It’s About Place

Place Matters, the new title of our newsletter, was chosen to declare and promote the essence of our department and its strategic intellectual position within the University of Tennessee and the larger academy. Geographers bring a unique spatial perspective to their work. The where question is often at the heart of many social and environmental issues—whether one is examining population and migrations, climate change, transportation, natural hazards, manufacturing, ecological resiliency, or civil and human rights.

Our faculty are making major progress in advancing the frontiers of geographical research and engaging in important interdisciplinary collaborations with scientists in other fields of study. They are also on the forefront of teaching as they support UT’s new campus-wide initiative to enhance and expand experiential learning opportunities for students. Our efforts in this regard have benefited recently from major gifts to our McCroskey Fund, which supports student fieldwork and specialized conference travel, and our annual Robert Long Graduate Student Award.

Place also matters when you consider our program’s commitment to offer students the best learning environment possible. A key strength of our department is the Burchfiel Building which for the past fifteen years has afforded the department’s faculty, staff, and students with a home under one roof. Having a building dedicated to geography has provided a special place for students, faculty, and staff, and fostered a strong sense of community.

Frankly, there are few university geography programs that can claim newer and more impressive facilities than ours. Burchfiel Building facilities are complemented by a host of research spaces in the Claxton Computational Complex, Science and Engineering Research Facility (SERF), and at Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL). But Burchfiel does not stay impressive without improvement and adapting to changing needs and opportunities. Over the past year, the department has created an additional computer teaching laboratory to accommodate demand for more GIS courses, accomplished a major renovation on the second floor to provide offices for our expanding faculty, and installed a beautiful array of donated antique maps in the hallways of Burchfiel.

Alumni and friends are always welcome to visit and tour the department any time they are in the Knoxville area. We also encourage alumni and friends to follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and our recently redesigned, mobile device-friendly web page at geography.utk.edu.

Finally, as we contemplate the kind of place of innovation and community that our department can be as UT continues its push to the Top 25 of public research institutions, there is one constant. The journey to excellence is not one that our faculty and students make alone. Please know that you—our alumni and friends—always have an important place in the program, and that your continuing support is greatly appreciated.

DEREK ALDERMAN
Professor and Department Head
KELSEY ELLIS, assistant professor, is a physical geographer specializing in applied meteorology and climatology. In her research she uses a variety of statistical and spatial analysis methods in order to advance understanding of tropical cyclones, tornadoes, and human-environment interactions.

Currently, she is a collaborator on a project associated with VORTEX-SE (Verification of the Origins of Rotation in Tornadoes Experiment-Southeast), administered by the National Severe Storms Laboratory (NSSL), a federal research laboratory under the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

VORTEX-SE’s research goals are to understand how environmental factors characteristic of the Southeastern U.S. affect the formation, intensity, structure and path characteristics of tornadoes for this region, to determine the best methods for communicating forecast uncertainty, and to evaluate public response.

Tornadoes in the southeast are more fatal than other locations. Professor Ellis will be using Tennessee as a case study to provide insight into the issue of tornado fatalities in this region. Due to the high number of nocturnal tornadoes, the wide range of tornado frequencies across the state, and great socioeconomic diversity, Tennessee provides a unique, yet representative, location to conduct this research.

SOLANGE MUÑOZ is the newest faculty member in the department, having joined the department in August 2015 as assistant professor. Her areas of expertise include Latin America, race and ethnicity, urban geography, housing, and immigration.

She earned master’s degree in Latin American studies and a doctorate in geography from the University of Texas-Austin. Prior to coming to UT, she served as a lecturer at the University of Michigan.

Professor Muñoz’s research interests are deeply rooted in her personal and intellectual concerns with political, economic, and socio-spatial processes of marginalization and contestation. A human geographer, she employs qualitative and ethnographic methods to address social dimensions of urban development. Her work entails examining how struggles for access to housing and to remain in the city are routinely lived and experienced by poor urban populations and the social organizations that represent them.

