

# THE RECENT INTELLECTUAL STRUCTURE OF GEOGRAPHY\*

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**ABSTRACT.** An active learning project in an introductory graduate course used multidimensional scaling of the name index in *Geography in America at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, by Gary Gaile and Cort Willmott, to reveal some features of the discipline's recent intellectual structure relevant to the relationship between human and physical geography. Previous analyses, dating to the 1980s, used citation indices or Association of American Geographers specialty-group rosters to conclude that either the regional or the methods and environmental subdisciplines bridge human and physical geography. The name index has advantages over those databases, and its analysis reveals that the minimal connectivity that occurs between human and physical geography has recently operated more through environmental than through either methods or regional subdisciplines. *Keywords:* active learning, Geography in America, human geography, multidimensional scaling, physical geography.

Study of geography's intellectual structure is an essential part of the process through which geographers continually re-create their discipline. Analysis of data that act as proxies for intellectual structure can adjudicate among competing, often idealistic and normative, models that place particular subdisciplines at the disciplinary core or cores and relegate others to the periphery. Such analyses can stimulate more grounded discussion about the opportunities and constraints involved in disciplinary restructuring. A multidimensional scaling (MDS) of the name index in *Geography in America at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, by Gary Gaile and Cort Willmott (2003), provides such an analysis and also contributes to pedagogy by illustrating how graduate students in an introductory course can engage in collaborative, active learning to make an original research contribution.

## COMPETING MODELS OF INTELLECTUAL STRUCTURE

Many geographers have conjectured about the intellectual structure of the discipline. The resulting models, though not based on systematic analyses of proxy measures of intellectual structure, represent much more than ungrounded speculation. They are based on long experience in the discipline and broad reading of its literature.

In one of the classics among such models, William Pattison (1964) proposed that four complementary "traditions" structure geography's disciplinary identity: spatial, area studies, man-land, and earth science. Those traditions allegedly inter-

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