

department of GEOGRAPHY

SPRING 2017



UNC
COLLEGE OF
ARTS & SCIENCES



THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL

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This newsletter is produced by the Information Committee, which consists of faculty members Elizabeth Havice (Co-chair and Editor), Jun Liang (Co-Chair), Scott Kirsch, Nina Martin and graduate student Michelle Padley.

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL
Carolina Hall, Campus Box 3220
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3220
geography@unc.edu

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GEOGRAPHY

FROM the CHAIR

As I write, Spring is in full force here in Chapel Hill. Flowers are blooming, the campus quads are filled with students, and everyone is celebrating Tarheel basketball!

I'm pleased to bring you the 2017 annual newsletter highlighting the impressive work of undergraduate and graduate students and faculty as well as a distinguished alumnus. Dr. Stephen Birdsall's 50 year milestone at UNC is celebrated in

the newsletter and continues to be celebrated in Chapel Hill. While he is officially retired he is still teaching and is in the office just about every day. Undergraduate Morehead-Chain Fellow Martha Isaacs has focused on urban geography and will pursue a career in transportation planning — but in the immediate future she will live and work in Asia as the recipient of a prestigious Luce Scholarship. The innovative research of Dr. Betsy Olson is highlighted; she spent much of her early academic career in the United Kingdom where one of her specialties was on the geography of youth caregivers (children who need to care for adults or other children) and she has expanded that work to the United States. The newsletter will also take you inside Dr. Gabriela Valdivia's first year seminar on nature and society and

give you a peek into graduate student Darius Scott's work on the historical rural black community roads in the Jim Crow South, as well as graduate student Matt Dannenberg's research on how forests interact with climate and hydrological systems. We are also delighted to have a note from distinguished alumnus Alex Robertson, who reflects fondly on Chapel Hill and how training as a geographer has shaped the way he sees the world. This year we are also pleased to include updates from alumni -- keep them coming, we love hearing from you!

Please visit our department website (geography.unc.edu) regularly to learn about the most recent happenings in the department. The Department of Geography is grateful to its alumni and friends for their financial support. We depend on alumni and friends like

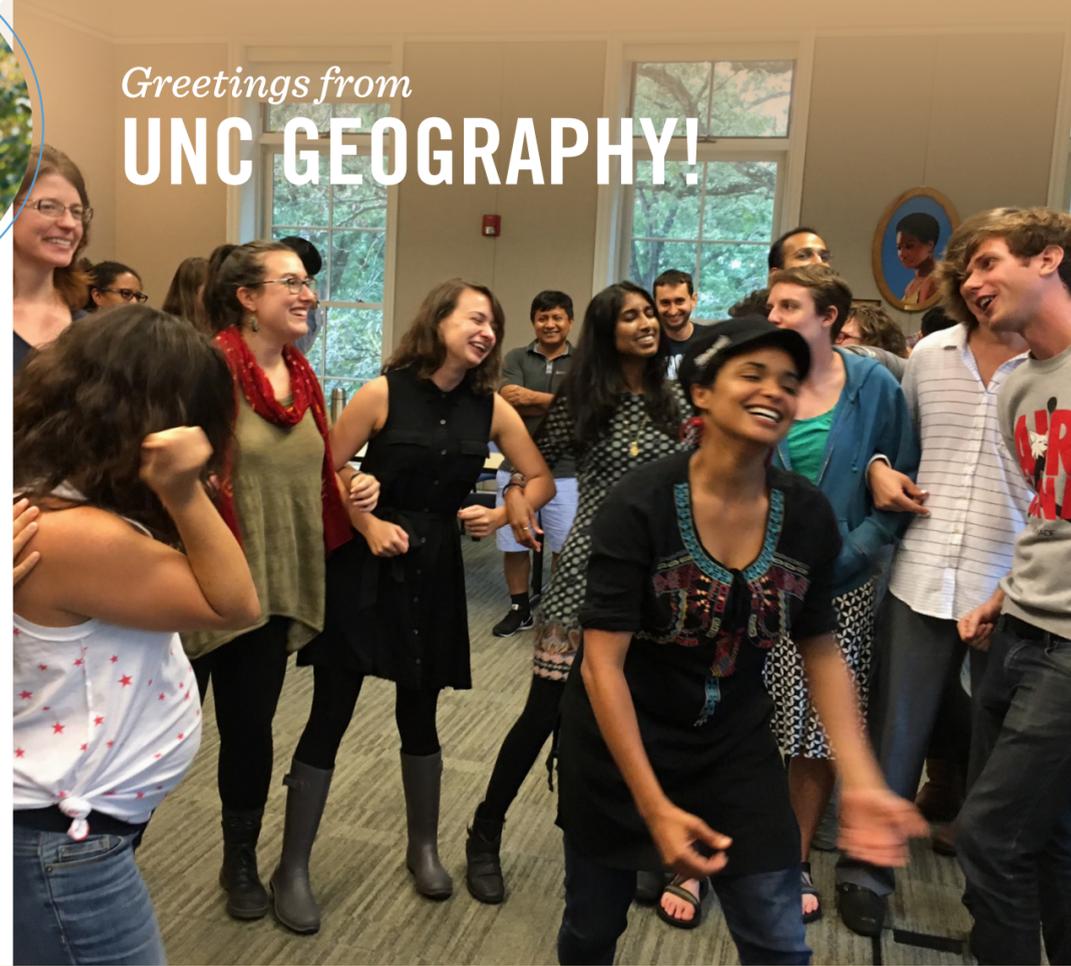
you to help meet our ever-increasing needs. Your gift to the Department can help us meet many goals. Online giving is easy and secure: log onto geography.unc.edu/make-a-gift-to-geography/ for information and links. You can also use the envelope attached to this newsletter. Feel free to email or call me to talk about our programs. And if you are ever in Chapel Hill, please visit us.



