New Direction in the School

by Julia Evanovitch and Lisa Leoni

Welcome to the SGES newsletter! Each newsletter will spotlight different research that is happening in the department, highlight departmental events and catch up with Alumni. We hope the SGES News will help alumni, faculty, and staff reconnect, get to know our department a little better and build a strong SGES community.

The SGES has had quite an exciting year, with many research projects, new hires, and exciting field courses. In this newsletter, you will climb glaciers, explore the cities around you, and come face to face with Sherlock Holmes. You will meet many interesting faces in the department and reconnect with Alumni Simon Donatto and Kim Devotta. We honour the memory of Sue Vajoczki and Bob Bignell with touching pieces written by their long-time friends and colleagues Dr. Carolyn Eyles and Ming-ko Woo.

The SGES would also like to extend congratulations to all of its recent graduates. Thank you for your participation and contributions to the department over the years, whether it was TAing, research as a graduate student, or simply enjoying one of the many courses the SGES has to offer. We hope you will keep us up to date as you move forward in your future endeavors.

We’ve had many changes in the department including saying goodbye to Janet Leach, a long-term office staff member, and welcoming the addition of Deane Maynard and Laura Labate to the main office. A notable change in the department is the appointment of our New Director, Dr. Bruce Newbold. Bruce has a long history with McMaster, having completed both his undergraduate and doctoral degrees here in Geography. Bruce officially joined the SGES as faculty in 2000 with a research focus on migration, immigration, and ageing issues.

Bruce was appointed the director of the SGES in 2012. His affiliation with McMaster having attended as a student and now working as faculty makes his experience invaluable in the department. We welcome Bruce as our new director and would also like to thank our former director, Dr. Pavlos Kanaroglou for his contributions and guidance in the department.
Director’s Corner
by Dr. Bruce Newbold

Every few years, all academic programs in Ontario must be reviewed through the Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), a process that ensures that our programs remain relevant by reflecting on our mission and degree level expectations. In short, are we providing our students with the skills and knowledge that we set out to do?

SGES’ undergraduate and graduate programs will be reviewed in the coming academic year (2013/14). While there is a tremendous amount of work to prepare for the review, it will enable us to gain a more coherent and up-to-date picture of our teaching outcomes and how our graduate and undergraduate programs fit together. We have already started the process. Our undergraduate curriculum has been overhauled this past year, with the new program ready for the fall of 2013. Highlights include increased flexibility for students, new course offerings, field trips, new experiential education opportunities, and an on-going commitment to improving the student experience. Many of you may also be asked to participate through surveys. Please take the time to complete – your feedback and opinion is important to us!

On a different note, the past year has brought other changes to the School. We have been saddened by the deaths of Bob Bignell and Dr. Sue Vajoczki. Both were long-term members of the School. Bob was the School’s technician for many years (and having served in the same role in the Department of Geography) - many of you would remember Bob’s love for the outdoors. Sue was an award-winning instructor – her love for teaching was clearly evident in everything she did here at McMaster.

On a brighter note, Prof. Janok Bhattacharya joins the School this fall as the Susan Cunningham Chair in Sedimentary Geology. His arrival on campus is highly anticipated, and provides much needed expertise in the areas of structural and petroleum geology. John Maclachlan also joins SGES as an instructor. His expertise and experiences in the classroom will be shared with the Arts and Science program and the McMaster Institute for Innovation and Excellence in Teaching and Learning (MIIETL, formerly CLL). A warm welcome to both!

Noteworthy News

Dr. Greg Slater has co-authored a research paper that was published in the journal Nature. The research team has discovered the oldest known flowing water on Earth: deep fracture fluids isolated from a mine in Timmins could be up to 2.64 billion years old. The paper is titled ‘Deep fracture fluids isolated in the crust since the Precambrian era’

Dr. Richard Harris has published a book titled ‘Building a Market’ which looks at the rise of the home improvement industry in the U.S. and Canada from the end of World War I to the late 1950s.

Dr. Allison Williams has been awarded a CIHR research chair to investigate gender, workplaces and caregiver-employee policy

Congratulations to all of the undergraduate students that recently graduated during spring convocation in June, 2013!

Congratulations to the following for recently completing their Master’s and PhDs!

