

Toward a More Diverse UT Geography: Who Was Lillian Stimson?

The UT Department of Geography is devoted to enhancing the gender and racial/ethnic diversity of its faculty and students as well as expanding opportunities for other underrepresented groups. Of course, doing so requires focusing on future programs and initiatives, but it is also about 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 from 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 by serving 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 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 Lydia Pulsipher and Carol Harden (both now retired), and Sally Horn. 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, the Department has become the home of new generations of innovative female faculty in Geography—such as Madhuri Sharma, Kelsey Ellis, Solange Muñoz, Hannah Herrero, Nikki Luke, LaToya Eaves, Tracey Norrell, and Mayra Roman-Rivera.