Message from the Chair

The Department of Geography at the University of North Alabama (UNA) prides itself with its dedicated and hardworking faculty. We are committed to excellence in all aspects of our activities – teaching, research, and service. Because students are our number one priority, we dedicate the full measure of our resources and abilities in providing an environment conducive to learning. As a result, we have assembled state of the art geospatial information technologies and also developed innovative instructional techniques to make that happen. Ultimately, we hope to inspire curiosity and creativity that gives our students a competitive edge in the academy and also in the geospatial market place. It is for this reason that the Department embarked on a faculty retreat in June 2013 to create a 5-year strategic plan to advance its goals.

Aware that many activities of significance that took place in our Department in 2012-2013 are reported in other sections of this Newsletter, I will highlight a few. The transition in departmental leadership from Dr. William (Bill) Strong to Dr. Francis Koti on August 1, 2012 was the first big thing. Bill Strong, who had assumed this position for 29 years also retired from the University in December 2012 after 40 years of dedicated service to the Department, UNA, the profession and also the Shoals community. While there has been a change in guard, however, the mission of our Department remains the same: to present the tools and knowledge, yet create a learning environment where our students can explore, acquire, and apply geographic knowledge in ways that set them apart from their peers.

During the year, two faculty members – Dr. Greg Gaston and Dr. Michael Pretes were awarded faculty development leaves by the University. While Dr. Pretes will spend a year at the University of Wyoming teaching and doing research, Dr. Gaston will be based at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania – both teaching and doing research. Dr. Gaston was also awarded a Fulbright scholarship which he will utilize to support his teaching and research activities while in Tanzania. Dr. Michael Pretes was also awarded the Phi Kappa Phi Excellence in Teaching Award. This award has been previously awarded to three other geography faculty members, William Strong, Lisa Keys-Mathews, and Francis Koti – a living testimony of the dedication to excellence in teaching by the Geography faculty. We continue to receive the full support of our Alumni every year. The University of North Alabama Geography Alumni conference is a highlight of our calendar – and has become something we look forward to every year.

There were more activities that merit mention than can fit in this space. Whether it was new and innovative teaching approaches by our faculty, or faculty and student research publications and presentations at conferences, or faculty recognition for excellence in teaching and research or local and international course offerings, or the faculty strategic planning retreat, or just offering services to our community, our goal and commitment was the same: excellence in all aspects of our activities. We look forward to a great 2013-2014 academic year.
Faculty Highlights

Dr. Francis Koti
PhD; GISP.
Associate Professor and Chair

Dr. Francis Koti is the Chair of the Department of Geography at UNA. At the undergraduate level he regularly teaches Principles of Physical Geography I: Weather and Climate, Geography of Africa, GIS, Urban Geography and Principles in Urban and Regional Planning. At the graduate level, he teaches Geographic Thought along with Urban and Regional Planning. Furthermore, he also offers two field courses: Geography of the South and the Geography of Africa, with a focus on Tanzania. Geography of the South allows students to travel by road through five states: Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Tennessee – learning about the physical and cultural environment. Geography of Africa takes students to Tanzania. Based at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, students travel to the Mount Kilimanjaro area, the City of Dar es Salaam, and the Island of Zanzibar to learn about the physical and cultural aspects of these areas. This program has been offered twice with Dr. Greg Gaston.

Dr. Koti’s research interests are in participatory geographic information systems (PGIS), African urbanization, urban and regional planning, third world development and planning, and regional and rural development. He has recently been involved in a research that examined the impacts of modern geospatial technologies on social and spatial exclusion in the fringe of Africa’s largest cities. He mainly explored alternative GIS approaches applicable in data-poor environments, economically depressed areas, and also socially and spatially differentiated social contexts. The research was published as a journal article in Africa Today journal in Spring 2010. He has also been involved in three other research projects. 1) Investigated 14 regional development issues in the State of Alabama – specifically looking at the spatial incidence of levels of educational attainment in the State using GIS, 2) Explored the impacts of urban sprawl in small southern towns in the US, 3) Evaluated the operation of the African Diaspora remittance market. Papers from these projects were presented at regional and national conferences. His current research focus is exploring the sustainability of the emerging “techno cities” on the fringe of Africa’s largest cities. The ultimate goal is to develop an index that can be used to assess the sustainability of these emerging technology-oriented cities.

Dr. Koti is involved with a wide array of professional activities. Along with being Chair of the Department of Geography, he is involved with MS thesis committees, he assisted two Geography students with research that has been accepted to the Southeastern Division of the Association of American Geographers conference, and worked with Gabrielle Jenkins to produce a Newsletter for the Department. Within the Shoals community he serves as Commissioner in the Florence City Planning Commission. The commission recently developed a new code for Planned Unit Developments and also revised the Subdivision Regulations to require sidewalks and street trees in all new subdivisions – among other things. He also served as match announcer for Florence High School soccer team during the 2013 season.

