

Biographical Sketch: Professor John D. “Doug” Eyre
Emeritus Professor of Geography
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
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Professor John D. “Doug” Eyre grew up in Delaware and received his A.B., M.A., and PhD (1951) degrees from the University of Michigan. His long-standing interest in East Asia dates from Army service (1942-1946) as a Japanese language officer and doctoral research in Japan (1950-1951). After six years on the faculty of the University of Washington (1951-1957), Doug came to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill as an Associate Professor in what was then the Department of Geology & Geography. He became Professor and initial Chair of the newly independent Department of Geography in 1962.

Doug’s main teaching interests have included World Regional Geography, U.S. Historical Geography, East Asia Geography, and Political Geography, although in the earlier days of the department a small faculty made it necessary for him to teach a broader range of courses and seminars. Retiring at the then-mandatory retirement age of 70 in 1992, Doug continued to teach in a part-time capacity for 9 more years, and he continued to oversee the department’s fund-raising activities and remained active in library affairs.

In addition to his teaching excellence, he has supervised 36 theses and dissertations; published several dozen books, monographs, articles and reviews, most of them dealing with Japan’s urban and economic geography; spent three year-long and six shorter research periods in Japan; did research in Micronesia (1983); and traveled widely in East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, the USSR, Middle East, and Europe.

Extremely active in campus affairs, Doug has served on the Faculty Council and on a number of elected and appointed faculty committees and administrative boards. During 1970-1977, he was Coordinator (now Director) of International Programs and academic advisor (International Studies and other majors) in the College of Arts and Sciences. He also participated in the eventual creation of an undergraduate Asian Studies degree program. He guided creation of the Faculty Handbook and two later editions. Although the UNC Library was a depository for maps produced by the federal government and had a large backlog of unsorted maps, it did not have a separate map room for their storage, display, and use. Doug worked with the library administration until such a facility, managed by a professional map librarian, was created in the 1960s. Also active in alumni affairs, Doug has served as chairman (1982-1991) of the Friends of the Library and is a member of the Dean’s Club and Chancellor’s Club. He received the 2004 General Alumni Association Faculty Service Award. And he was listed in Who’s Who for two decades (1960-1980).

Doug also served the university as a very successful fund raiser. In 1984 Eyre set a goal to match a \$150,000 alumni bequest for the new Davis Library, asking 150 alumni to contribute \$1,000 each. Eyre called on a former student of his, 1986 graduate Michael Jordan, who made the initial pledge. Eyre’s fund-raising prowess also was demonstrated during the 1993 Bicentennial Campaign, when he co-chaired the Faculty-Staff Campus Campaign that raised some \$9.9 million from about 34 percent of the university community. In 1989, Doug was honored with the \$200,000 J.D. Eyre Geography Travel Fund, established by a distinguished alumnus of the department, Dr. Voit Gilmore of Southern Pines, North Carolina. Income from the fund facilitates faculty and student travel that will “bring the world into the Chapel Hill classroom.”

Doug has served his profession as member and national program chairman of the Association of American Geographers, member and program chairman of the Association for Asian Studies, and member of the American Geographical Society. At Carolina, Doug played a leading role in internationalizing the curriculum with his research and teaching on East Asia. Nearly 50-years after Doug Eyre joined the faculty at UNC, the international perspective is more important than ever, and the university is making a concerted effort to “globalize” the curriculum.

Doug has for years written a regular column on Chapel Hill history for the Chapel Hill News, uncovering and explaining interesting aspects of the town’s history, geography and development. He and Olga have been model citizens, contributing to the town’s cultural and civic life, and contributing to the strong town-gown relations. Today, Doug, an Emeritus Professor in the Department of Geography at UNC-Chapel Hill, and his wife, Olga, who was a Chapel Hill businesswoman for 20 years, reside at their McCauley Street home, within easy walking distance of the campus and downtown. A son, Eric, also lives in Chapel Hill, a daughter, Katie, resides in nearby Virginia, and another son, Alex, lives in Seattle.

Above all, there is countless Tar Heels who remember Doug as their favorite professor. He is always personable, interested and helpful, and has been dedicated to making students’ experience at Carolina the best years of their lives. He is in touch with many of his former students, keeps up with their lives, and regularly corresponds with them.

Finally, Doug is considered the department’s “treasure.” Providing guidance, scholarly leadership, and integrity, Doug has left his imprint in the department far and wide, educating and fostering excellence in undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty in the department, discipline of geography, and across campus. There is no better statement of “personal” success and enrichment of a Carolina geographer than to say “I knew Professor Eyre!” His contributions to geography and to the campus are considerable, perpetuating, and indelible.