

Indiana reflects national trend as geography literacy declines

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A study in the *Journal of Geography* reports that despite increased support for K-12 geography education over a 15-year period, geography knowledge among Indiana college freshmen has not improved.

A test measuring ability in map skills, place name location, physical geography and human geography was administered in 1987 and again in 2002 to college freshmen at public and private colleges and universities in Indiana. Test scores were two percent lower in 2002 than in 1987.

"We were dismayed to see this decline, which is much more significant than it appears. With the efforts we put into K-12 geography education statewide through the Geography Educators Network of Indiana during the 15-year period we anticipated an increase in geography literacy, not a decline," said study author F.L. (Rick) Bein, Ph.D., professor of geography, School of Liberal Arts, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis.

These results reflect a national trend verified by similar findings by the National Geographic Society. "In Indiana, like in many other states, state educational standards are so focused on math and science, that geography and the other high school social studies are neglected," said Dr. Bein.

The few resources allocated to the social studies are consumed by the history programs. Geography is often taught only to less academic high school [students](#) and rarely integrated into history classes. In fact, Dr.

Bein and co-authors found no significant difference in geography literacy between the scores of those students who had taken high school geography and those who had not.

In both tests students did best in the place names category and least well in map skills.

In 1987 and 2002, male students scored significantly higher than the female freshmen. Arts and sciences students scored much better than students in [education](#), business and other majors. Travel was the primary source of geography knowledge, not [high school](#) geography classes. Not surprisingly, the more places the students had lived, the higher their scores.

In 1987 there was no significant difference between Asian, white, Hispanic and other students although the African American students scored noticeably lower. In 2002 whites had the highest scores and Hispanic students were the second highest scoring group. Asian students scored lower than Hispanics, but somewhat higher than African American students. The study authors noted that the sample size was small for both Asians and Hispanics which may have influenced the ranking of both groups.

More information: In addition to Dr. Bein, authors of the study, "Fifteen Year Follow-Up Geography Skills Test Administered in Indiana, 1987 and 2002," which appears in Volume 108, Issue 1 of the *Journal of Geography*, are James J. Hayes, Ph.D. of Indiana University and Thomas G. Jones, Ph.D., of Taylor University.

Source: Indiana University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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