MA: Pearl Buhariwala, Jeanette Eby, Amy Shanks

MSc: Tim Dohey, Katie Kendra, Reyham Khader, Christa Klein Gebbinck, Riley Mulligan, Ananta Parsaud, Mario Reyes, Nadine Shatilla, Danielle Simkus, Sarah Soles, Phil Suttak, Peter Tscharprofit

PhD: Dr. Andrew Clark, Dr. Heidi Daxberger, Dr. Amy Elliot, Dr. Athena Goodfellow, Dr. Nagissa Mahmoudi, Dr. Paul Moore, Dr. Janina Plach, Dr. Michelle Vine

Dr. Michael Mercier at Spring Convocation with some of his best TA’s ever!
From Left: Christina Salituro, Victoria Coates, Samantha Romlewski, Michael Mercier, Sarah Medeiros & Patrick Vusir
REMEMBERING SUE

Sue Vajoczki came to McMaster as an undergraduate student in 1985 and became interested in geomorphological research – inspired by two of her early mentors in the Department of Geography, Dr. Brian McCann and Dr. Derek Ford. She explored subaqueous karst with Derek for her M.Sc thesis project and in 1992 joined the department as a lecturer. This is when Sue found her true calling – as an exceptional educator. She took on the task of teaching a number of large and challenging courses and as the School’s Academic Advisor developed systems for tracking students’ progress and helping them navigate the complexities of university administration. Anyone walking in the corridors of the old Geography department could tell which Sue’s office was – the one with a line of students waiting patiently to see her - Sue’s door was always open for them. Sue truly cared about the welfare of her students and she knew how to help them – with encouragement, support, a stern warning (Sue’s ‘kick in the butt’), or a new academic plan. Sue was the person we all knew could find a solution to any issue – and if there wasn’t a ready-made solution, she’d create one. ‘Piece of cake’ was her retort to a tricky problem.

Between 1992 and 2006 Sue taught many thousands of students at McMaster and even though her classes were some of the most popular and fulfilling, she always wanted to make them better. This stimulated her passionate interest in pedagogical research – she wanted to know how students learn, how they could learn more effectively, and how instructors could create learning environments to maximize student learning. She earned her Ph.D from Wilfred Laurier University in 2008 and in 2007 was appointed as an Associate Professor at Mac. Sue believed that education had no boundaries and was happy to take her teaching outside of the classroom regardless of logistical nightmares. She was a great advocate of experiential learning and led many fieldtrips and field courses to places such as Whitefish Falls and Costa Rica. In 2006 she became the Director of Experiential Learning in the Faculty of Social Sciences and created an innovative and very successful program to engage students in multiple forms of experiential learning.

Sue never backed down from a challenge. Following her first battle with cancer she became the Director of the Centre for Leadership in Learning and created new opportunities for faculty, staff and students to enhance their proficiency both as teachers and learners. Her accomplishments as an outstanding educator, scholar, and champion of student success were recognized in 2012 when she received a 3M National Teaching Fellowship. She was posthumously promoted to full professor July 1, 2013 and awarded an Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Association (OCUFA) teaching award in September of 2013.

Sue is sorely missed by all of us at McMaster. However, she lives on in all of us. She inspired and guided many of us to do things we didn’t think were possible. She had a passion for challenges, for learning, and for her family. Alex, Josh and Katie were her foundation and supported her throughout her career. She was so proud of them. There are few who can pack as much into their lives and have such a positive impact on so many people as Sue did. She will always be with us.

The Susan Vajoczki Legacy Fund has been established at McMaster to honour Sue’s memory and distinguished academic career. The fund will be used to create an ongoing undergraduate scholarship to help talented students pursue research in Geography and Earth Sciences, pedagogical research, and evidence-based teaching and learning projects. For those wishing to do so, donations may be made to the Susan Vajoczki Legacy Fund, c/o Advancement Office, McMaster University, 1280 Main Street West, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8S 4L8 or may be made online.

In Memory: Susan Vajoczki (1966-2012)

by Carolyn Eyles

In Memory: Susan Vajoczki (1966-2012)
In Memory: Bob Bignell (1948-2013)
by Ming-ko Woo – Professor Emeritus

Born and raised in Bristol, Bob Bignell came to Canada from England in January 1970 to start his employment at McMaster in the then Geography Department. For over 30 years, he was a dedicated and loyal member of the Department. Always pleasant and always prepared to help, Bob was well liked by faculty, staff and students.