Outside of his professional duties, Dr. Koti enjoys being with his family. He can often be found at one of his son Milton’s high school and club soccer games. He also plays soccer and basketball with Milton. His six year old daughter, Arianna, and he both enjoy swimming. During the college football and basketball season, he follows the West Virginia University Mountaineers and UNA Lions closely. Whenever there is a team for the Department or just faculty and staff, he enjoys bowling or playing basketball and softball.

Dr. David Brommer
PhD.
Assistant Professor

Dr. Brommer is one of the most recent additions to the Geography Department faculty. At the undergraduate level he teaches World Regional Geography, Principles of Physical Geography I: Weather and Climate, Climatology, and Meteorology. He also teaches Environmental Hazards and Applied Climatology at the graduate level and the undergraduate level. As is to be expected when one considers the courses listed above, Dr. Brommer’s research interests lie in the realm of weather and climate. He is specifically interested in the interactions between humans and climate. This includes how people respond to severe weather events and how information is used to make personal protection decisions. He is also interested in modern climate variability and in climate of the built environment. Currently he is working on understanding tornado shelter decisions and communications, as well as evaluating temperature variability in large, semi-enclosed structures, like football and baseball stadiums. During a regular school year he most enjoys incorporating current weather events into his courses, and discussing them with his classes. In the upcoming year he is looking forward to getting more students interested in geography through our introductory courses and through various campus activities. He says, “It is never too soon to change majors to geography!”

Outside of his professional work, Dr. Brommer enjoys spending time with his wife and daughter, small woodworking projects, and occasionally brewing beer.
Dr. Fleming is one of the new additions to the geography department. At the undergraduate level he teaches World Regional Geography, Principles of Physical Geography II: Landscapes, Cartography, and Projects in Geographic Information Science. At the graduate level he teaches a seminar in Geospatial Science and Special Topics in Physical Geography: Biogeography. This past summer he also taught a field course on Biogeography in the American southwest with Dr. Gaston. In the future he would like to develop a service learning course. The goal of this would be to combine the environment of a field course with a service project done during the course.

Dr. Fleming’s research is based in ecological biology. His focus is on the contemporary distributions of organisms and the causes of those distribution patterns. He also applies geospatial technologies to these studies. Most of his experience is with submerged aquatic plants and invasive species. He examines how these invasive species influence the distribution of native species. Furthermore, he looks at how invasive aquatic plants influence aquatic fauna. Currently, he is mapping the distribution of aquatic plants in Pickwick Reservoir. He also is collaborating on a project that is examining the dispersal of black bears in Mississippi.

In the past year, Dr. Fleming served on a discussion panel for GeoHuntsville titled “Educating a Geospatial Workforce.” His service to the department included becoming faculty advisor for the Geography Club as well as organizing Research Day activities.

During the school year, Dr. Fleming most looks forward to getting students in the field; whether it is by short excursions as part of a regular semester class, or through field courses taught while traveling across the country. He considers returning to UNA as a professor, his alma mater, as his career highlight of the past year. In the future, he hopes to develop a new service learning course and continue with his newly developed Quantitative Methods course. Outside of school Dr. Fleming is an avid hunter, often fishes in tournaments, and enjoys reading.

Dr. Greg Gaston

Dr. Greg Gaston is a professor of Geography at UNA. During a typical semester the classes he teaches include Physical Geography, Aerial Image Interpretation, Climatology, and Geomorphology. He also leads field courses during the summer to the American west, the Pacific Northwest and the Southwest, as well as to Africa. His research interests lie in the natural world, with particular emphasis on geomorphology and weather. Currently his research covers both of his interests. He is conducting research to understand depositional environments in the Mississippian age barrier island complex of north Alabama, he is exploring possible Paleo channels of the Tennessee River, he is using remote sensing and GIS tools to identify unmarked burial sites, and he is mapping severe weather patterns in the United States.

The highlight of Dr. Gaston’s school year is conducting field courses and classes, like the Introductory Physical Geography Class, that include field trips. He enjoys being able to explore the world with students and introducing new geography students to all that the field of geography has to offer. The highlight of Dr. Gaston’s year was the successful completion of the desert southwest field course during the summer, as well as being awarded a Fulbright award that will take him to Tanzania. In 2014, Dr. Gaston is looking forward to leading a field course through Wyoming and Montana, and UNA students visiting in Tanzania.