Michael Emch
Professor and Chair,
UNC-CH Department of Geography



Greetings from UNC GEOGRAPHY!



NEWS & HIGHLIGHTS

SHARE YOUR NEWS! Please visit geography.unc.edu for more news and profiles of geography faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students and send us an email at geography@unc.edu to share your news.

department news

DR. SONG received a grant from NASA for his study on the impacts of land use, land cover, and climate change on gross and net primary productivity in the Southeastern USA.

DR. GÖKARIKSEL received the Chapman Family Teaching Award for undergraduate teaching. The award honors faculty who demonstrate concern for students while creating meaningful learning experiences.

DR. RIVEROS IREGUI received National Science Foundation funding to study contaminants in water near the Lumbar River, which was affected by extreme raining and flooding during Hurricane Matthew.

Graduate student **PRISCILLA VAZ** received the Tanner award for excellence in undergraduate teaching by graduate teaching assistants.

Graduate student **TREY MURPHY** won second place in the UNC Innovative Use of GIS competition for his research on the "Ownership and Spatial Distribution of Mineral Wealth in the Eagle Ford Shale (Texas, USA)."

Geography major **JOHANNA SCHAAPER** won first place in the UNC GIS Day mapping competition for her work on "New Jersey Crime Rate, Population Change, and Distance Between Law Enforcement."

DR. ERIKA WISE discussed tree coring on an episode of the Travel Channel's "Expedition Unknown" about the Lost Colony of Roanoke.

Graduate student **ANGUS LYALL** received the National Science Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant as well as Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship for his work on the contentious negotiations between Indigenous groups and the Ecuadorian state over oil production in the Amazon.

Graduate student **MARK ORTIZ** represented the American Association of Geographers at the Climate Reality Project's Leadership Corp Training held in Houston, Tx.



Friends of geography celebrate DR. STEPHEN BIRDSALL'S 50 YEARS AT UNC

On December 2nd, 2016, geographers gathered in celebration of Dr. Birdsall's 50 years of service at UNC. Dr. Birdsall delivered the Annual Doug Eyre Distinguished Lecture, which was endowed in honor of John D. "Doug" Eyre, who was not only the first chair of the geography department but held that position when Birdsall was first hired. Since that time, Birdsall has been a prominent figure on campus and in the discipline.

