The University of Maine at Farmington and the University of Southern Maine offer the only two geography concentrations in Maine. Although many aspects of their programs developed independently of each other, the small size of the two operations has encouraged some cooperative efforts, including the lone geographer at the University of Maine in Orono, to provide experiences that no Maine campus could support alone. Programs at both campuses provide options that are attractive to students interested in general liberal arts, teaching and applied studies.

The geography program at the University of Maine at Farmington with three full-time faculty is the largest and most diverse in Maine. Two applied tracks are offered: (1) Land Planning Technician (Associate Degree) and (2) Liberal Arts (Bachelor Degree) Geography Major with applied focus. The two year degree is designed to train personnel for entry into land use planning and involves the following geography courses: Cartography, Map Use, Land Use, Town and Regional Planning, Current Planning Problems, The American City, and Planning Field Experience.

Within the context of these two tracks, applied geography is an important element. The associate degree mandates an internship experience where the student works with an agency. Students in the liberal arts program who select the public–private applied option are encouraged to participate in an internship experience. Students in both programs are placed in a variety of intern situations. The department has fine working relations with many state, regional, and municipal agencies. In addition to the internship, several geography courses have an applied focus. The two planning courses, Land Use, Location Analysis and Field Camp in Geography concentrate on applied experiences. Historically, the planning and land use offerings have concerned local planning problems. These projects often are worked out with town planning boards, state agencies or regional organizations. In many cases, the agency involved will cover all or a portion of costs.

The relationship between applied geography and the field camp is fairly recent. The field camp was introduced in 1980 as a joint team taught offering by the University of Maine–Orono, University of Maine–Farmington and the University of Southern Maine. The camp is a two week operation that rotates among the three campuses. During the first three years, the course involved the standard geography field activities. Because of other faculty obligation the course was not offered in 1983. In 1984 the field camp, at the invitation of the City Planning Department, was held in Auburn, Maine. The City of Auburn has one of the oldest farmland protection ordinances in New England but its effectiveness had never been investigated. The Auburn City Council was considering repeal of some aspects of the law that would result in opening significant areas of farmland to development. The State of Maine was also looking at Auburn as a possible model for a statewide agricultural land protection program. These conditions represented an ideal setting for problem-oriented, applied field camp. Funding came from the Maine Department of Agriculture, Maine State Planning Office, and University of Maine system while the City of Auburn provided space in City Hall and materials. Students who enrolled in the course worked on a current problem in the political environment of a city hall. Preliminary results of the field camp study were presented to the Auburn City Council and the Governor’s Rural Development Committee.

The applied aspect of geography is an important element of the UMF and USM departments. It has a positive image with both private and public agencies and is a major link between the academic environment and the outside world. Graduates of the UMF program are employed by many agencies such as National Defense Mapping Agency, Maine State Planning Office, Maine State Development Office, North Kennebec Regional Planning Agency, Landmarks, Aerial Survey and Photo, Inc. and LeLorine Publishing. In addition, some students have chosen to attend graduate school.

The University of Southern Maine program is staffed by two full time faculty and includes two applied options: (1) Liberal Arts (Bachelor Degree) - Geography-Anthropology Major and (2) Liberal Arts (Bachelor Degree) - Applied Geography Minor in Planning. Courses in Cartography, Air Photo Interpretation, Land Use Analysis and Planning have been developed. Geography-Anthropology majors are required to take an independent study or internship experience in the public or private sector. Examples of applied department field work include: The Museum of Man, USM campus, Casco Bay Prehistoric Survey and Archaeology; Fort Hill, Gorham, Maine, Frontier Site Analysis; Ceramics Research in Portland, Maine.

Two applied minors were developed when the College of Arts and Sciences encouraged students to apply for an 18 hour minor as well as requiring a major. The minors, one in planning and requiring primarily courses in Geography, have attracted some students.

Most students applying for the major are attracted because of the applied focus. Internship experiences have resulted in a number of recent graduates getting work. The presentation of topical courses, the attention to theoretical background in the applied courses and internship program is working. Students are successfully going on to graduate schools in geography and anthropology. Students are obtaining jobs related to their academic background, and the numbers of students in the major and in classes are slowly increasing.

In summary, the USM Geography-Anthropology Department focuses on the study of cultural processes via the complementary approaches of both disciplines. Students benefit from the two-fold approach, that includes ample opportunities to participate in applied research projects and in-service training. Such practical but varied undergraduate experiences are considered essential to success in today's rapidly changing world.