Outside of school Dr. Gaston shows how much of a geographer he is at heart. He loves to explore and travel whether he is alone or with students. He also is a bit of a jack of all trades. He enjoys anything from riding and working on his motorcycles to building furniture.
Dr. Lisa Keys-Mathews is a Professor of Geography at UNA. She is currently serving as the Director of UNA’s Quality Enhancement Program. In the last three years, Dr. Keys-Mathews has taught the following courses at the undergraduate level: Environmental Hazards, Projects in GIS, Geography of Latin America and she will offer Cartography in spring 2019. At the graduate level, she teaches Seminar in Geospatial Science, Environmental Hazards, and Projects in GIS. She has been involved in field courses in the past. As a matter of fact, she and Dr. Bill Strong were the first faculty members in the Department of Geography to offer a study abroad course when they took students to Costa Rica in 2008 for three weeks. She plans on organizing another study abroad course in the future to Cuba. Dr. Keys-Mathews research interests are in the area of Environmental Hazards and Disasters, change detection using satellite imagery, geospatial technologies used to teach K-12 geography, geography education. The following are some of her most recent notable research projects: 1) National Geographic Society – Alabama Geographic Alliance – this funding support two graduate students (Jesse Lane and John Tyler Hardin, both 1/2 assistantships) as well as projects such as Geography Awareness Week, Giant Traveling Map of Africa, and office operations; 2) National Geographic Society – Teacher Leadership Grant – working with six teachers from across the state to increase their skills and experience in and with education policy, lobbying, fundraising, professional development delivery, and outreach; 3) National Geographic Society – Teacher Leadership Grant – working with six states to develop a teacher-leadership institute held in summer 2013 and summer 2014; and 4) Principal Investigator on the Department of Justice COPS grant analyzing crime and its relationship with disasters (fourth year). Dr. Sim is the principal researcher.

Dr. Keys-Mathews is currently supervising the

MS Thesis research work for Robert Nall and John Hardin. Dr. Keys-Mathews has also been actively involved in professional service activities in the Department, UNA, the profession and also the Shoals community. During the year, her favorite thing to do is meeting and welcoming new students to UNA. I really enjoy meeting new students and welcoming them to UNA. Promotion to a full professor of Geography was her career highlight in 2013. She also loves to travel with her family.

Dr. Michael Pretes

Dr. Pretes is a professor of Geography at UNA. During a typical school year he teaches World Regional Geography, History and Philosophy of Geography, Geopolitics, Business Geography, and Introduction to Human Geography at the undergraduate level. At the graduate level he teaches Research Methods, Geopolitics, and various other courses. He also leads several field courses. In the past three years he has gone with Dr. Gaston to the American Southwest and Pacific Northwest. He also took students to China for two years for a joint trip with the business department. Most recently he went to Peru with Dr. Infinger of the foreign language department. Furthermore, he also includes field trips with his regular semester classes. For instance his geopolitics class goes on a three-day trip to Washington, DC. In the future he hopes to develop a course to Australia and New Zealand.

Dr. Pretes’s research interests lie in the realm of human geography. The regions of his research have varied from the arctic in places like Canada and Scandinavia, as well as western North America, Australia, and various Pacific islands. Specifically, he focuses on economic development of remote regions and the problems those locations face. His economic research expands into tourism and microfinance in developing countries as well. Currently he is completing research on sovereign wealth funds in pacific island countries and expanding that topic into remote areas of North America.

Dr. Pretes has participated in a number of professional activities in the past year. He is on an editorial advisory board for a McGraw-Hill textbook on weapons of mass destruction and terrorism. He regularly reviews journal articles, especially those that deal with tourism like Tourism Management and The Annals of Tourism Research. He is also very active in the local Shoals area community. He regularly speaks at the Institute of Learning and Retirement. Furthermore, he is on the board of directors of the organization in the Shoals called On Stage, which brings in various musical groups to the Shoals. He is also on the board of Friends of the Library for the Florence Public Library, and was the co-founder and the organizer of a library series called “Get Out of Town” that gives public lectures in January about different parts of the world.

The part of Dr. Pretes’s school year that he most looks forward to is taking students on field courses. He says, “Especially in the field of geography there’s no better way to understand things than to go and see. I really like the ones to the west and seeing the faces of southern students when they go there and are shocked at how different the natural landscape is. Outside of school Dr. Pretes is still very much a geographer. He enjoys traveling whether it is to a small town or an exotic country. He does quite a bit of reading, which his large collection of books is evidence of. He also enjoys gardening at home. Lately, his backyard has become home to a variety of native plants of the south."
Professionally, Dr. Sim was involved in a wide range of activities in the past year. Within the geography department she has worked with several students on coordinating internships, assisting with research grants, and working with graduate and undergraduate students on the Department of Justice funded project. She also organized paper sessions and presented at the American Association of Geographer’s conference and reviewed journal articles for publications such as Applied Geography. Her highlight of the past year is her first peer reviewed journal publication in the International Journal of the Constructed Environment.