Bob was trained as a photographer and in 1993 he also acquired a BA degree in History from McMaster. In the pre-digital era, dark room techniques were in considerable demand for the production of photographic illustrative materials. Bob was the sole person in charge of such work. Many a time when given last-minute notice, he would work till late in the evenings to deliver requisite materials to our colleagues to meet their publication or conference deadlines.

In addition to being a proficient technician, Bob was an effective instructor. For one week in many summers, he assisted in teaching surveying to undergraduate classes. Past students would remember his useful hands-on advice that facilitated completion of their mapping assignments. Bob gladly participated in fieldwork that was required by the many research projects undertaken by the department faculty. He applied his ample logistical skill to help mounting expeditions, and lent his personal presence at local sites such as Beverly Swamp, or in distant locations like the canyons and caves of the Canadian Rockies.

He was committed to and took pride in his work. As the chief technician of the Department, he ensured that all faculty, staff and graduate students received proper technical support. He was most efficient and prompt in providing assistance, be it a small task like booking the departmental vehicle or highly involved undertakings like moving offices and labs.

Bob took a short leave to the United Kingdom and returned with his new bride, Jan, to the delighted surprise of the Department which quickly threw an impromptu party. Jan, who has volunteered as a Girl Guide leader for years, shared his passion for the outdoor; and they found their perfect targets in the vast and varied domain of Canada. Their devotion to outdoor activities knew no seasonal bound. They went to an Algonquin cabin in the deep of winter, to cut blocks of lake ice and preserved them for summer consumption by the family that lived in southern United States.

Bob was known to have skied for hours in extreme coldness, once even getting frost-bitten en route. In summer, Bob loved to retrace the daunting tracks of the Hudson Bay company-men. He canoed the magnificent wilderness of the far North, to bask in the serenity of the open tundra or to capture the excitement of shooting the rapids of mighty rivers like the Thelon or the Kazan where few would venture. He loved caving and spent years exploring caves in the Rockies, in West Virginia and in Mexico. He was an avid fisherman. He even taught me how to cast the line. But I was an indifferent angler and had to borrow a huge lake trout he caught to take photographic credit that was hardly mine.

Bob and Jan took early retirement in 2003 to spend more time with the great outdoor. Sadly, their travels were curtailed by his struggle with cancer. During such a trying period, he was devotedly attended by his loving wife. Bob left us on 25th May 2013, but will continue to be remembered fondly for his congeniality and professionalism by his colleagues, former students, and other friends.
Research Spotlight: Allison Williams

by Julia Evanovitch

Allison Williams is an Associate Professor whose research focus includes public health, health geography and social issues. Allison chose to come to McMaster because of its success in recruiting graduate students and its reputation for being a strong research institution.

Allison has been recently awarded the CIHR Research Chair in Gender, Work and Health where she is examining caregiver friendly workplaces and how workplaces can be more accommodating to caregivers. Currently, the ageing population is living longer yet there are no planned increases in health services, social services or facilities. This is putting more responsibility on families, specifically women, who make up the majority of caregivers. Allison is looking at how we can accommodate these challenges in the workplace while having policy makers better recognize the issue. There is such value to her current work, that federal ministries, including Human Resources and Skills Development Canada have shown interest. Allison finds that the biggest challenge to her research is real world uptake, where findings inform practice. She recognizes that change is difficult, but she hopes to work with NGOs, industry and others to help her research become widely distributed.

Aside from her research interests she also teaches a 3rd year undergraduate course in community and public health that focuses on experiential learning through debates, community mapping and guest lecturers. In addition she teaches a qualitative research class at the graduate level that allows her to tie in some of her own research and experience. Allison enjoys teaching social and health geography because she enjoys the hands on learning experience such as using the field as her classroom. Her research background provides her with a wealth of knowledge and experience that falls into many different fields, including health sciences, nursing, social work, sociology, political science, gerontology, gender studies and many more.

Allison is inspired by academics that contribute to social change through their research. This belief shines through her extensive health geography background that is well known across Canada. Her evaluative research on the Compassionate Care Benefit(the first federal benefit for caregivers)brought an invitation to speak to Canada’s parliament twice. This is the type of experience that she sees as informing social change, where decision-makers are intent on listening to research.

Outside of work, Allison tries to swim daily and take weekends off work (where possible) to work toward work-life balance. Allison feels that the best advice she was given was when she was an Assistant Professor at Brock University, where she was told not to compare yourself to people in your immediate environment, but to people at the top of your field. We are very fortunate to have Allison within our department as she brings a wide scope of both practical and theoretical experience with her that is shown in both her passion in research and teaching.

