

# Department of Geography University of Central Arkansas



The *Newsletter* of the Department of Geography Vol. 1 No. 1 February 2004

## A Note From the "Interim" Chair...

July 1, 2003!! That date will go down as a significant date in the history of geography at the University of Central Arkansas. It was on that date that geography became separated from the Department of Geography and Political Science and became the Department of Geography. We had been consolidated for nine years. As such, it has been almost ten years since we have published a newsletter. This newsletter marks the beginning of a new era of "freedom" and self-determination - an era for which we have waited nearly a decade. So, with this issue, we say, "What a great day for geography at UCA!" and "Hello former students!" A lot has changed in ten years. During those years William F. Keinath and W. C. Jameson retired and Dr. Amadou Thiam and Ms. Mary Sue Passé-Smith have come into the department. Suzanne Rogers, our faithful secretary for so many years, is also back with us. She is happy to be "home." Between Suzanne and Ashley McMinn, our student worker (see photo next column), we find it difficult to get into trouble. We hope this newsletter finds everyone busy, healthy, employed, and prosperous. We encourage you to keep in touch with us via e-mail, phone, or regular mail! We are always eager to know of your comings and goings and about important events in your lives.

Dr. Brooks Green



## A Bit of History...

Geography courses have been taught at UCA since 1908, the year that Arkansas State Normal School began operation. At that time, the course, Physical Geography, was located in the Department of Science. By 1913, the department was renamed the Department of Natural Science, and the course, Commercial Geography, was added. In 1924, geography became a division within the Department of Science and three courses, Business Geography, Review Geography, and Historical Geography, were the only courses listed. Arkansas State Normal School became Arkansas State Teachers College in 1925. By that time, Hurbert L. Minton had joined the faculty. He was instrumental in adding fourteen geography courses to the curriculum and in 1927, became the first chair of the newly created Department of Geography. In 1937, a 15-credit geography minor was offered. Minton remained chair until 1947, at which time Alger E. Burdick, who served as the second chair until 1959, replaced him. In 1955, a geography major was offered for the first time. From 1959 to 1968, three acting chairs, Clarence Williams, Alger Burdick, and William F. Keinath, led the Department of Geography. In 1967, ASTC became State College of Arkansas and in 1968, Keinath became the third chair of the department. While Keinath was chair, the departmental honors program was implemented, and in 1975, ASC became the University of Central Arkansas. William Carl Jameson arrived in 1975 and became acting chair in 1977 and chair in 1978. At that time, the Department of Geography was located in the basement floor of Main

Hall. Brooks Green arrived in 1980 and became acting chair in 1988 and chair in 1989 and served until 1994 when the Department of Geography was consolidated with Political Science and Sociology. In 1993, the geography faculty moved to the newly constructed Irby Hall to suite 306. From 1994, the consolidated department has been led by Carl Redden (sociology), Lawson Veasey (public administration), both interim chairs, and Ronald Hy (public administration), who became chair in 1996. Hy left UCA in 2002, Don Whistler (political science) was appointed interim chair of the department, and the geography faculty moved to Irby 301. On July 1, 2003, the Department of Geography was separated from political science and Brooks Green was appointed interim chair. A search is now underway for a permanent chair.

### **The UCA Graduate Certificate in GIS...**

The Graduate Certificate in GIS at the University of Central Arkansas (UCA) is hosted by the Department of Geography. It is designed to meet the needs and busy schedules of full-time professionals. The GIS Certificate Program has been designed to help practicing professionals in any natural resource management or social science field to enhance their skills and improve the quality of their work. Students earn the Graduate Certificate in GIS by successfully completing five out of seven course modules. Earning the certificate also increases the chances of unemployed students to quickly find a job just after graduation (even before graduation, sometimes). Therefore, the GIS Certificate at UCA leads to rapid professional promotion, because GIS is among the most dynamic and lucrative job markets in the nation today.

The GIS Certificate at UCA is made flexible in order to adapt to the regular work schedule of expected candidates. The courses are organized as evening classes. Thus participants do not need to change their regular work schedule to enroll in GIS Certificate classes. So far, courses are offered one to two times a year. However, attempts are being made to schedule most courses in an eight-to-ten week-period and offer some courses more than one time a year.

Plans are underway to tentatively deliver the courses via the WWW starting in Fall 2004. WWW-registered students will be entitled to purchase the latest versions of *ArcView 8.x* and *ArcGIS* software at a significantly reduced price. These are the software applications that are used for most courses. With this new orientation, UCA takes the certificate program to the students' doorsteps and releases them from the heavy burden of commuting or traveling overseas. No matter where they live in the world, the enrolled participants will have a direct link with faculty at the Department of Geography to assist them in troubleshooting their applications. The Department of Geography is also planning to introduce an undergraduate certificate program in GIS. This new program is also planned to be

WWW-based. For more information, check the following link.