During a regular school year, Dr. Sim most looks forward to working with students. Whether it be introducing new students to GIS, or working with older students on research projects. She is also looking forward to the first graduation of a Masters student she has supervised. For fun outside of school, Dr. Sim enjoys playing golf, traveling, watching movies, cooking, going to wine and beer tastings, and listening to rock music very loudly. I am sure most of us can agree that her taste in downtime hobbies is excellent.

Dr. William Strong

Dr. Strong is a professor emeritus in the UNA geography department. He typically teaches maps and map interpretation, cartography, and world regional geography at the undergraduate level. He also teaches geovisualization at the graduate level. In past years he co-developed a study abroad urban field research course to Costa Rica with Dr. Keys-Mathews. His research interests have varied over time. Early on in his career he placed focus in India with research topics including agriculture, game theory, and the migration of particular language groups to Bangalore. In recent years his research was with Dr. Keys-Mathews in Costa Rica on ecotourism, peri-urban development and changes in the central business district in the capital city of San Jose.

Dr. Strong’s professional work in the past year included a vast array of activities. Prior to last fall he was the UNA geography department chair for many years. He works on several committees in the department and university including acting as director of the UNA Foundation and serving on the department strategic planning committee. He also works as co-director of the Alabama Geographic Alliance with Dr. Keys-Mathews and the National Geographic Society, which is the principal funder. Outside of the university he is active on the National Council for Geographic Education and in the American Association of Geographers. Within the local community he is a member and former president of the Florence Rotary Club.

During a school year Dr. Strong most looks forward to seeing old students and meeting students new to the department who are eager to experience more geography. The world regional geography course is especially enjoyable to him because it introduces students to the world through the lens of geography. Teaching maps and map interpretation is a particular highlight for him because it is such an important foundation for the geospatial technology courses. In the upcoming year Dr. Strong looks forward to teaching and working with students as well as continuing geographic outreach with National Geographic.

During his downtime Dr. Strong is the typical geographer in that he loves to travel. He also enjoys reading often, be it geography related reading or novels purely for pleasure. He also has been actively training in martial arts for over forty years. He is currently the Secretary General of the World Tang Soo Do Association.
New York and Washington D.C. Urban Field Course

As one those experiences in life that serve to elevate one’s notion of their own capacities, the journey from home to places far away must count among the highly valued toward that endeavor. The urban field course offered as a joint venture between the Art and Geography departments (as two separately evaluated courses having both independent and joint coursework) serves the student an impossibly large platter of American urban experience in a compressed timeframe, far from home and lacking none of the marrow from whence may be drawn a sustainable passion for more. Excellent opportunities for networking and revelation of a post-university path are made accessible to the intrepid and industrious traveler.

The first iteration of the course has delivered several days of exploration in our nation’s monumental capital city, Washington D.C.; dynamic intermissions in the city of Brotherly Love, Philadelphia, PA; and Princeton, NJ; and almost a week in the incomprehensibly complex and dynamic boroughs of New York City. Brooklyn, Queens, and Manhattan each exhibit unique character and function in symbiosis, achieving global renown. From the unmatched views of Manhattan atop the Empire State Building to independent hours spent wandering the streets of Chelsea and Williamsburg, from tours of the Capitol building and Capitol Hill to Ethiopian cuisine, from the most crowded neighborhood in the United States to profuse and innumerable expanses of suburban sprawl, the Urban Field Course has it all. It is a great addition to the collegiate experience.

The course augments students' exposure to graphic media and design, architecture and geographic principles, particularly relevant to the human environment interface in a modern metropolis. The course can be taken as either graduate or undergraduate credit.

-Jason Blankenship

Field Courses

The Southwestern United States

Leaving the southeastern United States is an opportunity that I rarely get to take advantage of. I was excited that the first time I'd be experiencing the Southwestern United States was going to be in a hands-on learning environment where I would be seeing some of the most fascinating and beautiful geologic marvels the world has to offer.

The Southwestern Field Course consisted of two classes, Biogeography and Geomorphology. Each were worth three credit hours. My classmates, my instructors, and I traveled across six different states but we spent most of our time in Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico. On our travels we saw many unique formations and phenomena including Delicate Arch, Mesa Verde, The Sangre de Cristo Mountains, The Goosenecks, Little Wild Horse Canyon (Slot Canyon), and the Grand Canyon, just to name a few. Reflecting back there are so many things I could say about the trip as a whole.

I learned more in two weeks about geomorphology, biogeography, and myself than I ever thought I could. I wouldn't trade the experience for anything and if I had the opportunity to do it again I wouldn't pass it up. If you have an opportunity to participate in a field course take advantage of it. You won't regret it!