Research Spotlight: Sean Carey

by Lisa Leoni

Two years ago SGES welcomed a new member to its faculty: Dr. Sean Carey. A hydrologist whose research dabbles in topics from catchment hydrology to soil physics to biometeorology, Sean is interested in cold climate processes and how they influence hydrology.

A McMaster Alumni, having completed his MSc and PhD at Mac in the 90s under the supervision of Dr. Ming-ko Woo, Sean says he came back to McMaster for the chance to be close to family and because Mac had a good nucleus of people interested in ‘watery’ stuff which he thought was very exciting.

Sean’s research focus is expanding, and he is spending a lot more time engaging with industry, looking to help understand the problems of ecosystem reclamation and how mining impacts the environment. He feels he is lucky to be able to work with some great companies that are really supportive of his group’s work. He is also recently part of a larger NSERC network looking at changing cold regions that he supposes will keep him pretty busy in the north for the next 5 years.

What is his biggest research challenge? Sean says “Time and logistics. Research doesn’t just happen in the summer, so I’m always trying to balance getting things done when they need to get done versus teaching and other commitments. Logistics in remote environments can also be a challenge, but fun also.” However, Sean enjoys the variety that his career offers; “The only constant thing in life is change, and while it can be difficult, it is something that drives me. New projects, new students, new colleagues – it keeps things from getting stale.”

Sean has also taught classes in Soils and the Environment, Cold Environments, and
Climate and Water within the SGES. He enjoys the enthusiasm that students have when they actually like what they are learning. His teaching inspiration comes from the thought that there are a whole lot of problems in the world in terms of water and we need to have a lot of young and enthusiastic people focusing on this.

Sean's first priority is family, he has 2 kids, an 8-year-old girl and 6 year-old boy, that he says allow him to be a kid again. Sean also enjoys drinking different kinds of beer, music, playing the guitar and spending time outdoors. Three pieces of advice he carries with him are: 1) Find a good mentor and learn as much from them as you can. 2) Be kind to others, as it will get you farther than you think. 3) Don't take yourself too seriously.

Janok Bhattacharya
Janok Bhattacharya will be joining the SGES this coming fall as the new Susan Cunningham Research Chair. Janok graduated from McMaster in 1989 with a PhD in geology and after 24 years away, 'it felt like the right time to come back, McMaster is a great school'. His research focus is on looking at the archive of deep time through the sedimentary rock record to understand how shorelines grow and decay, how the deposits are organized in 3D space, and the implications of that organization for hydrocarbon discovery and recovery from subsurface reservoirs. His research is primarily accomplished through teams of graduate students with an emphasis on field-work, mostly in the deserts of Central Utah. He is interested in documenting and determining the size and scale of ancient river systems and their associated deltaic systems. Changes in deltaic shorelines through time can also yield insights as to the nature of high-frequency sea-level changes, especially during the Cretaceous Greenhouse time in earth history, a time purported by some to be free of glaciers. The data suggests that there were high-frequency sea-level changes of several tens of meters, likely related to cycles of climate change that may have been driven by ephemeral Antarctic ice sheets.

Janok's favourite aspect of teaching is being in the field with students and seeing them obtain the critical analysis skills and ability to interpret the rock record. He says this is always thrilling and that seeing the transition in students from passive learning to creative insight is the main goal. What he is most looking forward to about working within the SGES is the high caliber of students, working with a faculty that are enthusiastic about the opportunity to enhance the earth science and geology side of the program and a continued focus on excellence in research and teaching. Janok is also looking forward to interacting with our great alumni to help get them more involved in the future growth of SGES.

Before accepting this new position, Susan Cunningham and Janok met at a local pub close to his home in Houston. They talked about what her gift means to her, to Janok, and to McMaster, and how they will work together to further enhance the geology component of the SGES program. He hopes that her advice on that evening will also bear the same fruit as that of his many other mentors and supporters over the years.

Alex Poulin
Alex joined the SGES in January as our new computer technician. From his first job at the age of 15 at Data Com Computers to his most recent work experience as a Senior Technical Support Analyst at McMaster’s own UTS, Alex comes with a wealth of technical experience and is excited about his new employment venture in the SGES.

Alex was first drawn to working at McMaster because it has a positive impact on the Hamilton Community, recognizes the importance of work-life balance, and provides opportunities for growth and development.