<http://www.uca.edu/divisions/academic/geography/certificate1.htm>

Dr. Amadou K. Thiam



### **The Changing Geography Department Curriculum...**

A significant recent addition to our curriculum has been a 21-credit hours minor in Geographic Information Science (GIS), a technology-oriented minor designed to strengthen the student's use of the tools of geography. The minor in GIS affords students knowledge of the main principles upon which a Geographic Information System (GIS) is based, and an understanding of the potential capabilities of such a system. Students look inside the digital world and become familiar with what is special about spatial data. By examining case studies they gain an understanding of the power of a GIS in various fields of application. Using GIS software, students gain the experience and power to integrate information, analyze and solve spatial problems, visualize scenarios, present ideas, create digital maps, and develop effective solutions in any discipline or employment situation.

The geography core for the GIS minor includes "Introduction to Physical Geography," "Introduction to Human Geography," "Geographic Information Techniques," "Cartography," "Remote Sensing and Image Interpretation," "Geographic Information Systems," and "Geographic Information Analysis" (an advanced-level course in GIS). GIS minors must also successfully complete 3 credit hours of statistics. GIS minors may not be geography majors.

A recent significant change in our curriculum has been to drop the two "Field Studies" courses as a requirement for our majors, and to substitute "Geographic Information Systems" (a 3 credit hour, 3000-level course). Aware of the value of field experiences to our students, this change was made somewhat reluctantly, but was necessitated by university budgetary constraints. With GIS having emerged as a

central element of modern spatial information and analysis systems, "Geographic Information Systems" seemed the most appropriate substitute course requirement for our majors.

After offering a Graduate Certificate in GIS for the last few years, in which the student completes 5 of 7 tool courses, we are creating an undergraduate certificate program with courses at the 4000-level that correspond to our existing 5000-level courses. The 4000-level courses will be only for those students: a) who have high school diplomas or equivalent, b) who have associate degrees, c) who are enrolled in technical or junior colleges, or d) who are currently enrolled in a bachelor's degree program at a university. The entire Certificate Program will be converted into a distance education program, whereby all 4000-level and 5000-level courses will be placed on-line and offered through WebCT or some other Internet option. In this way, students who qualify can enroll in the program from anywhere and proceed through it at their own pace. This broadens the potential market to those persons who are out of high school in technical schools, junior colleges, at a university, and those who have bachelor's degrees working in a GIS or a GIS-related profession. An on-line context should potentially increase enrollment in each course because students will not have to drive to Conway and the program will be available to those with, as well as those without, a bachelor's degree.

Two new upper-division GIS courses, both electives and both applied in content, have been created and will be offered in the near future: "GIS in Practice: Business and Social Science Applications" and "GIS in Practice: Environmental Applications." We are planning to develop a second General Education course (in addition to "Principles of Geography"), a social science elective tentatively titled "World Regions: People, Places, and Environments." The departmental consensus is that such a course might attract a different type of student, and thus would not compete with the existing "Principles" course. Nor would it compete with "World Regional Geography I and II," which are more intensive courses required for the geography major and minor. Additionally, various regional course electives are being considered for development in the future, including Geography of Asia and Geography of Europe/Russia.

Dr. Paul Butt



### **Mary Sue Passé-Smith Joins the Department...**

I have been employed as a Lab Instructor and Lecturer in GIS at the University of Central Arkansas in Conway since August of 1997. In January of 2002, I began attending classes at UA-Fayetteville while maintaining a teaching and lab administration position at UCA. I am scheduled to defend my Master of Arts thesis in Geography at the University of Arkansas in March 2004 and graduate in May. Besides teaching GIS, Cartography and Principles of Geography to undergraduates, I have taught business and public leaders' classes on the uses of GIS and other computer-oriented skills. I also administer the Geosystems lab and its equipment (servers, hard/software); have done numerous GIS, mapping, and other projects, surveys, and grant research in the community; and am the department Webmaster. I am interested in pursuing the use of GIS in modeling how surficial land-use patterns and changes might affect large and small-scale atmospheric phenomena as well as the geography of natural hazards, hazards policy, and disaster aid.

Ms. Mary Sue Passé-Smith



### **Teaching "Old Dogs" New Tricks...**

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) is an increasingly important aspect of our geography curriculum. While half of UCA's Geography Department is well trained in (indeed teach!) the GIS and technology-oriented courses, the other three instructors have been working to improve their GIS skills and incorporate them into their courses. This past November, Drs. Butt and Reynolds, along with myself, were able to advance our training by attending an intensive, two-day ArcGIS workshop in Monticello.