-Hannah Faulkner
Tanzania 2014 Study Abroad Program Announced

Dr. Francis Koti and Dr. Greg Gaston have announced the Tanzania study abroad program for 2014. This program, which takes place in Tanzania, is being offered for the third time since Summer 2011. The program will be offered during the 2014 May Intercession from May 11-27, 2014. Two courses will be offered: GE359 – Geography of Africa with a focus on Tanzania (Dr. Koti); and GE457 – East African Landforms and Landscapes (Dr. Gaston). For information about this program, please contact Dr. Francis Koti at ftkoti@una.edu or call him at 1556-866-4173. More details on the program can be found on the program website at: http://www.buildingthepride.com/faculty/ftkoti/unakenya.htm.

Peru images courtesy of Jessica Pendergrass
Player Highlights

Jimmy Hilley

Jimmy Hilley is a recent graduate of UNA. He graduated summa cum laude with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Geography with a GIS concentration. He is now working towards his M.S. Degree in Geography with a concentration in Regional, Urban, and Environmental Planning at the University of Alabama.

Before graduating, he presented his capstone project at the Association of American Geographers (AAG) Annual Meeting in Los Angeles, April 2013. He led a paper presentation in a session on Smart Growth and Sustainable Development lead by Dr. Kott and Dr. Sim. His research involved developing a set of sustainability indicators for New Urbanism and applying them to a national geodatabase of New Urbanism communities. The indicators used in his research measured the sustainability of New Urbanism communities based on location, land use, transportation networks, and environmental issues. The final product was a sustainability score for each community. His research was funded by the UNA Undergraduate Research Program (URP) and the AAG Urban Geography Specialty Group.

Jimmy was also awarded the Dean’s Award for the College of Arts and Sciences 2012-2013. This award is one of the most prestigious awards given at the University Awards Gala. There is only one of these awards for each college. Students were recommended by a professor and needed to have a 3.5 or higher GPA. About the award, Jimmy says, “Dr. Sim deserves at least half of the credit for this award because it was her letter of recommendation and the support she gave me over the past year and a half that helped me earn it. She was the one who helped me find a capstone project, apply for the URP grant, and encouraged me to apply for graduate school. She is a wonderful professor and has really helped me achieve my full potential at UNA.”

Gabrielle Jenkins

Undergraduate Geography major Gabrielle Jenkins was selected as one of the four student Vice-Presidents for the University of North Alabama Chapter of the Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi. The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi is the nation's oldest, largest, and most selective all-discipline honor society. Phi Kappa Phi inducts annually approximately 30,000 students, faculty, professional staff, and alumni. The Society's mission is "To recognize and promote academic excellence in all fields of higher education and to engage the community of scholars in service to others." As part of the training for this role, Gabrielle applied for and won a travel award, which funded her travel to the annual national summit of Student Vice Presidents held in Baton Rouge, LA, in July 2013. She is currently implementing the things she learned at the conference. Gabrielle also worked with Dr. Kott to develop the Department of Geography Newsletter. A native of Alabama, Gabrielle plans to graduate in the spring of 2014, with a BA in Geography with a minor in International Studies and a certificate in GIS. While her options are open at this time, she plans on attending graduate school in Australia upon her graduation.

Master's Program in Geospatial Science

The Department of Geography graduate program in geospatial science has been operational since 2011. The program was developed with a focus on the application of geospatial science methods and technologies to prepare students to solve complex environmental, urban, economic, and business problems. Geospatial methods, conduct independent research; develop skills in critical thinking and writing; and prepare for professions requiring knowledge of geospatial methods, analysis, and techniques. In its third year, the program has an enrollment of twenty students. Six students have graduated from the program to date: Zeblon Wallace, William Walker, Cayla Buttram and Bradley Baker (all supervised by Dr. Lisa Keys-Mathews); Robert Kavanaugh (supervised by Dr. Michael Prates) and Jacob Cody (supervised by Dr. Sunhui Sim). The graduate Program Coordinator is Dr. David Brommer. Dr. Brommer can be reached: dbrommer@una.edu.

Geography Undergraduate Program

The Department of Geography undergraduate program at UNA is one of the largest Geography undergraduate programs in the State of Alabama. The program has grown rapidly in the last decade. The program currently has over 150 majors compared to less than 50 ten years ago. Our undergraduate program continues to use an applied approach with a focus on professional areas: Geographic Information Systems and Science, Business Geography, and General Geography. We pride ourselves in producing high quality graduates with knowledge and skills that match any other program in the region. Our former graduates dominate the geospatial industry in the Huntsville area. For the past year, we graduated 45 students: 20 in fall 2012 and 25 in Spring/Summer 2013. Geography faculty members are working tirelessly to revitalize the undergraduate curriculum to meet student needs and also to reflect the current demands in the geospatial market place. More recent changes have been the inclusion of Geographic Information Systems into the core courses of the Geography degree and also the introduction of a new Geospatial Human-Computer Interaction minor - (also known as GEOHCI). GEOHCI is an emerging concept, which integrates location-based knowledge, spatial cognition and fundamental aspects of geographic representation into the computer-human interaction domain. This minor in GEOHCI will produce broadly trained geographers with knowledge from other related disciplines that incorporate development, design and use-experience aspects. These include: Art, Computer Information Systems, English, and Psychology. This interdisciplinary minor will broaden students' perspectives and also enhance their employment chances in the job market.
For the next year two familiar faces will be missing from Wesleyan Hall. Dr. Greg Gaston and Dr. Michael Pretes will be away during their faculty development leave. Dr. Gaston will be in Tanzania while Dr. Pretes will be in Wyoming.

