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## Geographic Mobility as a Civil Right

### SUMMER TEACHING INSTITUTE EXPLORES GEOGRAPHIC MOBILITY AS IT RELATES TO THE AFRICAN AMERICAN FREEDOM STRUGGLE

In July of 2022, the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, hosted a residential summer institute for K-12 educators from across the US, funded by a National Endowment for the Humanities grant. Participants explored the history of the Civil Rights movement through geographic mobility. The institute highlighted the central role of migration, transportation, and travel and tourism in structural racism and the fight for African American freedom and self-determination.

Participants attended lectures and lab exercises; participated in discussions; and learned methodologies and classroom activities from curriculum and content specialists. They also took field trips around Knoxville, Nashville, and Memphis as part of the institute's commitment to place-based education.

"Through the institute, we offered a model of critical thought, instruction, and pedagogical application that supports ongoing calls for greater numbers of social studies educators to address power and inequity," said Derek Alderman, professor of geography.

Alderman and colleague Joshua Kenna, associate professor of social science education in the UT College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences, received nearly \$200,000 in funding to host the institute from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) "A More Perfect Union" initiative, which aims to promote a deeper understanding of American history and culture.

"In addition to having a well-rounded curriculum that utilizes several experts from the field and provides experiential learning opportunities, we're also proud of our strong emphasis on building and fostering relationships with teachers," Kenna said. "The goal is not achieved when they acquire the content, it is



only achieved when we help them grapple with and overcome pedagogical and logistical hurdles so that they can teach this content in their classrooms."

Workshops featured guest lectures and hands-on lessons from experts on geographic mobility, race and racism, oral history, digital mapping and the humanities, and pedagogy. The institute culminated with participating teachers developing and presenting curriculum projects and ideas for teaching about the role of migration, transportation, travel and tourism within the Black civil rights experience.

"Our hosting of this summer institute in Knoxville received high marks from participating teachers and NEH program directors. It further cements the University of Tennessee's reputation as a national leader in teacher training and creating important synergies between the teaching of history, geography, and social justice," Alderman said. "The university welcomed a brilliant group of K-12 teachers, many of whom are educators of color. They significantly advanced discussions of diversity and inclusion on our campus and taught many of the institute's staff important lessons about the struggles currently facing the nation's teachers."



## Welcome to the Department of Geography and Sustainability!

Last year started as another rough year, with a COVID surge and quarantined teachers and students that sent some classes online. Despite that start, the year will instead be defined as one of the strongest years of growth and change ever in the department. First of all, we have a new name! Welcome to the **Department of Geography & Sustainability**.

To understand the name change, we go back to fall 2017 when we acquired the small interdisciplinary program in sustainability, which was a concentration in the college's major in interdisciplinary studies without a home. Geography agreed to take on the small program and named Senior Lecturer Melissa Hinten as the director. Hinten and the department immediately got to work making a better home for sustainability. We applied to the Tennessee Higher Education Commission to make sustainability a BA full degree. We added a capstone course to the major to help students prepare for the job market. The undergraduate Geography Club embraced the students and renamed itself the UT Alliance of Geographers and Sustainers. Sustainability flourished.

I don't think any of us realized in 2017 how important sustainability would become to our department. What started out as 50 students is now almost 120 students. Half of our undergraduate students are working toward a sustainability major or minor, and sustainability students became departmental leaders alongside geography students. By spring 2022, it seemed fair and right to ask the university for a name change. So here we are, with our first newsletter of the Department of Geography and Sustainability.

The department continues to grow in other ways too. Last year started our new BS degree in geographic information science and technology. Don't worry - there's no plan to change names to the Department of Geography, Sustainability, and Geographic Information Science & Technology! We have also started a new minor in broadcast meteorology; an innovative joint program with the School of Journalism and Electronic Media. As the number of students grow, our faculty continues to grow too. Last year we were joined by Sola Festus and Mayra Román-Rivera as lecturers in GIS and physical geography, and this fall we are excited to welcome Dimitris Herrera as an assistant professor with expertise in climatology and meteorology.

