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This newsletter is produced by the Information Committee, which consists of faculty members Christian Lentz (Chair and Editor-in-Chief), Paul Delamater, Jun Liang, John Pickles, Diego Riveros-Iregui, and graduate students Mary Biggs (Text Editor), Lily Herbert (Graphic Designer), and Caitilin McMillon.

PHOTO CREDIT: ALYSSA LAFARO

In photo: From left to right: Maribel Herrera, Chloe Schneider, and Nehemiah Stewart collect measurements of greenhouse gases from high-elevation peatlands in the Cayambe Coca Ecological Reserve, in northern Ecuador. As part of UNC geographer Diego Riveros-Iregui’s NSF Early Career Award, these undergrads — along with two more and a Ph.D. student — spent seven weeks studying this environment to learn how carbon and water travel through alpine tropical watersheds. This work helps researchers understand how carbon emissions affect climate change.
**LETTER FROM THE CHAIR**

It is difficult to formulate a greeting in times of dramatic change that has brought such hardship and sorrow to so many.

And yet, this pair of words, “and yet,” has become my way of reminding myself of the remarkable qualities of the Carolina geography community. Our department had one week to take all of our courses to virtual learning, and yet our staff, faculty, lecturers and teaching assistants worked tirelessly to ensure continuity of learning. Our students have faced disappointment and hardship leaving campus abruptly, and yet they continue to engage in their work to create an undergraduate lounge for all future geography students to leave a lasting legacy that humbles us in its spirit and commitment. Research projects have been delayed, and yet our faculty remain amongst the most prolific publishers of any geography department in the country.

Written largely before the pandemic closed UNC’s campus, this newsletter is an account of the people who make our broader community so special. I’m struck by the number of additional accolades that have been earned by our faculty even in the short time since the content of the newsletter was finalized. Dr. Valdivia received the University’s Tanner Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching, the second year in a row that a Geography professor has received this honor. Dr. Delamater was awarded a prestigious NIH K Award that will fund five years of his research on the relationship between geography and herd immunity (catch him in a new podcast, COVID Conversations). Graduate students continue to earn awards and accolades that are too numerous to list here, ranging from NSF research grants to fellowships to work alongside community organizations.

And yet, the consequences of the pandemic have uneven impacts upon our community. The financial insecurities of many of our graduate students have been thrown into stark relief, and international students face unprecedented uncertainties. The pandemic has hit household finances and resulted in the cancellation of grants and fellowships that represent years of work. It is here that our geography community, and the committed support of our dedicated donors, has made a true difference. The Stephen S. Broidy Student Summer Award Fund will support the graduate student research that has made our program one of the most competitive in the country. Our Carolina geography community also reminds us that in these times of hardship, we can continue to look forward to creating life-changing opportunities for our students. The new Alix T. Robertson Study Abroad Fund will allow geography undergraduates to travel abroad and experience firsthand the importance of geography for engaging with the world. We can’t wait to share the impact of these programs with you in future years.

Geography matters more than ever, and our work at Carolina continues with unprecedented heart and dedication. Thank you for being a part of it.

Elizabeth Olson
Professor and Chair, UNC–EJI Department of Geography

**FEMINISMS HERE & NOW & SHERAH FAULKNER**

Feminisms Here & Now is an interdisciplinary conference organized by Ph.D. students in the Departments of Communication and Geography. The 2019 theme, “Difficult Attachments,” drew from discussions around the conference’s three prior themes (“An Interdisciplinary Conversation,” “Alongside | Across | Against,” and “Continuities and Contradictions”) by taking up the complexities of connection, wherever they may lie.

**NEWS & HIGHLIGHTS**


Dr. John Lepofsky was granted a Curriculum Development Award by UNC’s Center for European Studies.

Dr. Elizabeth Olson was awarded a National Science Foundation grant for her project: “F rank, Family Caregivers, and the Geography of Childhood.” The study enhances an ongoing partnership with the American Association of Geering Youth, and with youth caregivers living in Palm Beach County, Florida.

Dr. Banu Gökarıksel led a group of Duke undergraduates for the 2019 Duke Middle East in Europe summer program. They conducted research on labour migration and refugee spaces in Berlin.

Dr. Canghe Song was featured in UNC’s Endeavors series for his work on remote sensing and changing landscapes in China.

Dr. Clark Gray received an NIH award to investigate climate-induced migration in Sub-Saharan Africa with a focus on how this process varies over space and how destination areas are affected.