Dr. Gaston was awarded a Fulbright award, which will take him to the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania where he will be sharing his geographic knowledge with students there. There will be particular emphasis on introducing the students to technical aspects of GIS along with the applications it is useful in. Then, in 2014, he will be visited in Tanzania by UNA students who will be there as part of the Africa study abroad program that the department has led in recent years.

Dr. Gaston’s presence will not be completely gone from the department. This semester he is still in charge of the aerial photo interpretation class that has been his teaching territory for several years, but for the first time it will be by means of distance learning. We all certainly wish Dr. Gaston the best during his leave, and look forward to the return his wall-shaking laugh we have all grown so accustomed to.

Dr. Pretes will also be leaving us for a year. He will be at the University of Wyoming in Laramie, Wyoming, for two semesters. Each semester he will be teaching one class on the Wyoming campus. He also will be teaching a Globalization and Society online course for the UNA Master of Professional Studies program.

Dr. Pretes will also be taking time during his leave to focus more on his research and publication endeavors. His stay in Wyoming will also give him the chance to cross country ski and go snow shoeing, which is of course not something that is an option in Alabama.

We all wish Dr. Pretes the best of luck in adjusting to the cold Wyoming weather, and look forward to his return home next spring.
In August of 2012 a change in leadership of the Department of Geography was made. After 29 years of serving as Department Chair, Dr. William Strong stepped down from his position, which has since been taken over by Dr. Francis Koti. In December of 2012, Dr. Strong also retired from University after 40 years of serving as a geography professor at UNA. He has since become a Raymond Isbell Scholar. As such, he has continued to teach his classes while an endowment for geography education has been established. Because he is volunteering this time, and the department has not needed to hire a replacement professor for the time being, the majority of his salary and benefits go into this endowment. This is yet another way Dr. Strong has contributed to the field of geography in his long and illustrious career. From working as the geographer in residence for National Geographic to serving as co-director of the Alabama Geographic Alliance, Dr. Strong has consistently shown his dedication to the spread of geographic education.

It is hard to imagine the geography department without Dr. Strong. Fortunately, after officially retiring from all teaching duties sometime in the upcoming year he intends to maintain his connections to UNA. He is also looking forward taking advantage of his newly acquired free time. He plans on becoming more active in Tang Soo Do Karate, which he has been actively practicing for over 40 years. He also looks forward to having more time for travel around the country and world.

It is no exaggeration to say that the geography department simply will not be the same without Dr. Strong. He has been such a vital part of the growth and progress that we students have had the pleasure of being a part of. We wish him all the best and hope he fully enjoys his retirement. A simple thank you does not begin to convey the gratitude we all feel for what he has done, but thank you, Dr. Strong. Thank you for all the contributions you have made, and will inevitably continue to make.
Geography Club

At the first meeting for the 2013-2014 school year upcoming activities were discussed and elections for officers were held. The new officers include:

President
Brianna Clark

Vice President
Hannah Faulkner

Secretary
Dan Sasser

Treasurer
Pam Bishop

Activities Coordinator
Trey Alexander

White Water Rafting

Anyone is welcome to join and geography students are particularly encouraged to participate. There will be several fun activities throughout the year that we hope to see familiar and new faces at.

Meetings every other Tuesday

For more information contact
Brianna Clark or Hannah Faulkner.
Brianna: bclark@una.edu
Hannah: hfaulkner@una.edu

Tailgating!
Geographers Get Jobs

In spring 2013, University of North Alabama (UNA) Department of Geography compiled a list of job titles of former Geography graduates for the period 2000-2012. The data was derived from contact information and business cards former students have deposited in our office over the years. Though not a major source, the World Wide Web was used for verification of the data. The data was tabulated containing names of the graduates, their employers, type of work of the employer and their job titles. A total of 37 different job titles were established in the twelve year period. Commenting on this, Dr. Gaston remarked, "...darned impressive list! This is the ultimate metric that measures our performance...the success of our students." Below is the list of 37 job titles of former Geography majors from UNA for the period 2000-2012. The description of the nature of their employer is given on the right. This list is not exhaustive. Yes, Geographers get jobs.