Alex is looking forward to contributing to the success of the SGES by providing computer support to our staff, grads, and faculty. He looks forward to building strong working relationships and partnering with all members of the SGES. He hopes to make things easier for everyone when it comes to technology.

New Faces in the SGES
Alumni Spotlight

Simon Donato
by Lisa Leoni

Geologist, adventure scientist, and ultra-endurance junkie. Simon Donato has a passion for exploring human potential, pushing himself to redefine his limits, and pursuing scientific knowledge through exploration. Most of all though, he is passionate about leading a life where he gets to do what he loves each day, living without regret, and fostering lasting relationships with people that matter to him.

A former PhD student at McMaster University from 2003-2008, Simon focused his research on identifying paleo-tsunamis using geologic criteria (sedimentology, taphonomy, and micropaleontology). Simon chose McMaster in order to work with Dr. Eduard Reinhardt, broaden his geo-skill set, and for the opportunity to conduct fieldwork in interesting and exotic regions. He says “the ability to conduct self-directed research and to educate (himself) in areas that he did not specialize in during his studies was invaluable, and absolutely necessary”.

Once he completed his degree, he was hired directly from McMaster by Imperial Oil, and spent nearly 5 years working as a geologist. During this time, Imperial Oil provided him with the opportunity to travel to the oil sands to view drilling and production operations, numerous training courses (classroom and field), and some “real” geologic field trips where the data collected was used to pursue opportunities.

Simon has parlayed his academic and industry experience into several ventures: Adventure Science – an organization that pairs research scientists with adventure athletes to conduct scientific projects outside of the lab, and Boundless, a television show where he travels the globe competing in grueling endurance races. With Boundless, being a geologist is an asset as he can provide viewers with background information on the regions he races through. Simon aspires to continue to develop both of these ventures, and expand Adventure Science to provide a greater reach. Ultimately, he wishes to continue pursuing projects that he is passionate about. Simon most enjoys the freedom and flexibility of his current ventures. He works hard and long hours, but to him it never feels like work. He feels his work provides tangible and very rewarding benefits at the end of the day.

Some of the best advice that Simon has been given includes: Choose a job you love and you’ll never have to work a day in your life (via his dad – from Confucious) and from Mark Twain – If you tell the truth, you don’t have to remember anything. Simon is inspired by individuals who push to redefine the limits of their potential, whether it’s the hockey dad who ran his first 10 km or the disabled military veteran running a marathon. It’s safe to say that through all that Simon has accomplished, he is also an inspiration to all of us. To learn more about what Simon is up to, visit http://about.me/simondonato.

Kimberly Devotta
by Julia Evanovitch

Kimberly Devotta completed her studies within the SGES from 2006-2012 completing her BA (Hons) in Geography and Environmental Studies and her MA in Geography. She explains that she chose Geography because she learned on her first day of class that “everything is geography”. By the end of that lecture, she definitely believed it, “I see the role of geography in everyday experiences and points of inquiry”.

Kim's educational experience from McMaster has now taken her to the Centre for Research on Inner City Health at St. Michael's Hospital where she works as a Research Coordinator. The centre focuses on social determinants of health in the inner city and other geographies. Kim feels that “my degree gave me the knowledge and experience I needed to join a multi-disciplinary research team that looks at health through many different lenses, at many different scales”. She feels that her degree also gave her a good background in research methods and critical thinking. She enjoys that her current role allows her to work in a team environment, “collaborating with other people who have the same goals in mind, can make your career a lot more enjoyable and rewarding”.

She found the easiest transition from school to work life was adjusting to the accountability and deadlines of work life. She found that “if you take them seriously throughout your degree, it makes for an easier transition. School can be a lot like a job and the skills you develop to manage your time can definitely help you after you get your degree”. Furthermore, Kim explains that completing her Master’s thesis helped her develop research experience and strategies for dealing with the “roller coaster of events that projects can sometimes go through”. Kim’s interest continues to focus on health and health care, and her background in Geography gave her the foundation to investigate and understand current issues and decision-making processes.