Dr. John Pickles led a group of UNC undergraduates for UNC’s 2019 Summer in Paris program. Students took courses in French and urban geographies, and completed independent research projects.

Dr. Gabriela Valdivia received Tanner Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching. This recognizes both her innovations in undergraduate education and her commitment to excellence in teaching, research and mentorship.

Dr. Christian Lentz, in partnership with the National Humanities Center, won an award from the National Endowment for the Humanities to hold a summer institute for K-12 Teachers in July 2020. Over 30 teachers from across the US will come to the Triangle for two weeks to learn about “Contested Territory: America’s Role in Southeast Asia, 1945-75.”

Dr. Erika Wise received a 3-year NSF award for her project on “Multi-Centuries Perspectives on Current and Future Flow in the Lowland Mississippi River Basin.”
Pallavi Gupta is a third-year Ph.D. student studying the intersection of waste, space, gender, and labor relations in India. Last summer, she was one of 10 UNC graduate students awarded a Professional Pathways Fellowship by the Mellon-funded Humanities for the Public Good Initiative.

WHAT DO YOU BRING TO GEOGRAPHY AT UNC? HOW HAVE STUDYING GEOGRAPHY HERE INFLUENCED YOU?
I come with a bachelor’s in law, a master’s in social work, and nearly 10 years of work experience in the non-profit sector in India. The strength of geography as an interdisciplinary field has been very rewarding for me. Scholarship in the fields of political geography, feminist geography, and geographical materialism, to name a few, have shaped my current research on space, waste, and power.

WHAT DID YOU CHOOSE GEOGRAPHY AT UNC?
I had the opportunity to meet Dr. Sara Smith before applying for the program. Her warm personality and welcoming approach convinced me to come here. Equally importantly, the interdisciplinary nature of the department and the ongoing research in various sub-fields of human geography made it a compelling choice for my graduate studies.

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE?
I aspire to pursue a tenure track position and research questions of inequality based on caste, race, gender, space, and labor. I am further interested in building stronger synergies between Smith Asian scholarship and those here in the U.S.

SEBASTIAN COBARRUBIAS

Sebastian Cobarrubias graduated with his Ph.D. in Geography in 2009 and joined Dr. John Pickles’ research group as a post-doctoral fellow. He has since been teaching in International Studies at the University of North Carolina – Charlotte.

This year he and his partner Maribel Casas Cortes (Ph.D. Anthropology UNC Chapel Hill and post-doc in Geography) have taken up exciting new positions at the University of Zaragoza in Spain. Both were — and remain — active members of 5Cs: the Counter-Cartography Collective.

As collaborating authors, Sebastian and Maribel have written extensively on the changing geographies and cartographies of migration and border management in Europe, with particular case studies of EU policies in Spain and Morocco. Maribel has also written extensively on precarious work and feminist research practice.

Sebastian has joined ARAID, the Development and Research Agency of Aragon’s Government at the Geography Department. Maribel has been awarded the very competitive international Spanish Government Ramon y Cajal research fellowship funded by the European Union.

Accessible to students new to the field, this handbook edited by Associate Professor Sara Smith offers critical approaches to political geography—including questions of gender, sexuality, race, and difference. The chapters explain central political concepts such as citizenship, security, and territory in a geographic context.

Edited by Professor and Chair Elizabeth Olson and colleagues, this handbook features 48 new contributions from both experienced and emerging scholars, artists and activists who critically review and appraise current feminist theory and politics.
Paul Delamater

Dr. Paul Delamater, Assistant Professor in the Department of Geography, studies the geographic aspects of health outcomes and behaviors, as well as health care access and utilization. His recent research has focused on understanding childhood vaccination, herd immunity, and vaccine-preventable diseases in the U.S.

Why did you choose to teach at UNC-Chapel Hill? What would you want others to know about Geography here?

I chose to come to Geography at UNC-Chapel Hill because it is a world-class department at a world-class university. As a health geographer, I was also drawn to the department because of its rich history in health and medical geography. Research conducted by UNC Geography professors Mike Emch, Melinda Meade, Robert Emch, and Will Gesler (to name just a few) has been highly influential in my development as a scholar.

How did you become a geographer?

Free pizza! I began my undergraduate education as an engineering major (because my father was an engineer). After a couple of years, I realized that engineering was not for me. One day, when I was heading into a classroom, I saw a sign for a Geography Open House where they were serving free pizza. I couldn’t pass up a chance to get free pizza, so I went to the event that afternoon and was blown away when seeing the components of GIScience (GIS, remote-sensing, and cartography) for the first time.