As you read this newsletter, you'll see that despite the difficulties of the last few years, our department continued on doing what we do best. Our faculty, staff, and alumni remain dedicated to helping students to become world-changers, and you'll see features that highlight a new mentoring system initiated by Mike Camponovo. Finally, and most importantly, our geography and sustainability students continue to use their knowledge in service of their passion to understand and change the world, and you'll see features of undergraduate and graduate students working alongside faculty and community organizations in areas from racial justice to climate change.



**NICHOLAS NAGLE**  
Professor and Head



**MELISSA HINTEN**



**SOLA FESTUS**



**MARYA ROMÁN-RIVERA**

## Community Engagement and Outreach

Outreach and community engagement are key components to our curriculum in the department. Students have several opportunities to engage with our community while applying what they learn in the classroom to real-world situations. During the past year, students worked with the Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment (SOCM), Adelante, and others to solve local problems with geography.



**NIKKI LUKE**

## Evictions Mapping

On September 4, 2020, the CDC issued a nationwide moratorium on evictions and foreclosures due to non-payment to slow the spread of COVID-19. Despite this federal action, evictions continued in the Knox County Circuit Court. A small group of volunteers working with Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment (SOCM) responded to share information about the moratorium with tenants facing upcoming court dates. Adam Hughes, the SOCM East Tennessee community organizer, approached Nikki Luke, assistant professor of geography, to see if she could help. Luke worked with geography students Sam Myers-Miller and Maya Rao to map where evictions were occurring so SOCM could continue their outreach efforts.

The moratorium ended in July 2021, but it was never a permanent solution to housing insecurity in Knoxville. Students and faculty in the geography department have continued to work with SOCM and the East Knoxville-based organization Socially Equal Energy Efficient Development (SEED) to collect information about housing and energy access in Knoxville through a door-to-door survey in impacted neighborhoods.

In the spring 2022 semester, students in GEOG 420 and GEOG 446 will continue this work to identify changes in the geographies and frequencies of eviction in Knoxville during the pandemic and analyze whether these changes might influence housing affordability for renters. This engaged research puts the methods of geography to use to support the objectives of community-based organizations while working to understand processes of urban change in Knoxville.



## Impacts of Urban Renewal

To preserve, revitalize, and transform the urban communities of cities across America, the federal government passed Title I of the Housing Act in 1949 and Title III of the Housing Act in 1954. Although framed as a project for redevelopment and revitalization of downtown areas, urban renewal targeted African American communities for demolition. The goal was to clear the "blight and slums" of downtown areas in the form of large-scale clearance to make room for new infrastructure. These policies and actions became known nationwide as urban renewal.

Luke Brice created an interactive map of what Knoxville looked like before the urban renewal policies removed a large history of Knoxville's African American population and displaced them elsewhere.

"The effects of urban renewal are still felt today. People who lived through these policies still remember and share their experiences. Living memory allows us to understand the present landscape of our city today," Luke said. "Urban renewal continues to affect the African American community in Knoxville today, not only by a broken and displaced community, but also through continuing urban clean-up legislation."

According to Luke, urban renewal teaches us to look at society with a different eye.

"What looks like slum and blight to one group is the home and loved community of another," Luke said. "Place and space are defined by those who live in it and shouldn't be a target of those who don't experience it."

To learn more about his project and see an interactive story map, visit [tiny.utk.edu/storymap](https://tiny.utk.edu/storymap).



## Mapping the Migrant Journey

Geography students Maya Rao and Annie Liu spent the spring 2021 semester helping Meghan Conley, assistant professor of practice in the UT Department of Sociology, with an ArcGIS StoryMap project in collaboration with Adelante, a local immigration legal nonprofit, to look at the various impacts detention has on immigrants in Knox County.

Sociology 433R is a research-based class, with students from different majors participating in and learning about participatory action research and its methods. Students began the semester working in teams researching the impacts detention has on different parts of life, including social, financial, physical, and mental. Each group wrote a paper that would then inform the next aspect of the research project.