The workshop was lead by Dr. Robert Weih, Director of the Spatial Analysis Lab in the Arkansas Forestry Resource Center, University of Arkansas at Monticello. Bob is well known and respected by many UCA-Geography graduates that work in GIS-related fields throughout the region, and he has developed a first-class GIS program in the forestry program at Monticello. While the three of us had attended a few

other GIS training workshops the previous semester, this was far and away the most intensive and in-depth GIS workshop attended.

For two full days, we worked our way through the latest ArcGIS 8.3 edition. We were the only academics among the 16 participants, the majority coming from forestry and timber industries of the federal government. Bob did a great job of helping us along, but we each spent the entire time at our own computers running through the myriad of analysis tools this program offers. I was a bit intimidated when he said that ArcGIS 8.3 was the largest program ever put onto a Windows platform, and that there are more lines of code in ArcGIS than every Microsoft Software package combined!

After two very applied days at the keyboard, we received our “diplomas.” Does this mean that I can teach Introduction to GIS? Well, I don’t think so! But I am hoping that this workshop will “jump-start” my GIS skills training and my goal is that I can better present the power and potential of these skills to our lower-level general education students and develop some GIS related assignments for my upper-level elective courses.

Dr. Jeff Allender



### **Environmental Alliance at UCA...**

Environmental Alliance is the student-founded, environmentally focused organization at UCA. The organization continues to function, even with me as the advisor, but with more participation from majors other than geography, including numerous environmental science, biology, and Honors College students. Projects of the organization include campus recycling (especially in the dorms), campus cleanup, Earth Day, and stream cleanup. Last spring, the members spread out over the campus picking up discards, and the ubiquitous cigarette butts. Earth Day events included informational speakers, live music, and a dunking booth in front of the Student Center. No, I was not one of the dunkees, however, this year I will take the position above the water.

Some of you may recall that EA annually cleaned up Stone Dam Creek, the stream that flows

through and drains the southeast portion of campus. Even the former U. prez participated on one occasion. Since the northern portion of that stream has been covered and is now a parking lot, the group has adopted Tucker Creek, west of UCA, and cleans up various reaches of it during the fall and spring. This is a good PR move, since much of the stream parallels the high-use Conway Hike-Bike Way. The spring stream cleanup is scheduled for April 4, 3 pm, and will include the downstream reach in the vicinity of Hogan Lane. Come join us for a fun afternoon, but bring your waders.

Dr. Jerry Reynolds



### **Geography Internship Program...**

Many of the geography graduates of UCA have gained on-the-job experience at agencies in central Arkansas. Some of you are now employed by those same agencies. You will be glad to know that the Geography Internship Program continues at UCA. Since the Spring of 1984, 77 students have gained internship experience at various agencies ranging almost from A to Z, actually from ADEM to WWT. Do any of these agencies look familiar? AHTD, AGFC, ASP, ASWCC, APDC, CCP, CSD, FTN, KATV, LRPWD, NRCS, OCHA, PCP, PAGIS, USACE, USFS, and USFWS. If your agency is in need of students with geographical skills, especially cartographic and GIS, please let us know and we’ll provide you with “only the best.”

Dr. Jerry Reynolds

### **Gamma Theta Upsilon to be reactivated at UCA...**

Gamma Theta Upsilon (GTU) is an international honor society in geography, and UCA’s chapter is being reactivated. Our chapter, Iota Xi, actually has a long history at UCA, being founded in 1967. Being a very student-oriented and student-driven organization, its activity has varied based upon student interest and participation. It was active back in the mid-90’s with organized trips and social events along with a sponsored lecture series of professional geographers as guest speakers.

Recently, several students have indicated an interest in getting the chapter active again. Being an honor society, not honorary, membership indicates a higher level of accomplishment and interest in the field of geography, and is an additional kudo to include on one's resume. Membership requirements include having completed at least three semesters of course work, at least three geography courses, maintaining a B average in geography course work, and being in the upper 35% of one's class.

If any students or alumni are interested in joining GTU, please contact me at [JeffA@uca.edu](mailto:JeffA@uca.edu) for further information. There is a small initiation fee that includes lifetime membership.

Dr. Jeff Allender

### Hi from Suzanne...

I'm back! I have worked for geography the twenty years I have been employed at UCA, but when the three departments were combined, I had to move to the political science office. I have been gone for about five years and have truly missed being located in geography and am so glad to be back home with the geographers. We are all excited to have the Geography Department again and move on to bigger and better things. A few things have changed in my life. One exciting change is that I am now the very proud grandmother (Mimi) of two precious girls, and the other change is the color of my hair. If you ever come to UCA's campus, be sure and come by the office and see us!

Mrs. Suzanne Rogers

