Geography Newsletter, 2010-2011

University of Northern Iowa. Department of Geography.

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This year the Department of Geography was very proud to have six undergraduate students and two graduate students present research at the national meeting of the Association of American Geographers, held in Seattle. All of the projects represent research of exceptional quality and required months of commitment from the students. The project titles are:

**Susan Meerdink**, Long-term implications of the “ethanol boom” for American agriculture: Iowa case study

**Tesfay Russell**, Evaluating analytical methods for analyzing the role of financial institutions in immigrant integration

**Andrew Wille**, Spatial temporal analysis of crop yield variability at the field level

**Philip Cavin**, Using airborne LiDAR data and 3D dasymetric mapping technique to enhance population distribution maps in densely urbanized areas

**Nicole Elder**, An examination of lab-based hyperspectral data for the rapid, non-destructive analysis of lake cores

**Jonathon Launspach**, Wildfires and climate dynamics in the Arctic: A spatiotemporal analysis using MODIS data

**Borislav Nikoltchev** (grad), Economic polarization in Bulgaria and EU funded rural development programs, do they work?

**Anna Pestereva** (grad), GIS analysis of spatiotemporal dynamics of Taimyr Wild Reindeer population

This year UNI Geography hosted another international visit. Dr. German D. Kuroshev is the head of the Cartography and Geoinformatics Department at the St. Petersburg State University in Russia. Dr. Kuroshev is a renowned engineering geodesist and cartographer. He authored several books on geodesy and cartography, directed geo-engineering surveys for construction of major hydroelectric power plants in the USSR and assisted in fundamental geodetic surveys in Peru and Indonesia. Dr. Kuroshev visited UNI on April 1, 2011 to talk to students about his research. This was part of the Program in Research and Outreach in Geography between Russia and the United States (PROGRUS) supported by the generous donation of James and Connie Schuerman.

Students in the Geography Club designed T-shirts this year as a fundraiser. The design was worked out collaboratively on a van ride back from a club trip to EROS Data Center near Sioux Falls, SD. The club printed about 70 shirts and sold out! There has been talk of printing a second run and if any alums are interested, let us know. The information is provided on the back page for the second order.

In the Fall of 2010 Dr. Dave May worked near Lake View, Iowa with archaeologist Matt Hill (Iowa State University) on a site where several bison (buffalo) have been unearthed during field tiling. The site may or may not be an archaeological site, but it is fascinating in that many bison died in the wet, swampy landscape near each other. In November they were fortunate to have one of the field tilers dig trenches to help locate such a concentration of bison bones. Naturally, they didn’t discovered bones until the 12th trench excavated less than an hour before the sun set. They hope to return next summer or fall for more work. Matt Hill, Dave Rapson (Iowa State University adjunct instructor), and Dr. May will return to western Nebraska this summer to search for more Paleoindian (11,500-9,000 yr B.P.) sites.
Throughout my past five years at the University of Northern Iowa I have had a great experience in the geography department. So much that I am continuing on with my education to receive my Masters degree in Geography at UNI. After declaring my geography major during the end of my sophomore year, I had the opportunity to speak with several professors within the department, in which they provided me with a range of areas to pursue. One of the greatest advantages of this department is that the professors will take time out of their day to work with you. This has probably been the most influential part for me during my education at the University of Northern Iowa. This department gives students the opportunity to do research, which in return gives the students an edge over other departments throughout the United States. During the 2011 Annual Geography Conference in Seattle, Washington six undergraduates from UNI presented their research. It was apparent that our school had the largest number of undergraduate participants. UNI not only provides the chance to do quality research but also encourages students to present their research in a professional setting. Throughout my personal experience I have taken part in several research projects, and have presented at several small and large conferences throughout the United States. Students can also be involved in several ways within the department. I received both the Geography Club and Gamma Theta Upsilon awards during the 2010-2011 school year. I played a large role in bringing both these clubs to active status and making them available to students in the future.

**GTU Inductees**

This year students played a leading role in revitalizing our chapter of Gamma Theta Upsilon (GTU). GTU is an international honor society for student geographers. UNI Geography has a long and distinguished history with the GTU organization. The society was nationalized from its founding university at Illinois State in 1931. UNI then received the first national charter, the Beta Chapter, under the direction of the nationally renowned geographer Dr. Alison Aitchison. Since then the society has expanded to 298 chapters. Eligibility for membership into GTU requires initiates to have completed a minimum of 3 geography courses, have a GPA of at least 3.3 overall and in geography, and to have completed at least 3 semesters of college course work.
Giving Back

Giving to the department is a great way to help current students as they work toward their degrees. The Department of Geography has a discretionary account within the UNI Foundation which we use to fund special field trips, student travel, guest speakers, our annual student banquet, and many other student-related activities.