He offered 14 years of service in the South Building as Senior Associate Dean, Acting Dean and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. In the field of geography, Birdsall was editor of the journal *Southeastern Geographer* before he had tenure at UNC. He continued on to be elected to fill offices in the Southeastern Division of the American Association of Geographers before serving as Vice President and President of the national association.

Birdsall takes UNC undergraduates in his Cultural Landscapes course out to the field.

When asked to reflect on his work and legacy, Birdsall noted his feeling of accomplishment at rebuilding his teaching and research portfolio after working in administration for many years. To do so, he brought the efforts together: he taught courses that integrated his new research on rural North Carolinians' experiences of work and published articles on methods for integrating research and teaching. He cites the opportunity to try new challenges and take on new roles as a great



joy of work at UNC because they entail, "reading, talking, listening to people, exploring out in the field, sitting quietly and thinking and then translating all of this into the classroom, course projects and research publications." Birdsall's success is evident: his courses on Cultural Landscapes and World Regional Geography are bursting at the seams and in 2007 he was awarded the annual Board of Governor's Award for Excellence in Teaching, which recognized him for excellent and exceptional undergraduate teaching over a sustained period of time.

Cutting his geographic teeth in the field as a physical geographer, Birdsall has since explored culture, landscapes, why places matter and how they are formulated through inter-personal relationships in time and space. His public talk in December entitled *Wayfaring: Places, Limits, Purposes* left the audience with the message that the joy of life is in the journey, not the destination. When asked where journeys in retirement might take him, his response was one of a wayfarer musing on places he'd like to go and people he'd like to see. Yet, his Tarheel ties are strong and when pressed he responded, "Who's retiring?"

ALEX ROBERTSON

By Morgan McPherson '16



As a child living in New York, Alex Robertson '01 only experienced UNC through the television or through stories from his Carolina alumni relatives. His first visit to campus was as a young teen to watch a basketball game coached by Dean Smith.

"It was daunting and overwhelming but also fun because I had grown up being a Carolina basketball fan and finally got to see the Dean Dome, walk around the campus and meet some players," he said.

When Robertson began considering colleges as an upperclassman at Deerfield Academy in Massachusetts, Carolina was at the top of his list. "I wanted a different climate culturally and geographically," he said.

A lifelong interest in history and geography inspired Robertson to major in both.

"I always liked history, and I think geography I inherited from my dad. He's always had an interest in places, in seeing and experiencing different landscapes and climate."

"At UNC, we watched a movie that said, 'Geography is the mother of history.' Obviously with history there's so much to learn but having a broad geographical knowledge of where we came from helps you understand where we're going and our roots, and why people live the way they do, why they live there and why they migrate."

Alex, the younger of two sons of Julian '55 and Josie Robertson, founders of the Robertson Scholars Program, has continued his parents' legacy of giving through his own generosity to UNC's department of geography each year since 2004.

"My high school's motto was 'be worthy of your heritage,' and Carolina is definitely part of my heritage and I'm very proud of that association. I want to help the institutions that helped me in my life and Carolina is certainly at the top of my list."

Since graduating, Robertson has built a successful career as a managing partner in New York at Tiger Management LLC, the investment firm his father founded.

"New York is a melting pot and people come from all over, so it helps me connect to people to know a little about where they're from, whether it's the city, the climate, the geography, the economy or natural resources. In New York City, two out of five people here aren't born in this country. It's great to be able to connect with them by knowing about where they're from. It can be a gateway and potentially open doors."

Robertson advises current UNC students to study abroad and take advantage of their time in college as a chance to explore all opportunities before settling on a career.

"Study something you're really interested in and don't worry as much about it directly leading to a job. Think about what your passions are and follow those. If you learn how to be analytical and communicate properly, it will take you a long way."



