

Learning about the Earth at the University of South Alabama

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With the University of South Alabama being a primary region-serving institution, students are most concerned about all aspects of the coastal environment in which they live and grew up, especially hurricanes and other coastal hazards when looking at Earth's processes. Incoming majors have a poor understanding of issues considered by Earth scientists to be societally important. High schools in Alabama are not required to teach the earth sciences so students do not know the potential that these fields offer them when they are interested in a career concerning the environment. Once introduced to these topics, they become interested in them and will take that interest from course to course. In our freshman-level Atmospheric Processes course, we introduce students to the processes that create tropical storms and hurricanes, why they come ashore where they do, and what affects their damage potential. For the coastal environment, we teach an introductory course on landscape processes, in which we cover depositional and coastal environments. We also briefly introduce them to coastal issues like erosion, climate change and sea level rise, and hazards. The program offers upper level courses on natural hazards and environmental geography, both of which continue our study of the coastal environment; the courses also branches out into the study of natural processes and issues that are important to them and are important to society. We have introduced a course on medical geography to study the interface of the environment, humans, and disease, in continuation of our focus on the connection between geography and the environment. Overall, our majors want to learn about issues related to professionals in environmental and emergency management and will seek classes that will fulfill that goal. These courses have high enrollment and students from these courses seek careers in industry or government.