What impact does your work have, and how would you like to see it develop now and in the future?

One of my best early career successes has been my ability to integrate geographic ideas and approaches to population health issues in a way that is interesting to a broad range of people. In the last few years, my research on vaccine hesitancy and vaccine-related policy has been featured in popular press outlets such as the Wall Street Journal, CONN.com, the Los Angeles Times, and Mother Jones. I recently received an NIH K-01 grant which will allow me to ask and answer some important questions about how outbreak risks are associated with geographic clustering of vaccine hesitancy. I think that this work will provide important information that can be used by scientists, policymakers, public health practitioners, and others to reduce the risk of vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks.

Tell us more about your research, and what the perspective of Geography brings to your work.

I use GIS and spatial analysis methods to study population health issues. Recently, my work has focused on vaccination, vaccine hesitancy, and vaccine-preventable disease outbreak risk in the United States. Geography plays a huge role in all aspects of this work because the geographic arrangement of beliefs and behaviors (i.e., not vaccinating children because of objections to vaccination) has a direct effect on the risk of an adverse outcome (outbreak). Another very interesting and important aspect of this work is that people’s reaction to vaccine-related policy changes is highly variable across space. This results in a highly variable and constantly changing landscape of vaccine beliefs and behaviors and disease outbreak risk.

Cameron Taylor

As a first year at UNC, Cameron Taylor noticed that a lot of courses she wanted to take were geography courses. “The classes ranged from environmental science, and she credits the department with laying the foundation of her career in public health.

During the summers of 2007 and 2008, Taylor worked with Dr. Michael Emch to integrate GPS data collection into ongoing vaccine trials in Lilongwe, Malawi. “My time in Malawi did more than just build my research skills,” Taylor says now. “It also introduced me to my love of studying malaria.”

Taylor explains that malaria epidemiology often varies over relatively small geographic areas. Understanding spatiotemporal variation has important implications for national programs seeking to control and eliminate malaria. After graduating from UNC with her Bachelor of Arts in 2010, Taylor earned a master’s in public health at Tulane University.

She continued to work with malaria data using skills in GIS she learned at UNC. After graduating from Tulane, Taylor began working at The Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) Program in Rockville, Maryland. She is now the malaria technical coordinator at the DHS.

I met a lot of amazing students, teachers, and mentors in the UNC geography department who I still interact with today on a personal and professional level. I am still crossing paths with people I knew from the geography department either at conferences, technical meetings, or in walking through the airport in Nairobi! You never know when you will run into a fellow Tarheel geography major!
As a paleoclimatologist, Erika Wise studies climate trends from the past thousand years. Her methods of inquiry may be complicated — using microscopic cross-dating and isotope analysis — but her research begins with something far more common: trees.

One limitation of dendrochronology is that samples usually provide only one value per year. For example, a sample can indicate that, overall, 1725 was a drought year but discrepancies can occur within that year. Although 1725 could have been dry on average, it may have also experienced lots of precipitation in the winter due to unusually abundant snowfall.

To branch out beyond one value per year, Wise partnered with Cary Mock, a colleague at the University of South Carolina. Historical climatologists, including newspapers, diaries, and shipping records — to study past climate patterns. These documents are more detailed, with some measurements taken multiple times per day. Historical climatologists’ information can be limited to where humans live, but dendrochronology’s strength is in the spatial coverage trees provide. By teaming up, Wise and Mock can fill in gaps of their respective records.

The two are analyzing records from West Coast states like Washington, Oregon, and California, between the 1840s and the 1860s — the end of what is known as the Little Ice Age and the beginning of climate change due to human actions. “A lot of our storm systems come off the Pacific and can affect the whole country,” she says. “And the West is really a place of extremes.”
MEGAN RAISLE

“THERE IS SPACE FOR EVERYONE AND EVERY IDEA IN THIS MOVEMENT.”

Megan Raisle (Geography ‘20) is passionate about the environment and our place in it.

Recipient of the 2020 McNally Award for Excellence in Geography, Megan Raisle’s many activities include environmental activism and research. Raisle was instrumental in organizing the Chapel Hill Climate Strike on September 20th, 2019. She says there has been a renewed sense of purpose within environmental organizations on campus to work together to encourage UNC’s administration to take immediate and transparent action to get to net zero water, waste, and emissions.

This winter, Raisle was part of a group of students who represented UNC-CH at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change’s Annual Conference of the Parties in Madrid. “It shone a light for me on the importance of localized, informed action that is fueled by the knowledge that global institutions have failed us and climate activists around the world stand with us.”