EZRA RAWITSCH

Geography Major, Class of 2019

Geography incorporates what's best about the Liberal Arts and Sciences. Geography is philosophical and numerical; visual, lyrical and elusive. It's a discipline that, above all, demands curiosity. The Department's faculty foster a culture of dialogue and inquisitiveness, which makes for animated and interesting class environments. It's fun!

Through geography I've learned to look at health spatially, and to understand that health equity has a lot to do with access to resources that is very dependent upon where you live. I've learned to use GIS mapping software. I've used GIS to add visuals to my research to communicate more powerfully with target audiences.



EMILIE KADHIM

Geography Major, Class of 2017

News & Highlights, continued...

National Geographic featured the work of **DR. CLARK GRAY** in a blog post titled "Could Climate Change Keep Kids Out of School?"

Geographers from around the world are scheduled to come UNC Chapel Hill May 18th - 20th for a conference on **FEMINIST GEOGRAPHY** organized by the department.

DR. SARA SMITH was awarded a National Science Foundation grant for her research concerning the impacts of education on youth aspirations and identity.

DR. ELIZABETH HAVICE traveled to the Solomon Islands to offer a week-long training on trade and fisheries for government officials from fourteen Pacific Island Countries.

Graduate Student **MAIA CALL** was selected as US Policy Communications Fellow by the Population Reference Bureau.

DR. CHIP KONRAD'S expertise was featured in the Washington Post article, "The raging wildfires in the southeast could be a glimpse of what's to come".

Graduate Student **TONG QIU** won the award for best student paper at the second congress of the Society for Urban Ecology in Shanghai.

Graduate student **AMY BRAUN** was awarded a UNC Graduate School Dissertation Fellowship for her work on how the marine biotech sector contributes to sustainable development.

WCHL Chapelboro interviewed **DRS. BANU GÖKARIKSEL** and **SARA SMITH** for their perspective on how governments enforce and define borders.

Graduate student **PAVITHRA VASUDEVAN'S** research play on environmental justice, "Race and Waste in an Aluminum Town," was performed at UNC.

alumni news

LARRY MARKHAM (BA GEOGRAPHY AND AIRFORCE ROTC DISTINGUISHED GRADUATE, '67)

Completed 22 years in the USAF (retired as Lt Col). Then had 10 years teaching undergraduate business courses in PA & SC. Also retired from SC state government (Museum Commission & Columbia Municipal Airport). Currently taking new geography courses and those that did not exist 50 years ago at the University of SC through free tuition under their senior citizen program. Approaching 50 years of marriage to Dianne (UNC '68) - 4 grown children & 17 grand kids.

DARIUS SCOTT

Uncovering North Carolina's "back ways"

How is it possible to learn about historic wagon roads in rural North Carolina which are no longer in use, roads which may never have appeared on any map? For Geography doctoral candidate Darius Scott, the answer is by talking with people, and listening to stories about "back ways" that have been passed down for generations.

Drawing on methods honed as a research assistant in UNC's Southern Oral History Program, Darius's Ph.D. research, "Exploring the Back Way: An Analysis of Wagon Roads in Rural African American Communities," attempts to understand the complex meanings of these roads for those who experienced them – as landscapes of racial segregation but also as spaces of commercial exchange and relative safety. Their stories are providing Darius with a rich source of information about how the back ways were used:

Darius, who grew up in Oxford, North Carolina, hopes his research will help to break down divides and raise new questions about past uses of place and environment. He became interested in the

wagon roads out of "a concern that what we learn from basic scholarship about African American history and places often don't suit what I heard growing up about the very same times and sorts of places. I think the US historical imaginary poorly accommodates the complexity of topics like segregation." His research has been supported through a Ford Foundation Predoctoral Fellowship and Social Science Research Council Dissertation Proposal Development Fellowship.

What does Darius do when he's not recovering North Carolina's rural back ways? "I write poetry when I'm exceptionally stressed out. Also, I try to approach the research topic from an unfamiliar point of view just for curiosity's sake."

