



Geography

People, places and the environment

“Studying Geography is like putting glasses on and seeing clearly – you will learn about the interactions between humans and the environment by looking at the world in new and different ways.”

Jess Gerry, BSc(Hons) (Geography), MSc (Geography)

Geographers study the environment – both physical and human, including the physical processes that shape the natural environment, the social and cultural processes that explain patterns of human activity, and the interactions between human activity and the natural world.

Geography also explores key environmental and development challenges, such as climate change and inequality, and the potential solutions to these problems. Geography helps us manage human activity and secure the future of our planet.

A Geography degree at Otago will equip you with valuable research and communication skills using interdisciplinary approaches to explore environmental and societal challenges. This combination of practical skills and theoretical learning will serve you well no matter the career you choose.

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Why study Geography?

Geography provides a bridge between the arts and the sciences, addressing issues at the local, regional, national and global scales. A Geography degree at Otago provides training through lectures and fieldwork in the environments in which we work.

Geography papers fit well into almost any degree and the School of Geography has strong links with many other disciplines including Geology, Surveying, Agricultural Innovation and sustainability research (Centre for Sustainability).

The mix of analytical and communication skills provided, combined with practical experience make Otago Geography graduates highly sought after in a wide range of industries.

Background required

There are no subjects you have to have done in order to study Geography – you don't even need to have studied it at school.

Career opportunities

Geography graduates work in the public and private sectors. Their skills and interdisciplinary outlook prepare them for a diverse range of careers. Central government departments, state-owned enterprises, local government, private corporations and consultancies employ Geography graduates in areas such as regional and resource planning, environmental management, natural resources (especially water) analysis, social and economic research, social services and regional development.

Geography at Otago

Geography may be taken as the major subject for the Bachelor of Arts (BA) or for the Bachelor of Science (BSc). In addition, many students enrol for undergraduate papers in Geography while pursuing other studies, including Law, Commerce, Humanities, Ecology, Geology, Surveying, Physical Education, Tourism, and Education.

The undergraduate programme provides a firm grounding in the social, economic and physical aspects of the environment. The study of Geography falls into three main areas:

Human Geography in which students focus on issues of urban and economic change, uneven development, social themes like ethnicity, childhood and gender, geopolitical conflict and the human use of natural resources.

Physical Geography in which students focus on physical geography, including earth surface processes and their expression in the landscape, the Earth's weather systems and climates, factors which lead to geographic variations in the distribution and growth of living things, and environmental controls on the availability and quality of water.

Environmental Management in which students gain a theoretical and practical understanding of environmental processes such as climatology, geomorphology, biogeography, hydrology and soil science. This area incorporates sustainable development, integrated resource management and environmental planning and policy.

Both BA and BSc Geography students can mix papers from across the discipline to build an applied environmental management programme within the Geography degree. It is also possible to take Environmental Management as a Bachelor of Applied Science (BAppSc) degree.

Teaching style

Geography papers are taught in a range of ways. Students attend lectures, tutorials and labs, and gain hands-on experience through fieldwork and practical courses in research methods.

Further study

The School of Geography offers an honours programme. Postgraduate studies include the Master of Planning, Master of International Development and Planning, Master of Arts, Master of Science, postgraduate diplomas, and a strong PhD programme.

For questions about
Geography
otago.ac.nz/geography



PROFILES

Nathaniel Christensen

BA (Geography, History), MA (Geography) | Senior Policy Adviser,
Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment

"Geography was a subject I loved at secondary school, and the degree offered a valuable blend of theory, academia and real-world and practical learnings – equipping me to think critically about the world around me and setting me up to contribute to making it a better place.

"All the staff I worked with were passionate about supporting students to do their best and encouraged a collegial approach to learning. I made some great friendships with fellow students, which made for a more enjoyable time studying and working together.

"After completing my master's, I joined the graduate programme at the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, where I'm now a senior policy adviser. I work mostly in the employment and labour market area. My success at Otago and the support I was given to achieve and push myself has set me up well to work in the sometimes high-pressure environment at MBIE, especially over the last year as we've been a key part of the government's successful COVID-19 response."



Florence Mills

BSc (Geography, Geographic Information Systems), MSc (Geography)
Consultant Hydrogeologist, Pattle Delamore Partners Ltd (PDP)

"I have a passion for the environment and believe in trying to leave the planet in a better place than we found it, in particular its natural water resources. I saw Geography as a career path that would enable me to do this.

"The facilities at Otago are great. I really enjoyed heading into the lab and analysing water and soil samples, using the map library and completing flume experiments. The staff within the department are truly invested in your education and wish to see you thrive.

"I also thoroughly enjoyed the many field trips across the lower South Island that I completed for both my degrees. Highlights were exploring the alpine river environments in the Southern Alps and the coastal areas in the Catlins.

"Since completing my master's, I have been pursuing a career in hydrology. Initially I worked for Watercare Service Ltd. A key highlight was being involved with Auckland's drought response team during a severe water shortage. I have since worked at Waikato Regional Council in their hydrology monitoring team which provided an awesome opportunity to explore the Waikato region and develop great fieldwork skills. I have just started a new position as a consultant hydrogeologist with PDP, which is an exciting new step in my hydrology career."