Kim offers some insightful advice to future SGES students, ‘you can make a career out of what interests you but it’s not always fast and easy to do so and requires a bit of patience and discovery. Perseverance is key. While it helps to know people and network, never feel like it’s a lost cause if you don’t know where or whom to start with. At the end of the day, it really is about your skills and what you can offer to a company or a team, and that alone can be a big learning process that is never too early (or late!) to start”. We wish Kim all the best as she continues in her research role and future endeavors.
Events in Review

Guest Speakers in Geog 1HA3
by Walter G. Peace

For various reasons, students generally look forward to hearing their instructor announce that there will be a ‘guest speaker’ in an upcoming class. Over the past five years in the Term 1 version of my GEOG 1HA3 (Human Geographies: Society and Culture) course, I have invited different, what I will call, ‘guest speakers with a twist’ to speak to the class. This tradition began in October, 2008 when the concluding lecture on the topic of culture happened to fall on Halloween. On a whim (I always looked forward to Halloween as a child) I jokingly suggested to my wife, Barbara that I should give the lecture in costume. One thing quickly led to another and on All Hallow’s Eve I appeared in class as the Grim Reaper, complete with scythe and hourglass. The lecture covered various cultural aspects of Halloween such as cemeteries, vampires, imaginary places, and so on, all from a geographical perspective, of course. Feedback from the students and course TAs was very positive and thus, a tradition was born.

Each year since, the lecture has been adapted to fit the interests and ‘specialization’ of the different guest speakers. In 2009, Count Dracula made a grand entrance accompanied by the opening bars of Bach’s Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor. The following year, Professor Albus Dumbledore graciously agreed to give a most magical lecture. In 2011, Satan, the Devil himself was conjured up from the depths of the Earth, his entrance accompanied by ‘Dance Macabre’, by Camille Saint-Saens. Most recently, in October 2012, the world’s greatest detective, Sherlock Holmes was summoned from his Baker Street residence in London, England. His presentation was entitled ‘The Geography of Good and Evil; Life and Death’.

While speculation as to who the next guest speaker might be is rampant, audiences will have to wait until 2014 as I am on leave in Term 1 this year. I must say that it would not be possible to get these (and future) speakers to McMaster without considerable assistance from a number of people. In particular, I must thank Dr. Michael Mercier and four Instructional Assistants (Courtney Riley, Stephanie Carty, Ashley Macdonald and Julia Evanovitch) for their technical assistance. Rick Hayes from Classroom Audio-Visual Services has always ensured that the equipment is functioning and can accommodate the needs of the guest speakers. Finally, my wife Barbara has gone above and beyond the call of duty in terms of ideas, suggestions, regarding make-up and props for the speakers. Without her, these lectures could not exist.

“From ghoulies and ghosties and long-legged beasties
And things that go bump in the night
Good Lord deliver us”
Scottish prayer

Cattails in Cootes
by Eliza Jackson

In July, 2013, the Bay Area Restoration Council (BARC) provided volunteers with the opportunity to assist with their vegetation restoration project in Cootes Paradise. In the spirit of community outreach, Alyson Brown (Educational Support Technician), Julia Evanovitch (Instructional Assistant), and Eliza Jackson (SGES Summer Student) represented McMaster and the School of Geography and Environmental Sciences at the event. The morning was spent planting cattails in the waters near Rat Island, and by the end, nearly 500 cattails had been planted by the team of volunteers. The project was organized by the Royal Botanical Gardens with the assistance of BARC. Together they have a larger scale initiative to rehabilitate the ecosystem within Cootes Paradise.

Top: Eliza, Alyson, and Julia at the Marsh.
Bottom: Barc, RBG, and volunteer planters

UPCOMING EVENTS IN THE SGES

Graduate Brunch – September 12th, 2013
GIS Day – December 4th, 2013
Research Day – April 9th, 2014

Many more events will be posted on the SGES website including the SGES Seminar Series, Woo Water Lecture, and Social Committee Events. Visit: http://www.science.mcmaster.ca/geo/
14TH ANNUAL GIS DAY
by Deane Maynard

For the 14th year, over 150 high school geography students and teachers got a special hands-on look at geographic information systems (GIS), GPS technology and 3-D Remote Sensing at McMaster University on Tuesday, Dec. 4, 2012.

Hosted by the School of Geography & Earth Sciences, GIS Day fulfills part of the Ontario geography curriculum for grade 9. Three high schools from Hamilton, Grimsby and Oakville participated in this daylong workshop.

The high school students took part in hands-on ArcGIS workshops in the computer labs where they learned how to work with digital formats of geographic data. They compared temperature data which explained how latitude, altitude, and proximity to water affect temperatures. The exercises taught on GIS Day are consistent with the current Ontario curriculum for Grade 9 Geography.