“ORAL HISTORIES IN RURAL BLACK COMMUNITIES DEMARCAT THESE HISTORIC, COMMUNITY PLACES THROUGH ANECDOTES AND GENEALOGICAL INFORMATION AND, FOR MY STUDY, OFTEN IN REFERENCE TO OLD WAGON ROADS. THE ONES I'VE RECORDED HAVE MAPPED THESE VERY SMALL, TIGHT-KNIT NEIGHBORHOODS AND INSCRIBE THEM WITH HISTORIES THAT GO AS FAR BACK AS THE 1700S. WHAT I'VE BEEN TOLD ABOUT THESE PLACES DOESN'T GENERALLY SUIT WHAT MORE TRADITIONAL CARTOGRAPHIC OR "TOP-DOWN" VIEWS ALLOW US TO KNOW ABOUT THE VERY SAME AREAS.

—Darius Scott



Geography PhD student Darius Scott participates in a research seminar.

FACULTY RESEARCH PROFILE

DR. ELIZABETH OLSON

Associate Professor Elizabeth Olson first learned about "young carers" while conducting a large research project about youth religiosity in the United Kingdom, where she was on the faculty of the School of GeoSciences at the University of Edinburgh.

Through the serendipity of collaborative fieldwork, she found herself working with a group of young women under the age of 18 who had caregiving responsibilities in their homes. For most families, and particularly those with scarce household resources, young people may provide significant amounts of direct and indirect caregiving in households with parents, grandparents, or siblings with chronic illness, disability, or other health conditions.

When Dr. Olson joined UNC in 2012 as a joint faculty member of Geography and Global Studies, she discovered that youth who are caregivers in the U.S. are not recognized in the same way as they are in the U.K., where they receive services intended to remove barriers to education and enhance wellbeing for them and their families. Over the past four years, she has been building networks of researchers, educators, social workers, and other practitioners in North Carolina and across the U.S. to better understand how youth caregivers might be supported here. She and the team are researching the history of children's caregiving work in the United States and on identifying the prevalence and impacts of youth caregiving. Her team is particularly interested in what she calls 'Bookend Caregiving' relationships,



which entail youth caregivers providing essential care to aging adults, while also receiving care in return. Professor Olson draws these issues together to consider how ethical conceptions of care in moral philosophy might help us understand the new and emerging conditions of global caregiving.

People who first hear about her work often ask her, "How is what you do geography?" She has a ready answer - there are few fields that provide the theoretical and empirical tools to couple intimate experiences of a child caregiver with larger scales of economic, political, and social change. This is also true for her contributions to research on contemporary religion in which she draws on ideas of everyday religiosity and landscape to explore how young people create new practices and spiritual spaces and uses participatory research methods like film-making to make abstract ideas more concrete.

What does Professor Olson think is the best thing about working in UNC geography? She says, "Our students, hands down." She frequently brings geography majors to work with her on her research projects, and loves that our students, from first year undergraduates to PhDs, are always willing to try out new experiments in research-led, participatory learning.

News & Highlights, continued...

BOYD MICHAEL "MICK" BROWN (BA, '70)

Retired from US Navy with 3 tours in Vietnam Nam as Naval Aviator. Squadron Commanding Officer, Chief-of-Staff of Air Wing, 3 deployments to Antarctica as air arm for Operation Deep Freeze. UNC geography major invaluable.

DON KIRKMAN WILSON (KIRK) (BA, '72)

Favorite Professor: John Florin. Favorite Memories: Other than the best years of my life as an undergraduate - it would have to be receiving a long hand written note every year (for quite a number of years) from Doug Eyre - in response to my small contribution to the Geography Fund! What a wonderful ambassador he was for the Dept. of Geography!

SARA HILL SALAMA (NOW WILLIAMS) (MA, '80)

I retired from UNC in July 2016. I live with my husband Hank in Graham. My new "career" revolves around my 3-year-old granddaughter, Sara Blum Brantley! I am also a home funeral guide and green burial advocate, educating people about their rights to care for their own dead. Check out my blog! shroudingsisters.blogspot.com

STEVE ROBERTS (BA, '80, WITH HONORS)

Started a new career at a ripe old age last year as the Director of Technology Commercialization at Kent State University in Ohio. We have the world-famous Liquid Crystal Institute here (inventors of the display unit on the iPhone 7, and millions of TVs, computer monitors, etc.) and other state of the art research scientists, which keep me scrambling to digest the tech and support spin-off companies and licenses. Working with other research institutions all over the US and the world, so I like to think that I am putting my Geography degree to good use!

