

Toward a Diverse UT Geography: Who Was Lillian Stimson?

The Department is devoted to enhancing the gender and racial/ethnic diversity of its faculty and students as well as expanding opportunities for underrepresented groups. Doing so requires not only focusing on future programs and initiatives, but also reflecting back on the role that diversity has played, historically, within the Geography program and recognizing some leaders who have faded from our collective memory.



For many in the Department, the name “Lillian Stimson” probably does not immediately ring a bell, although her portrait hangs in Burchfiel 406, the Geography main conference area. Lillian Worley Stimson was a faculty member in the Department of Geography at the University of Tennessee for many years and an important female voice in a traditionally male-dominated academic discipline.

Professor Stimson joined UT in 1948 after teaching at Alabama College. She received a MA from University of Wisconsin in 1933 and a PhD from the University of North Carolina in 1949. Dr. Stimson was hired at UT as a result of the dramatic increase in student enrollment following World War II. She served on the faculty until the late 1960s. On May 17th of 1968, she died of injuries suffered in a car accident she had near Franklin, Tennessee in 1966.

Dr. Stimson’s interests included geographic education, the American South, conservation, politics, and urban studies. In 1965, Lillian Stimson hosted a National Defense Education Act (NDEA) Institute at UT. Long-time Department Head Sid Jumper noted that Dr. Stimson “spearheaded” Tennessee’s ties with the NDEA Fellowship Program, which later funded many graduate students in the Geography program. A memorial statement written about Lillian Stimson indicated that she “was active in promoting the involvement of women in education and gave considerably of her time in Delta Kappa Gamma, an international honor society for women educators, and to the American Association of University of Women.”

Dr. Stimson was able to claim some important “firsts” within Geography. She was the first female Chair/President of the Southeastern Division of the Association of American Geographers (SEDAAG), holding that position in 1949. Not until the early 1990s would SEDAAG elect another woman as President. In 1964, Dr. Stimson became the first (and thus far, the only) female Editor of *The Southeastern Geographer*, the official peer-reviewed journal of the Southeastern Division of the AAG. As this history suggests, the discipline of Geography, like other sciences, still struggles with issues of diversity.

The role of women in the history of UT Geography is not limited to Dr. Stimson, however. Dr. Julia Shipman was the first female with a Ph.D. to teach Geography at Tennessee. A graduate of Clark University, she taught in the 1920s when we were the Department of Geology, Geography, and Mineralogy. Shipman was the beginning of a series of important women geographers at UT who included Stimson and, more recently, Lydia Pulsipher (now emeritus), Sally Horn, and Carol Harden. Dr. Pulsipher is the author of a widely read world regional textbook. A Chancellor’s Professor since 2008, Dr. Horn is one of the most accomplished faculty members on campus. Former Department Head Carol Harden served as President of the Association of American Geographers, becoming in 2009 just the tenth female to be elected to that prestigious position. More recently, Harden and Horn were joined in the Department by Madhuri Sharma, Micheline van Riemsdijk, and Kelsey Scheitlin—who represent a new generation of innovative female scholars in Geography.