These interests have most recently found intellectual purchase in Latin America and through engagements with Latino immigrant communities in the U.S.

Through her research and teaching she strives to bring to the fore discussion, insight, and understanding of traditionally marginalized and stigmatized populations.
KURT BUTEFISH (BA ’84; MS ’86) is now in his fifteenth year heading up the Tennessee Geographic Alliance (TGA) which is housed in the Department of Geography. He was recognized this fall as one of the department’s 2015 Distinguished Alumni for his tireless work in promoting geography education.

While the outreach mission of TGA is to advance geographic literacy, primarily through work supporting Tennessee’s K-12 teachers, recently the organization’s focus has shifted toward advocating for geography instruction to remain relevant in the curriculum. To that end, TGA’s recent efforts have been two pronged—building the organization’s leadership capacity for advocacy for geography instruction and partnering with constituents to educate decision makers and the public on the need for geographically literate high school graduates. TGA’s natural partners for advocacy for geography education and literacy have come from the private sector and government agencies that employ geographers and geospatial practitioners. Their voices have been influential in the education of decision makers and students on the need for geographically literate high school graduates who can pursue a pathway toward filling the many geography and geospatial technology-related jobs in Tennessee.

Kurt also serves as the Executive Director for the Tennessee Council for the Social Studies which is the largest state-wide organization for Social Studies professionals.

The Burchfiel Geography Building was made possible by generous donations from William Wesley Burchfiel, Jr. of Sevierville, Tennessee. The building was erected and named in honor of his father, W. W. Burchfiel, Sr.

William Wesley Burchfiel, Jr. earned bachelor’s (’40) and master’s (’41) degrees in geography from the University of Tennessee and later a doctorate (’53) in geography from the University of Maryland. He enjoyed a successful career in business in Sevier County and maintained his lifelong interest in the university, especially athletics and geography.
This summer, I spent July in Paris, meeting and interviewing various veterans and newcomers of the French punk scene about the influence of Washington, DC on their lives. My research focuses on the diversity of ways in which music can affect impressions of urban landscape, using the legacy of Washington, DC’s punk scene as a basis. I first became aware of this particular connection between DC and Paris upon seeing a couple of French bands perform in Paris in 2010. Five years later, I turned this concept into a research proposal in Sally Horn’s grant-writing course, and the W.K. McClure Scholarship for the Study of World Affairs and the Stewart K. McCroskey Memorial Fund provided financial means to help make it a reality.

While in France, I had opportunities to meet and record expansive interviews with a variety of musicians, writers and fans whose impressions of DC had all been affected somehow by that city’s underground music scene. These included seventeen different interviewees, ranging in age from 20s to 50s, twelve men and five women, who had grown up (and become fans of punk music) in a variety of different places and backgrounds. I also had wonderful meetings with Séverin Guillard (Université de Paris L’Est) and Laurence Estanove (Université Paris Decartes), both of whom are doing impressive work in musical geography overseas and I’m proud to now call colleagues and counterparts.

Among the in-person meetings I had in Paris, one particular moment stands out for me. Philippe Roizes, the individual largely credited with “bringing DC hardcore to Paris” in the 1980s not only gave me a nearly-comprehensive history of Paris’ punk story over coffee, but he gave me an impromptu tour of some old punk haunts in Eastern Paris. He brought me by the café where he and his friends met on Saturdays to discuss their latest musical discoveries, highlighting how important salons like these are, and especially were before the internet. He walked me down Rue Oberkampf in the 11th Arrondissement, now heavily gentrified and filled with trendy bars, describing it as he remembered it from his adolescence: desolate and violent. He told me anecdotes of that block’s lurid history that have never been published before, especially not in academic discourse. We shook hands and parted, and I was so moved by the stories that our walk had elicited that I needed to duck into Café Charbon to hide for a few minutes and clear my head before my next interview.
When I returned to the States, many of my friends asked how France was. I found myself referring to it as “overwhelming,” which was probably easy to misinterpret. Any urban landscape as sought after as Paris should be overwhelming, I would feel like I was missing a major part of my research if I never shared in that experience; being packed into speeding Metro cars to discover an interview subject’s arrondissement, weaving through rush hour traffic at Place de la Nation on a bike to find a colleague, and trying to piece together rudimentary conversations with my rudimentary French. While I still have a career’s worth of lessons to learn about qualitative fieldwork, I realize how important it is for the researchers to be uncomfortable in the field. It gives them a sense of sympathy and drives their passion for what they’re doing.