NEIL ALDERMAN (BA, '83)

For the last 6 years I have been a Utility Scale Solar Farm Developer in North Carolina using my GIS and location skills for a very worthy purpose. Thus far I have been involved in 17 Farms totaling 101 MW's, which is enough to power 12,000 homes for a year!

BEN THRASH (BA, GEOGRAPHY AND CHEMISTRY, '96)

I recently accepted a position as Deputy Head of School at the International School of Helsinki. My wife Rachael and two kids Elijah and May will relocate to Finland in July 2017 to begin a new adventure in Helsinki.

JOHN TURNER-MCCLELLAND (BA, GEOGRAPHY AND POLITICAL SCIENCE, '99)

Was accepted into the evening cohort MBA program in Fall '16 at University of Texas at Dallas. In Spring '17 I am participating in an international management elective that had us

NATURE-SOCIETY FIRST YEAR SEMINAR

The students in Professor Gabriela Valdivia's first year seminar on *Nature and the Problem of Its Preservation* spent the fall semester grappling with Professor Valdivia's provocation that, "nature is not only a thing that's 'out there' with boundaries that are fixed and separate from people.

Nature is always being transformed by relationship among people and by our values." In class, students grappled with ideas about property and a range of approaches to natural resource management and were tasked with a semester-long study on the human relationship with oil. Working closely with UNC librarians Matt Jansen, Amanda Henley, and Phil McDaniel, Valdivia developed a dataset tracking the movement of oil shipping containers over a ten year period to use for spatial analysis research; students used the data to identify a site where the oil made landfall and then explored the kinds of transformations that unfolded around oil in that place.

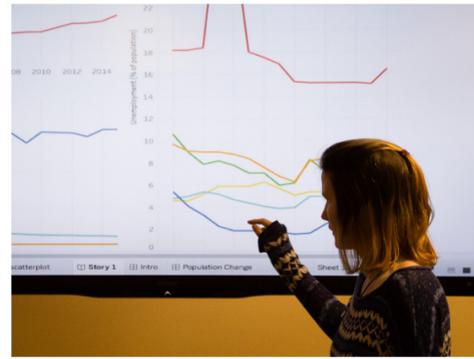
As is the norm for Carolina's exceptional students, and especially our curious and innovative Geographers, the students rose to the challenge, a particularly impressive feat given that it was their first semester at Carolina and many had no prior experience working with spatial and quantitative data or the subject matter. They worked with Dr. Valdivia and graduate student Maia Call to develop research questions and hone analytical skills that would enable them to put data into context. They overlaid oil infrastructure with other information such as demographic data, election results data, and ultimately told compelling stories about places where oil and people mix.

“ THIS COURSE... PUSHED ME TO THINK ABOUT TOPICS LIKE PROPERTY RIGHTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE THAT I WOULD NEVER HAVE THOUGHT ABOUT IF IT WEREN'T FOR THE READINGS AND DISCUSSIONS WE HAD IN PROFESSOR VALDIVIA'S CLASS.

—Lucy Min, first year student

First year Lucy Min and her group compared the economic, cultural and environmental effect of large scale oil refineries on two of the largest port cities in the US: El Segundo, CA and Houston, TX. The group expected to find that the oil industry both boosted and harmed the economy, but wasn't sure what to expect in terms of cultural and social impacts. According to Min, "The most interesting part of the research was finding out that the oil companies have many programs to benefit people living in the port cities, such as health educational programs or cultural celebration events. It was also interesting to weigh the cons of having large scale refineries, like the negative effects on the environment, against the positive boosts, such as jobs, that they can provide in the economy."