1. Assistant Professor of Geography – Master's level University
2. Sr. Vice President - GIS Consulting Company
3. Area Director, GIS Development Company
4. Business Operations Associate, GIS Development Company
5. Offshore Survey Tech, Oil Consulting Company
6. GIS Analyst I, II, GIS Development Company; Research Group/ Missile Defense Contractor
7. GIS Coordinator, GIS Development Company; Local Government
8. GIS Project Manager, GIS Development Company/ Missile Defense Contractor
9. GIS Software Engineer, GIS Software Development Company
10. GIS Specialist, GIS Consulting Company; Local Government
11. Urban Planner, Local Government/Municipal Government
12. Planning Director – Municipal Government
13. GIS Planner, Local Government/Municipal Government
14. Land Planner, Local Government/ Municipal Government
15. Urban Planner/Associate Planner, Local Government/Municipality
16. Viticulturist, Wine Producing Company
17. Natural Resource Planner, State Environmental Entity
18. GIS Technician, GIS Consulting Company, Gas/Power Company
19. Research Program Manager, Medical Facility at a Research University
20. Cartographer, Mapping Agency
21. GIS Spatial Analyst, Gas/Power Company
22. GIS Director, GIS Development Company
23. GIS Support Analyst II – GIS Development Company/ Missile Defense Contractor
24. Residential Marketing Rep – Gas Development Company
26. Engineer Associate – Municipal Government
27. GIS Coordinator – Municipal Government/ Missile Defense Contractor
28. Graduate Teaching and Graduate Research Assistants at MS and PhD level
29. Associate Maritime Analyst – GIS Development Company
Each year the University of North Alabama Geography Alumni Association hosts a conference that brings together alumni from the department as well as current students to network and participate in a variety of workshops and presentations.

The past year’s conference included workshops on how to utilize LiDAR, ways to integrate GIS applications into organizations, and assistance in completing GISP applications. There were also a variety of presentations made by students, guest speakers, and professors. Two new professors, Dr. David Brommer and Dr. Jonathon Fleming, were formally introduced to the department. Student presentations included scholarship award ceremonies, recognition of special achievements, and recapping past field courses and study abroad courses. The conference also welcomed National Geographic’s official geographer and director of editorial and research for National Geographic Maps, Juan José Valdés, as the keynote speaker.

Every year the Alumni Association conference serves as an important link between past students and current students of the UNA geography department. It is more than a collection of presentations and workshops. It allows for individuals in a plethora of geographic related fields to network, share ideas, and share experiences. This will be continued on October 6th and 10th of this year when the association once again brings the conference into the home of UNA geographers, Wesleyan Hall.

Keynote Speaker of 2013 UNAGAA Conference: Dr. Kenneth Foote

This year’s UNAGAA conference keynote speaker will be Dr. Kenneth Foote. Dr. Foote is Professor and Chair of the Department of Geography at University of Connecticut. Dr. Foote joined UConn in fall 2013 from the University of Colorado at Boulder, where he has been on the faculty for 13 years, having served as Chair from 2002-2005. He has served as Vice President and then President of the Association of American Geographers and as President of the National Council of Geographic Education. While he researches a broad range of issues, he is most well known for his book “Shadowed Ground: America’s Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy,” studying the memorialization of space and the deep personal connections that people have to sites of tragedy. He has led a number of online instructional materials development projects including The Geographer’s Craft Project and the Virtual Geography Department Project, funded by the National Science Foundation. Dr. Foote has also written several books on mentoring and other facets of early career faculty development, including “Teaching Geographic Information Science and Technology in Higher Education”, and “Re-reading Cultural Geography”.

2012 Keynote Speaker Juan José Valdés

Dr. Ken Foote
Featured Alumni
Mr. Richard Murphy

I started my studies at UNA in 2000. Initially a Spanish major, I “found” Geography while fulfilling my science credit requirements via Physical Geography I. While at UNA, I was president of the Geography Club and assisted with both the Alabama Geography Bee and the Alabama Geography Reading Initiative. The Geography Club led the charge to attend the AAG in New Orleans in 2003. It was an amazing trip in terms of witnessing the breadth of applications of Geography to problem solving and discovery. The sights of New Orleans were great for the “geographic eye” as well! In addition to departmental opportunities, I participated in a summer Research Experience for Undergraduates at Oklahoma State University, and interned at NACOLG. If I could recommend one thing to current students, it would be to pursue these types of internship opportunities, as they WILL help you in your job search and career. I graduated from UNA in 2004 with a BA in Geography and a minor in Spanish, but only after waiting until my final semester to take Physical Geography II to fulfill my requirements, much to Dr. Gaston’s chagrin. Ha!