The experiences I had on the ground in Paris, Lyon, and Marseille were indispensable, and for that, I owe major gratitude to the McClure and McCroskey Funds. No research this qualitatively intricate is possible to conduct via email, and the electronic follow-up I have been conducting since returning to the States has been possible due to my in-person meetings and on-site experience. Importantly, my time in France made it possible for me to understand the place as much as the people I met, as it was every bit as complex and interesting of a character.

Left: Me (left) in Marseille with Olivier (owner of Crapoulet Records), his wife Claire (owner of ‘Sailin On’ Tattoo parlor, named for a song by DC hardcore group Bad Brains), and their friend Charlotte (bassist in Paris band Stalled Minds).

Below: BANNED IN DC containing photos and anecdotes of the DC Punk Underground, first published in 1988 as one of the first documents/books of the American punk scene.
Mapping Learning

Thanks to the generosity of three donors and one gallery owner who is very passionate about maps, all four floors of the Burchfiel Geography Building are now graced with beautiful, original antique maps. Most of the maps are copperplate engravings with painstakingly applied hand color, created by map-making giants of the 16th to 18th centuries.

The gift was sparked by Jeff Chapman, director of the UT’s McClung Museum of Natural History and Culture, who had connections with W. Graham Arader III of Arader Galleries which specialize in antique natural history engravings and watercolors, maps and atlases, and rare books. Jeff contacted Mr. Arader and explained that the inhabitants of the Burchfiel building were looking to make the wall space of the highly trafficked areas more attractive and engaging. Mr. Arader made a trip to view Burchfiel and meet the faculty. He was very impressed with the facilities and envisioned the walls as an excellent canvas for displaying antiques maps. Mr. Arader then encouraged and arranged for three individuals to make donations to McClung of almost 200 antique maps. Most of those maps, twenty of which are now in Burchfiel, came from Jeffrey M. Leving, attorney and founder of Fathers’ Rights in Chicago. A map of Moscow that is now a centerpiece on the third floor was donated by Robert J. Isakson of Mobile, Alabama. Two maps of South Carolina and Georgia on the fourth floor were donated by Orrin Lippoff of Brooklyn, New York.

As facilitator of these gifts to the department, Mr. Arader was very specific in his intent that these gifted maps were to serve the educational mission of the department and the university and his expectation to see plans for the use of the maps in certain courses. Honoring his wish, the department has already designed a lesson plan for Geography 101 that takes advantage of the wonderful teaching and learning opportunities afforded by these gifts.

“The maps are beautiful to look at, but we would be foolish not to make use of the educational potential of them,” noted Henri-Grissino-Mayer. “That’s what they were designed to do in the first place. Not just to get people from point A to point B, but to educate people about their surroundings. That’s our purpose, too.”

Student Success GETS A BOOST FROM GENEROUS DONORS

Earlier this year, Hope and John Williamson enriched the impact of the Stewart K. McCroskey Memorial Fund with a commitment of $50,000. Hope and Jill Coupe, both sisters of Stewart McCroskey are long-time supporters of geography. The McCroskey Fund supports field research and professional travel by geography students and faculty. Stewart, who was a graduate student in geography at the time of his illness and death, was especially interested in the people of the Caribbean and their relationships to their environment. His research examined water management strategies on the dry island of Antigua, but he was sincerely interested in a wide range of geographic questions and environments.