At the end of the fall semester, students gathered in small groups to present final projects, and the energy and excitement in the room began to grow. Students showcased their new visualization and communication skills on storyboarding software Tableau, narrating their oil stories with maps, graphs and figures that revealed how oil and life mix. They excitedly discussed their findings and



First year students present their research findings in the Collaboration Center in Davis Library's Research Hub.

remaining questions. Reflecting on a successful project, Min said, "I'm very glad I took this course because it pushed me to think about topics, like property rights and environmental justice, that I would never have thought about if it weren't for the readings and discussions we had in Professor Valdivia's class." Graduate student Call noted being particularly impressed with the growth of the students over the semester, "Though they were freshly out of high school, by the end of the semester they were able to combine data with the concepts from the class and create compelling visualizations and stories about life in the presence of oil — a resource that is so central to everyday life."

GRADUATE
STUDENT
PROFILE

MATT DANNENBERG



Q TELL US ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND AND HOW YOU BECAME INTERESTED IN UNC GEOGRAPHY GRADUATE PROGRAM.

I earned my B.A. in English and Philosophy from a small liberal arts college (Hope College), but discovered after graduation that I was most interested in environmental science. I began taking GIS and remote sensing classes at UNC in 2010 before becoming a full time graduate student in 2011. I finished my M.A. in Geography in 2013 and will finish my Ph.D. this year. I use tree rings and satellite imagery to examine how forests interact with other parts of the Earth system, particularly with the climate system and hydrological systems. My work mostly focuses on how atmospheric circulation and precipitation seasonality affect vegetation phenology and productivity in dry regions of western North America.

Q HOW DO YOU SEE YOUR RESEARCH CONTRIBUTING TO THE FIELD OF GEOGRAPHY?

I have had the opportunity to participate in outreach activities near my study sites in Washington state, including presenting my work on remote sensing of environmental systems at the Wenatchee River Institute in Leavenworth, WA. It has also been a privilege to work with my supervisor, Dr. Erika Wise, and other collaborators to share findings with elementary and high school students. It was especially rewarding to share my experiences as a first generation college graduate with high school students in Yakima, WA.

Q WHY IS THIS RESEARCH IMPORTANT?

Forests provide many goods and services that humans and other animals rely upon, including by providing a large sink for anthropogenic emissions of CO₂. Changes in temperature and hydroclimate are likely to affect the functioning of forests and other ecosystems, but there remains significant disagreement over whether the positive influences of climate change on vegetation will outweigh its negative consequences.

Q WHAT'S NEXT FOR MATT DANNENBERG?

I'm primarily pursuing tenure-track positions at research universities, so interviews have demanded quite a bit of attention recently and I've been enjoying working on my scientific communication skills. When not working, I also make time for swimming, disc golf, playing card and board games, and reading science fiction and fantasy novels.



Dannenberg collecting an increment core from a Ponderosa Pine in Washington.

News & Highlights, continued...

travel abroad to Melbourne, Australia during spring break to learn about their business successes and challenges.

KATHLEEN CAGGIANO (BA, '00)

I got married on November 19, 2016, in Virginia. Despite marrying a Dookie, things have turned out well! In addition, I will be celebrating my 10-year work anniversary at Bloomberg BNA this year; I am currently a Managing Editor in the Tax & Specialty Division.

IYON MITCHELL (BA, '00)

Appointed Director of Institutional Effectiveness, Research and Planning at Roanoke Chowan Community College in Ahoskie, NC.

LOGAN YONAVJACK (BA, '07)

I recently graduated from Yale with a joint Master of Forestry and MBA (2016). I'm the Manager of Market Research & Analysis for CREO Syndicate, a network of family offices interested in impact investing.

SEAN LANGBERG (BA, '10)

I've recently moved to New York City to begin a job at the Institute of International Education's Scholar Rescue Fund, which provides fellowships to scholars across the world whose lives and work is threatened. My experience with the geography department, Dr. Kirsch in particular, was the most rewarding academic experience of my time at UNC and directly helped with employment after graduation!

