arabic language and some courses taught in Arabic, it has not been taken over by the government.

The vast majority of college students attend the four state supported universities. The largest is Cairo University in Giza on the west side of the Nile. Its total enrollment was claimed to be about 43,000. Ein Shams University in Helipolis, a suburb of Cairo on the east, is slightly smaller. It is completing its move to a new campus with all new buildings and facilities after an extended period in several converted buildings scattered rather widely over eastern Cairo. The University of Alexandria has an enrollment of over 20,000. The newest of the four major universities is the University of Assuit which graduated its first class in 1962, having opened its doors to first year students in 1958. The two newest universities are at Mansura in the eastern delta and Tanta in the middle delta. This academic year, their first, both institutions have been opened to first year students in medicine. Next year the second year offerings in medicine will be provided and also as many faculties, for new first year students, as space and funds will permit.

Three universities have departments of geography, Alexandria, Cairo, and Ein Shams. The latter has two departments one in the Faculty of Arts and one in Education. All state universities are co-educational but the Faculty of Education at Ein Shams is on a separate campus with women students only, so a small department of geography is situated there.

The Department of Geography and Cartography at Cairo University devotes most of its instructional time to majors who enter the University from the secondary schools and follow through a four-year prescribed program. All students are full-time and take the same courses, about 24 class hours per week, as their class group. Upon graduation all geography majors have had a common background of academic subjects. It might be of interest to note the courses a Bachelor of Arts student would offer in support of his candidacy. Some courses are one semester, others continue throughout the year.

*First Year* — Geography of the Arab World, General Cartography, Physical Geography, History of Ancient Egyptian Civilization, Geography of Environments, The Arab Society, Introduction to Geography, English, Arabic, Oceanography, Surveying and Essays in Geographic Discoveries.

*Second Year* — Historical Geography, Ethnology, Economic Geography, Urban Geography, General Cartography, History of Recent Middle East, Economics, English, Historical Geography of Egypt and Statistics.

*Third Year* — Geomorphology, History, Economic Maps and Diagrams, English, Field Work, Geography of Africa, Geography of Eurasia and Australia, Geography of the New World, and Essays (a kind of directed reading and writeup).

*Fourth Year* — Physical Geography of the U.A.R., Economic Geography of the U.A.R., History of Recent Egypt, Geography of the Nile Basin, Political Theories, Political Geography, Geography of Transport, English, Urban and Rural Planning, Economics, Cartography, Research Project and Field Work.

Approximation of Semester Hours  
for a Bachelor's Degree in Geography

	Hours		Hours
Geography	50-60	History	12
Cartography	18	Surveying	3
Oceanography	6	Sociology	3
Geomorphology	3	Anthropology	3
Urban & Rural Plan	3	Economics	6
Field Work	5	Political Science	3
Essays & Research	6	Statistics	3
English	24		
Arabic	6	<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>155-165 Semester Hours</b>

No student from any other department attends any of the above classes. Special courses in Geography are offered in the Faculties of Commerce and Education by their staff members, the faculty member going to their building to teach as do the English, Survey, History, Anthropology and other department's faculties come to the Geography Department to teach their subject. Thus the Department of Geography with about 100 in each class operates almost as a small college of 400 in a building shared with Archeology and nearly one-half a mile from the main campus with its more than 40,000 students. Academically the students in Geography have little contact with the student body of the University other than their common use of the main library.

The section of Cartography is a special branch of the Departments of Geography at Cairo and Alexandria. At the end of the second year in

Geography those students who show a special aptitude in Cartography are invited to elect the Cartography degree plan for their last two years. During the last two years, 18 semester hours of Cartography, in addition to those Cartography courses above, are taken, as well as additional surveying, photogrammetry and mathematics. The 1962 class was the first group of Cartography graduates. The Cairo group numbered 13, Alexandria had a few more. There will be no difficulty in finding places for this number in the many bureaus of the government.