Additional workshops included: learning how to use GPS systems during a campus-wide scavenger hunt; developing and improving their paper map skills and a demonstration of the Imperial Oil 3D Visualization facility with satellite remote sensing, geophysical and geological data.

McMaster’s GIS Day is part of the School of Geography and Earth Sciences High School Outreach Program led by Dr. Maureen Padden, which raises the visibility of the field of Geography, Earth Sciences and Geomatics among high school students and their teachers.

Special thanks goes to all of our graduate and undergraduate volunteers, the Imperial Oil Group at McMaster University, ESRI Canada, ESRI Redlands, Mills Library and McMaster University’s School of Geography & Earth Sciences, for their assistance in helping make GIS Day 2012 a success.

GIS Day 2013 will be held on Wednesday, December 4, 2013 and will take on a similar format to previous years’. Please contact Deane Maynard (maynard@mcmaster.ca) or 905-525-9140 x22542 if you are interested in participating or volunteering. Please click here to watch for GIS Day 2013 updates.

Imperial Oil Outreach Initiative
by Jay Brodeur

The Imperial Oil Outreach Initiative (IOOI) was established within SGES in 2010, thanks to the work of Dr. Bill Morris and a generous donation from the Imperial Oil Foundation. From the outset, its goal has been to use Google Earth and 3D visualization to raise awareness and excitement in Geography, Earth and Environmental Science (GEES) amongst high school and early undergraduate students, and to inspire them to pursue study in these fields. Since spring of 2013, the Initiative has been led by Dr. Maureen Padden, who has assembled a summer development team to help the Initiative reach its goals. The IOOI development team consists of: Maureen Padden, Jay Brodeur, Julia Evanoitch, Lisa Leoni, Michael Ayalew, Douglas Blomfield, Victoria Coates, Brenna Furlong, Etta Gunsolus, and Thomas Kosciuch. Throughout the summer, team members have been working together on a number of activities that further the IOOI’s overarching goals. These activities include:

- Creating freely-available, curriculum-relevant Google Earth-based teaching resources, which high school teachers can integrate into their teaching to enhance GEES exposure and instruction; and,
- Continuing a strong student outreach program, where local elementary and high school students are brought into the 3D room for an interactive 3D Google Earth experience.

Through their hard work, the IOOI team is committed to supporting the learning experience of all Geography, Earth and Environmental Science students, while simultaneously increasing exposure of the exciting learning opportunities within SGES.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the Imperial Oil Outreach Initiative or High School Outreach, please email: sgescop@mcmaster.ca
Education in the Field

ICELAND GROUP

Iceland Field Trip
by John Maclachlan

On April 29th, 2013 five McMaster School of Geography and Earth Sciences students met with twelve students from the University of Toronto Scarborough in the Keflavik Airport to embark on their exploration of Iceland.

The 12-day trip allowed for travel along the west central and southern part of the island. The geologic highlights of the trip were: standing on the plate boundary of the North American and Eurasian plates along the Mid-Ocean Ridge (MOR) where it comes up on land, exploring the recently active volcano Eyjafjallajökull responsible for world-wide travel delays in 2010, ‘dormant’ but potentially devastating volcanoes such as Katla, exploring Europe’s largest ice cap (Vatnajökull) using a ‘Super Jeep’ for transportation (well most of the way at least!), large glacial lakes people felt compelled to swim in, various hot springs and geysers.

There was also a chance to visit areas of cultural importance such as Seljavallalaug, Iceland’s oldest swimming pool located a 20 minute hike off the road and nestled along a Glacial valley wall. Here, everyone took the opportunity to eat the traditional Viking food of Hákarl. The students also visited the Vestmannaeyjar Islands, which experienced a volcanic eruption in 1973 forcing temporary evacuation, and had a discussion with a family that was evacuated from their home during the 2010 eruption just outside their family farm. Overall it was an experience that no one will ever forget.

Taking to Toronto
by Michael Mercier and Rob Wilton

Between August 25th and 30th, approximately 30 Level III undergraduate Honours Geography students completed their fieldwork component of GEOG 3MF3 (Human Geography Field Camp) in Toronto, Ontario. Now in its fifth year, this core course has become amongst the most memorable of many Geography students’ academic careers. The strength of the course comes from its comparatively small size, the individual hands-on instruction students get from their two instructors, the intensity of the experience (e.g. five plus full days of focused fieldwork), and the camaraderie that develops among the cohort of students through their shared experiences. When asked about their experiences, shortly after the trip, most commented on the hard work and long hours, but they also discussed the cool experiences, the friendships they developed, and the connections they made with their instructors.