PATRICK PETERSON (BA, '10)

I live in Charlotte, NC, and I manage national corporate accounts for Extended Stay America. Thankfully that means lots of my quality work hours are spent with Google Maps, hunting for housing options. My wife of 3 years Jenny and I zealously look forward to becoming parents this July.

CAMERON HORNE (BA, '13 WITH DISTINCTION IN PUBLIC SERVICE)

I started with Durham County Government as the Emergency Management Planner August 29, 2016. During that time I have deployed multiple times, including helping Princeville and Edgecombe County after Hurricane Matthew, in Hillsborough with the Water Crisis that affected Chapel Hill and Orange County, and other events. I'm also a MS candidate in Geography at University of South Carolina.

LOGAN SAVAGE (BA, GEOGRAPHY AND GLOBAL STUDIES '14)

I started a French language master's program at University of Paris Diderot in Geography and Territory Science. This semester my independent research project is mapping the digital divide in Europe and in the world.

MARTHA ISAACS

Q WHERE DO YOU COME FROM AND WHERE DO YOU NOW CALL HOME?

I grew up north of Baltimore, Maryland, and I still consider Baltimore my home, although I feel strong ties to the Chapel Hill-Carrboro area as well. Seeing my professors on the bike path, eating croissants outside at Weaver Street Market, running on the Bolin Creek Trail, and sitting in the courtyard between Hurston and Murphey Halls make UNC feel like home too.

Q AMONG OTHER UNIVERSITIES YOU APPLIED TO, WHY DID YOU CHOOSE UNC-CH?

I chose UNC-CH because I was attracted to the idea of learning about a place (I suppose I was a geographer from the start). At UNC, I have friends from around the state - Charlotte, Raleigh, Asheville, Wilmington, and have learned about the food, music, and politics in regions of North Carolina. The relaxed nature of UNC also appealed to me. I have never felt a competitive spirit from other classmates. In fact, I find that some of my best learning and discovery occurs from working with my peers, such as studying for statistics with classmates or diving into a global value chain research project with a group partner.

Q AMONG OTHER MAJORS AT UNC, WHY DID YOU CHOOSE GEOGRAPHY?

Older students involved in activism, research, and projects studied Geography, and I asked them about what drew them to the major. Each responded with an entirely different answer, and I realized Geography's interdisciplinary quality would provide diverse perspectives to my study of the production of space.

Q WHAT DO YOU BRING TO GEOGRAPHY AT UNC? HOW HAS STUDYING GEOGRAPHY HERE INFLUENCED YOU?

My geography studies focus on urban geography and planning. Geography has given me the critical, theoretical framework to analyze more technical aspects of the built environment. As I pursue a career as a transportation planner, I hope to incorporate the economic geography principles and research strategies learned at UNC. My thesis in Geography centers on barriers to cycling within the Burmese-originated refugee community in Chapel Hill-Carrboro; it pairs transportation geography theory with physical infrastructure considerations.

Q WHAT GEOGRAPHIC SKILLS AND IDEAS HAVE YOU ENGAGED?

During the fall of my junior year, I studied abroad with the School of International Training, and lived with families in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Dakar, Senegal, and Hanoi, Vietnam. My mapping skills, consideration of everyday practices of residents, and understanding of historical global economic policies and world systems theory, made me able to experience neighborhoods as learning labs. In the spring semester, I included these geographic skills in the C-Start (Carolina Students Taking Academic Responsibility Through Teaching) class that I taught about concepts of home and sense of place.

Q WHERE DOES A UNC GEOGRAPHY MAJOR TAKE YOU, NOW AND IN THE FUTURE?

I have recently learned that I have been selected as a Luce Scholar! The Luce Scholars Program is designed to enhance the understanding of Asia among potential leaders in American Society. I will spend a year living and working in the field of transportation planning in a city in Asia and will also receive language training.

Martha Isaacs, standing outside of Baltimore's Penn Station. Isaacs notes the line of taxis waiting to pick people up from the station. As a self-proclaimed 'transportation nerd', she ponders their fate as new Transportation Network Companies like Uber and Lyft become viable first/last mile options.