She encourages all UNC students to get involved. “If you ever want more information, to share ideas, to talk about any of this, or to jump on a project at UNC, I can help direct you.”

ADAM HASAN

Adam Hasan graduated from UNC–CH in 2019 with a Bachelor’s degree in Geography. At UNC, he completed an honors undergraduate thesis under the mentorship of Dr. John Pickles. Now, one year later, he fills us in on where his geography degree has taken him.

“MY PROFESSORS AND PEERS IN THE UNC GEOGRAPHY DEPARTMENT HAVE BEEN SOME OF THE BIGGEST INFLUENCES IN HELPING ME ORIENT MY MORAL COMPASS. GEOGRAPHY CONTINUES TO INSPIRE ME TO STAY CURIOUS ABOUT THE WORLD, TO KEEP ASKING CRITICAL QUESTIONS, AND TO WORK TO CREATE MORE JUST, EMPATHETIC COMMUNITIES AROUND ME, WHEREVER I HAPPEN TO FIND MYSELF.”

As a geographer working as a historian, I’m often most curious about the places that inspired and framed the Civil Rights Movement. From political economies associated with industrial plantation systems, to political struggles that emerged in response to urban renewal projects, to the spatial manifestations of voter disenfranchisement, understanding the role of place has always been critical for understanding freedom movements around the United States.”

Perhaps because of my family’s diverse geographic origins, I’ve always had an affinity for thinking about the world through my relation to my “place” within it. But I usually tell people it’s to compensate for falling short of my childhood dream of winning the Tennessee Geography Bee in middle school.

“I’m a research assistant at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute at Stanford University. I conduct historical research for the King Papers Project, an effort of the King Institute to publish an authoritative 14 volume collection of King’s most significant speeches, sermons, correspondence, and other notable documents from his life and legacy.

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James Ellsmoor knew he wanted to study geography, but not where he wanted to study geography. He originally applied to universities in his native UK, but UNC’s Morehead-Cain Scholarship drew him to the U.S.

“My first ever trip to the U.S. was to visit UNC-Chapel Hill, and I was sold!” he says now. “It was the best decision.”

Ellsmoor spent last summer in Ecuador as part of the International Research Experience for Undergraduates Program, led by Dr. Diego Riveros-Iregui. Their field experience focused on hydrological and ecological data collection in the Tropical Andes. Ellsmoor explains, “Our ability to connect disparate communities and work across the public, private and academic sectors was largely inspired by my experiences studying geography.”

In 2017, he was recognized on Forbes Magazine’s 30 Under 30 List for his dedication to sustainable development and renewable energy. “Island Innovation is an international consulting and media agency that specializes in environmental issues,” Ellsmoor explains. “Our ability to connect disparate communities and work across the public, private and academic sectors was largely inspired by my experiences studying geography.”

In 2019, the company’s annual Virtual Island Summit was attended by nearly 4,000 islanders worldwide. “We explored many relevant topics from sustainable fisheries to island journalism to cultural preservation,” Ellsmoor says.

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Asked to sum up his experiences as a UNC geographer, Ellsmoor replied: “Geography gave me the chance to travel and learn about new places. Most of all, it gave me a community while studying at UNC!”
NEW MINORS

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

GEOGRAPHY IS TAKING A BOLD AND SMART LEAP TO PROVIDING AN ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE CURRICULUM IN THE STATE WHERE THE EJ MOVEMENT STARTED. IT’S BEEN A LONG TIME COMING – AND MUCH IN DEMAND – AND I’M THRILLED THE DEPARTMENT IS LEADING THE WAY.

– POSTDOC & INCOMING ASSISTANT PROFESSOR DANIELLE PURIFOY

The new Environmental Justice Minor responds to student interest and a pressing need to understand the human dimensions of environmental change in the state and wider world. The Minor will train students in critical social analysis of racial, economic, and political differences as they intersect with environmental concerns. Students will have opportunities to participate in the North Carolina Environmental Justice Summit and the Environmental Justice Symposium.

GISCIENCE

THE GISc MINOR OFFERS THE OPPORTUNITY TO OBTAIN FRESH INSIGHTS INTO THE SPATIAL-TEMPORAL PATTERNS OF SOCIOECONOMIC, CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL PHENOMENA.

Students in the GISc Minor will gain skills in the state-of-the-art geospatial digital technologies, including geographic information systems, remote sensing, global positioning systems, and spatial data analysis. These skills are in high demand for resource management, planning, marketing, healthcare delivery, environment and health, environmental policy and more.