In 2006, I decided to transition from a career in retail, and get back to Geography. I enrolled at the University of South Carolina to work towards a MS in Geography. While at USC, I was a teaching assistant for Cartography and Human Geography, and also worked as a research assistant. In addition, I worked as a GIS Technician for the City of Columbia, SC. Graduate school was one of the most stressful but amazing times of my life. After completing course requirements in residence, I took a job as a GIS Analyst for CH2M HILL, a large engineering firm. Currently, I’m finishing the thesis requirements for my MS degree, and hope to (finally) graduate from the University of South Carolina this fall.

My career with CH2M HILL (and subsequently Critigen, which is the geospatial spin-off of CH2M HILL) has afforded many opportunities for growth in the past five years. Currently, I am a Practice Lead and Project Manager for Critigen managing the Oregon and Northern California territories. I supervise a staff of 8 GIS Analysts at various skill levels, as well as multiple projects in the energy and transportation sectors. While I do some GIS consulting and analysis in my current role, a typical day is usually spent managing staff, providing direction for projects, responding to requests for proposals, and managing project financials.

At the coaxing of fellow alumni Laura Galloway Suber, I became active in the UNA Geography Alumni Association in 2008, and currently serve as the organization President. The UNAGAA is unique in its mission to connect an active Geography alumni base to undergraduates to provide insights into the GIS and Geography industry. Each year, the UNAGAA hosts a conference in tandem with homecoming that allows alumni to reconnect and network with each other and the campus community. As part of the UNAGAA philanthropy to “give back”, we award a $500 research grant each year to an undergraduate(s) who submits an outstanding research proposal. We also contribute to an endowed scholarship fund jointly set up by the UNAGAA and the Geography Department. This self-sustaining endowment is currently at over $30,000, and provides a yearly $1,000 scholarship to a deserving student pursuing studies in Geography. I highly recommend undergraduates get involved and take the opportunity to network with Geography alumni. It could be the ticket to getting your foot in the door for a job.
The Freddie Wood Geographic Research Center

The Freddie Wood Geographic Center has been established at the Department of Geography to support research by Geography faculty and students at the University of North Alabama (UNA), offer a variety of professional services to UNA faculty, staff and students, the geospatial industry and the community, and present a mechanism for developing and sharing geospatial data with a large community of users. The Center will be officially commissioned by Dr. Freddie Wood on October 11, 2013 during the University of North Alabama Geography Alumni Association (UNAGAA) annual conference.

Named for Dr. Freddie Wood, a longtime employee of the University of North Alabama who helped to acquire the first grant to establish a Geographic Information Systems Lab at the University and made a generous personal gift to create an endowment to support the work of the Department of Geography, the Freddie Wood Geographic Research Center supports the educational, research, and service missions of the Department of Geography by providing computer facilities and software for teaching, learning, research, and presentation, and supporting practical experience in research and service projects through which students, under the direction of faculty, acquire and develop skills of geospatial analysis and presentation. The goals of the center include but are not limited to:

- Offering UNA faculty, staff and students affordable large print/plotting facilities for their research posters.
- Presenting a mechanism for Geography faculty to engage the geospatial industry in various collaborative geospatial-related projects and services.
- Presenting a platform for Geography faculty and students to offer professional geospatial services to the community and also the geospatial industry.
- Offering geography majors mechanism to develop critical real world project management and production skills to serve a broad community of users.
- Performing contractual services and also write and pursue grants
- Developing data for sharing with a variety of users within and beyond the State of Alabama.
Department of Geography Strategic Planning Retreat

The Department of Geography faculty members are currently developing a five-year strategic plan for the 2013-2018 period. We expect that by developing a strategic plan, we will be able to: focus our energy and resources, to ensure that we are all working toward the same goals, and also assess and adjust our direction in response to a rapidly changing geospatial World. Using this approach, the Department of Geography hopes to make fundamental decisions and take critical actions that will shape and guide who we are, what we do and its implications, how we do it, and why we do it - with a focus on the future. To kick-start the process, Geography faculty went on a strategic planning retreat on June 8, 2013 (see photos) where they developed the key parts of the plan including the mission, vision, core values, SWOTT analysis and the goals. This process is currently ongoing.
Special Thanks to Ms. Pam Bishop

Pam Bishop continues to support Geography faculty as well as helping students with their needs. Many agree that Pam is the glue that keeps everybody in the Department together. She works tirelessly to make sure that departmental administrative work is carried out in an efficient manner. It is safe to say that without her, the department would not run like the well-oiled machine it currently does.

Department of Geography now on Social Media

The Department of Geography has recently established social media platforms to enable Geography faculty members, students and our Alumni to network in various aspects. We are currently on Facebook, Twitter and Linked In. Please:

- Join our linked in group at: http://www.linkedin.com/groups?home=&gid=6400252&trk=anet_ug_hm;
- Like us on Facebook at: www.facebook.com/unageography; or
- Follow us on Twitter: https://twitter.com/unageography.

These platforms are currently being managed by graduate student Christopher Iwiev.

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