The Department also received the commitment of $25,000 from Dr. Richard G. Long and Kathleen Long Earle for the establishment of the Long Outstanding Graduate Student Award Endowment. The endowment will significantly enhance this long-time award that honors two graduate students each year for superior scholarship, professional promise and service to the Department and the discipline of Geography. Richard and Kathleen are the son and daughter of the late Dr. Robert G. Long, the award’s namesake and the first Head of Geography when it became a stand-alone Department in 1967.
A Partnership of Historic Magnitude

An initial inquiry from the Tennessee Historical Commission (THC) in 2000 launched an enduring and mutually beneficial partnership with UT’s Laboratory of Tree-Ring Science (LTRS) directed by Professor Henri Grissino-Mayer. The collaborative partnership has produced a better understanding of Tennessee’s rich history, showcased the department’s nationally prominent research program in tree-ring science, and afforded an array of experiential learning and professional opportunities for geography students.

What kicked off the partnership was THC’s request for performance of a tree-ring dating project to learn whether one of the premier historical sites in Tennessee (the Rocky Mount State Historic Site north of Johnson City) was indeed as old as oral and written histories suggested.

The findings were remarkable, revealing that most historic sites are in fact one to two generations younger than oral and written histories have long suggested. For example, the Cobb House at Rocky Mount was built in 1827, not in 1770 as history books had stated. Another tree-ring dating project in Knox County found that Governor John Sevier House at the Marble Springs State Historic Site was in fact not built by Governor John Sevier because the trees were harvested years after he had died. The research group also discovered that two log cabins at the Wynnewood State Historic Site in Castalian Springs, Tennessee, could not have been built by their namesakes because the supposed builders had passed away before their construction.

More recently, the research group dated logs from timbers at Sabine Hill, part of the Sycamore Shoals State Historic Area in Elizabethton, Tennessee, and learned that General Nathaniel Taylor in fact did not have anything to do with the construction of this impressive two-story Federalist architecture structure. Construction did not begin until two years after his death.

UT’s collaboration with THC has not only engaged tree-ring dating to re-write history and uncover some inaccuracies in historical accounts, but also fueled the department’s central goals of research, teaching, and learning. The projects with THC over the years have offered valuable hands-on, experiential learning opportunities for number of graduate and undergraduate students, both in the field and in the laboratory. Each of the numerous projects involving the dating of historic structures has involved graduate students in leadership roles who have engaged and supervised the work of undergraduate students. These projects taught students the necessity of scientific inquiry and application of the scientific method to provide a more accurate history of Tennessee.

The students involved have also benefited from opportunities to present the research results from these projects at regional and national professional meetings and publishing the findings in peer-reviewed journals.
Micheline van Riemsdijk and Josh Inwood Receive National Awards

Micheline van Riemsdijk, associate professor of geography, was a 2015 recipient of the Higher Education Distinguished Teaching Award from the National Council for Geographic Education. The award is national recognition of her professional dedication and leadership, teaching skills, and active development of innovative teaching materials and strategies. She was recognized at a special ceremony during the National Conference on Geography Education in August 2015 in Washington, DC.

Joshua Inwood, associate professor of geography and Africana studies, received the 2015 Glenda Laws Award at the meeting of the Association of American Geographers (AAG) in Chicago in late April.

The Glenda Laws Award is administered by the AAG and endorsed by members of the Institute of Australian Geographers, the Canadian Association of Geographers, and the Institute of British Geographers. The annual award and honorarium recognize outstanding contributions to geographic research on social issues. The Glenda Laws Award is a nationally prestigious honor that speaks highly to the international reputation that Inwood is establishing in critical race studies, peace geographies, and the study of human rights. The Laws Award Committee noted, in particular, Inwood’s exemplary record of scholarship, leadership role in public pedagogy, and his ongoing transparent dialogues with community members on and off campus to address issues of inequality, social justice and violence.