Courses are taught by the lecture method with most of the students working outside the department. Considerable importance is attached to field trips. The trips are often open to any Geography major regardless of his class. An all day trip is scheduled about once a month. These trips visit such places as the Faiyum Oasis, Suez and the southern Suez Canal, and Abu Wash, a wadi west of the delta. A four-day series of trips to Minufiya Province northwest of Cairo was a requirement of the third-year class to do land-use mapping in the field. The third-year cartography students helped supervise the student parties in the field. The fourth-year class had just arrived in Syria when that arm of the U.A.R. separated itself so the group had to return to Cairo without visiting more than the port of Latakia. Later in the year a six-day trip was taken to Alexandria and the Mediterranean Coast as far west as Salum in Libya.

Examinations are not given during the course but a comprehensive written final examination is given at the end of the semester or year if the course continues for a full year. Progress toward graduation, even staying in the University, depends on a satisfactory grade being earned in each of the many subjects. Lectures are ended two to three weeks before the examination period to give the students a chance to study for the examinations which are given over a three-week period. Each course is given a half-day for the examination. The examination period is a time of stress and anxiety. In order to preserve anonymity, numbers only appear on the examination papers when they are turned in. Each paper is checked by two readers.

The political policy of Egypt encourages university faculty members to go to neighboring Arab countries as visiting professors. Approximately half of the 32 Egyptian Geography professors were teaching outside of Egypt in 1961-62. Three were in Morocco, the rest in the Sudan, Libya, Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. This lend-lease policy is carried out in spite of a severe shortage of staff at home. This shortage is met in a way harmful to the professional growth of the staff. In addition to a normal load of 18-24 hours of lectures per week, nearly every professor teaches an overload of six or more hours each semester in another institution. Last year one professor from Assuit, nearly 200 miles up the valley spent Sunday teaching two courses in Cartography and Photogrammetry at Cairo. Two professors commuted from Alexandria twice a week and two came across town from Ein Shams to teach two classes each.

Library and map collections at the University suffers from the inability to make purchases outside the country. The departmental library had few non-arabic books with copyright dates later than 1930 and practically no periodicals. The main library however is reasonably well equipped with both foreign books and periodicals. The best collection of Geographic literature, maps and models in the U.A.R. is owned by the Egyptian Geographical Society and housed in their building near the center of Cairo.

The annual graduating class of nearly 400 bachelor-degree-holding geographers in a country of slightly over 25,000,000 might seem to be more than available jobs can absorb. I encountered no one who seemed unduly concerned about this. The private sector of industry has few openings for geographers but the many new schools opening (supposedly

one a day) plus the need for trained geographers in government service seems capable of absorbing the supply.

During the past year I was able to meet most of the academic Geographers in residence in Egypt as well as several on their way to or from foreign assignments. In almost every case the quality of the personnel impressed me. Most received at least a part of their graduate training outside the Middle East, mainly England and the United States. A smaller number has spent considerable time in France, Germany and the Soviet Union. During the past year the Department conferred a Ph.D. on one of its instructors whose training had all been taken in the U.A.R. but who had taught for a time in Libya.

Geographers in Egypt have acquitted themselves well in fields sometimes removed from academic geography. One is on the permanent staff of the United Nations in New York, another is the President of the new University of Assuit and has done a prodigious job in building and equipping a large modern university in the middle valley where nothing of its kind existed before. A third is probably better known nationally as he was appointed governor of Minufiya Province two years ago after serving as Chairman of the Geography Department at Cairo University for several years. He was put in charge of the most densely populated province in Egypt where land reforms were most needed. He is attempting to bridge the transition from large estates owned by a few to a broader base of ownership without the fragmentation and decline of production that usually follows, at least for a time.

Other geographers hold important positions in various bureaus of the government. The present crop of graduates will probably sort papers and shift piles of paper from desk to desk for awhile but the more able will no doubt rise to positions of responsibility within the near future.

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