The UNI Foundation can also set up special accounts dedicated to particular goals such as scholarships or travel abroad programs. If you are interested in giving to the Department of Geography, please contact either Dr. Patrick Pease 319-273-2772 patrick.pease@uni.edu

(or) The UNI Foundation 800-782-9522 UNI.Foundation@uni.edu http://www.uni-foundation.org/

Student Experiences

Sam Koch

From the beginning of my college career until 2010, my summers were highly predictable. Every year I would return to the same JC Penney store and spend my time explaining to customers the reason why 600 thread count sheets would last longer than 200 thread count, or the reason why flat-bottom cookware is most ideal for glass-top stoves. During the 2009-2010 academic year, I knew I wanted to do something different; something out of the ordinary and to gain some professional experience. With careful planning and plenty of saving, I was able to get an internship at the Peace Corps Headquarters in Washington, D.C. through The Washington Center’s International Affairs program.

At Peace Corps Headquarters I had two primary tasks: to create data sets using Google Earth Pro so that the Department of Overseas Programming and Training would be able to measure the impact that volunteers have made over time, and to assist the Women in Development/Gender and Development Coordinator with updating materials for her Initiative. A significant reason why I enjoyed my internship experience is due to the fact that I had one responsibility related to my major and another responsibility that that dealt with a secondary passion.

When given the assignment to use Google Earth Pro to create country-specific data sets, I felt unsure because I had never used Google Earth Pro. Fortunately, the GIS classes I had taken at UNI made pursuing this task much easier. Although Google Earth Pro is not as advanced as software I’d used, some of the functions acted the same way as those used in my GIS classes. This made troubleshooting far less intimidating. I also found my GIS background to be useful when it came to communicating my progress to my supervisor who had no GIS or Google Earth Pro background. Ultimately, I was able to successfully familiarize myself with Google Earth Pro, within two short weeks, and teach my supervisor to use it for the future. I was also able to refer my supervisors to companies that sell GI software so that Peace Corps could benefit from such an investment in the future.

The time I spent in Washington, D.C. was an invaluable experience that made my summer memorable. I would highly recommend The Washington Center’s internship program to other students.

Scholarships

Thanks to generous contributions of departmental alumni and sponsors, Geography students can receive a number of scholarships. In 2011 the Department awarded scholarships to the following individuals

Janice M. Clark Memorial Scholarship: Alyssa Holt
Edna L. Padovan Geography Scholarship: Chelsea Kies
James & Connie Schuerman Scholarship: Irina Childinova
2011 Awards Banquet

Congratulations Winners!

University of Northern Iowa Purple and Old Gold Award for Meritorious Scholarship
Awarded by the University upon recommendation from the Department of Geography to a graduating senior of outstanding quality.
Andrew Wille

Department of Geography/GTU Annual Academic Certificate of Achievement
Awarded by the Department of Geography to graduating seniors of outstanding quality.
Katherine Klus, Jonathon Launspach

NCGE’s 2010 Award for Excellence of Scholarship
Awarded by the National Council for Geographic Education in conjunction with the Association of American Geographers to graduating seniors of outstanding quality.
Philip Cavin, Eric Johnson

Annual Outstanding Undergraduate Research in Geography Award
Awarded to students for published and/or presented research during the academic year.
Philip Cavin, Nicole Elder, Jonathon Launspach, Susan Meerdink, Andrew Wille, Tesfay Russell
UNI Geography Outstanding Alumnus Award

Each year at our awards banquet we recognize a graduate who has made an impact in the field of geography and has represented our department with distinction. This year the Outstanding Alumni Award was given to Nathan Green. Nathan received his B.A. and M.A. degrees from UNI in 2003 and 2005 respectively. His M.A. thesis was widely recognized and earned Nathan several awards including 3rd place at the Great Midwestern Region Space Grant Consortium poster session and 2nd place for the Outstanding Masters Thesis Award at UNI. Following graduation, Nathan continued his work as a full time research scientist in the GeoTREE center. In 2007 Nathan took a position at the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) in St. Louis where he works as a GEOINT Analyst for Foundation Strategies. His role at NGA is to ensure that a variety of government agencies are provided with the Geospatial Intelligence they need to accomplish their key mission.
Geography Tee-Shirts

If you are interested in being on a contact list for future printings of the Geography Club shirt, send the students a note at unigeographyclub@gmail.com. The club will contact you with follow up order information once the Fall semester starts. If you missed it, check out the faculty wearing their shirts on Department Pride Day, page 2.