The 2013 edition of GEOG 3MF3 was held in Toronto, Ontario over the last full week of summer prior to the start of the fall semester. Students spent Sunday through Friday nights housed at the Bond Place Hotel near Yonge and Dundas, but their days were spent ‘out in the field’ learning about urban field research. In so doing, students spent their days alternating between i) conducting street-corner surveys asking Torontonians about their views of immigration and cultural diversity in the city, ii) engaging in social observation of the use of public spaces such as urban parks and plazas, and iii) developing an urban transect of Yonge Street by noting the changing land uses and built form of various sections of the city’s most iconic street. Students also used these various field methods in an applied way, by developing a plan to redevelop a vacant lot on the periphery of the city’s urban core from a series of parking lots to an urban park. While the field work for the course is now completed, students will spend time over the next three months (the fall semester) reflecting on their experiences in Toronto, and making sense of the data they collected.

In addition to their days spent conducting urban field work, students had ample opportunities, in the evening, to engage in social activities such as attending Blue Jays’ games or concerts, going out for meals together, shopping, etc. While for many of this year’s students, thoughts of all of the hard work of the week are already beginning to fade, but the experiences and friendships cultivated during the week away together will remain for a long time.

GEOG 3MF3 - Human Geography Field Camp Group at St. James Park, Toronto
Coral Reefs in the Bahamas
by Eduard Reinhardt

The 2013 coral reefs course (Earth Sci 4FF3) spent the February reading week on San Salvador Island in the Bahamas studying the environments that make-up a reef system. We visited mangroves, salt ponds, tidal flats, beaches, lagoons and coral reefs to better understand how these environments evolved geologically. We took sediment cores and collected samples to study how and why certain sediments accumulate in different environments and we SCUBA dived and snorkeled on the reefs to observe first-hand the processes at work in these natural systems.

Identifying sediment characters in the rock record is an important part of geological studies and provides clues on how climate and sea-level caused environmental change and where oil and gas maybe located. Seeing these environments first-hand is an important part of the learning process for students, as the modern environment is the key to understanding the geologic past and one cannot learn or appreciate the environment from a classroom. Getting out in the field and making observations is something that sticks; now, whenever the students of 4FF3 think of limestones, they will remember nice warm tropical seas teeming with corals, invertebrates and fish but also the stinky icky salt ponds....

MacMap
by Patrick DeLuca

Have you ever been lost on campus? The McMaster MacMap application will help you find your way!

Coming soon, the School of Geography and Earth Sciences and ESRI Canada will launch the new iPhone App known as MacMap. With its interactive map you’ll be able to calculate the shortest walking path between building entrances and also allows filtering of accessible entrances for your route. The data that powers this app came from two main sources, Dr. Darren Scott and Patrick DeLuca. Dr. Scott provided the data on accessible entrances and then created a full network of all of the paths on campus using one of the School’s mobile mapping units. Patrick DeLuca provided the data that was used to create the community basemap of campus. This basemap is updated on an ongoing basis and acts as the backdrop for the App. Other layers include the HSR bus stops and the emergency phone locations. The first version of the app was inspired by the needs of the CANHEIT 2011 conference, and was a partnership between Riley O’Brien from UTS, Darren Scott and Patrick DeLuca from Geography and Earth Sciences. This second version is a completely new build created by ESRI Canada, which SGES has had a partnership with for over 20 years. Future versions will include building floor plans and routing to specific rooms. Eventually the goal is to create a full 3D campus that can be accessed from any smartphone. The app will be available from the iStore mid to late September (links will be provided on the School of Geography and Earth Sciences website).
Photo Contest

For the last few years, the SGES has run photo contests where Faculty, Staff and Students have submitted photos, many of which now decorate our hallways. SGES News would like to continue this tradition and extend the invitation to Alumni. The winning photo will be on the front cover of the next SGES Newsletter.

SHARE YOUR PHOTO!

Have a photo that you’d like to share in ‘Blast From the Past’ or submit to the photo contest? Email it to us at: sgesnews@mcmaster.ca

Blast From the Past (circa 1997)
We'd like to hear from you. If you have ideas for the newsletter or a story/news that you would like to share with the SGES community, let us know! You can reach us at the following:

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