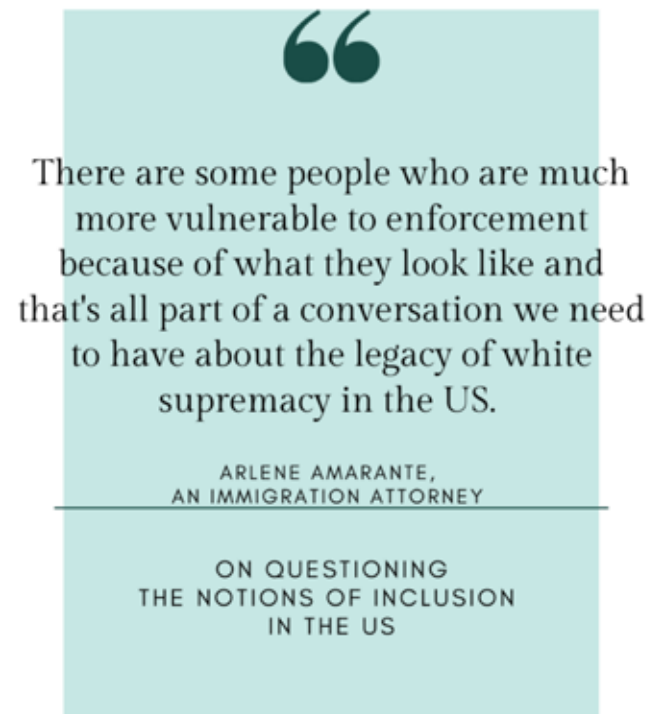
"I looked at the physical impacts of detention by researching the locations of detention facilities and discovered that many detention facilities are built on toxic superfund sites," Maya said.

Annie was on the financial impacts team and looked at the negative effects that detention has on family finances of the detained.

"We also examined the economic reasons behind the detention and deportation machine and found that the immigration landscape of this country is extremely profit-driven and commodified, thus leading to the dehumanization of immigrants," Annie said.

Next, students conducted interviews with different people involved in the detention process. Maya interviewed a local Knox County Schools teacher who has experiences with students who have parents who have gone through the detention process and has seen firsthand the trauma that those experiences can have on students. Annie talked to Hammad Sheikh Esq. and discussed what the detention process looked like from an immigration attorney's perspective. He also spoke about the impact that COVID was having on detainees' health and safety.

Students also interviewed immigrants who went through the detention and deportation proceedings that the local Knox county sheriff's office enforces in conjunction with Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Maya and Annie worked together on creating content for the final product - an ArcGIS StoryMap. They created maps using different features, such as the drive time analysis to see the distance detainees travel when going through the various checkpoints in the United States. Maya found data from migration policy and the American Community Survey to create a countries of origin map to show some of the demographic data of undocumented immigrants in Tennessee. Annie found local news sources that helped to give context to the issues they were mapping.



Ultimately, they mapped out the journey that the interviewees went through during their immigration experience.

"Our goal was to show just how unjust and traumatic these experiences are on the immigrant populations," Maya said.

Their final step was presenting the project to Adelante, who were very proud of the finished product.

"I loved the experience," Maya said. "It ignited my interest in community-based research, which I hope to study further. I especially enjoyed connecting my skills in GIS, passion for the environment, and curiosity in policy."

Annie loved the class as well, especially since she had the opportunity to work with Adelante again.

"I've worked with the group in the past to use GIS to visualize issues," Annie said. "The experience in community-based research was super valuable and will be helpful as I pursue my interest in working with nonprofits."

Learn more and see their map online at [tiny.utk.edu/storymap2](https://tiny.utk.edu/storymap2)



Read more about UT Geography & Sustainability online. [geography.utk.edu](https://geography.utk.edu)

Our alumni continue to find exciting ways to keep engaged with current students. In the middle of the pandemic, a small group of alumni were looking for ways to support current and recently graduating students at a time when the economy was suffering, so they created an alumni group on LinkedIn to build connections between the two groups.

Founding members are Hannah Gunderman ('18), Adam Alsamadisi ('15, '19), Kelly Baar ('19), and Morgan Steckler ('20). Join the group by searching for "UTK Geography Alum" on LinkedIn.

"When you go on a tour of UT, one phrase really hits home: *Tennessee is a big campus with a small community feel*. This could not be truer than as a student in the geography department, which serves as a home away from home. It offers opportunities in research, leadership, and networking. It encourages students to excel academically and gives students the resources to do so. It houses a safe space for students to study, create friendships, and host events. We felt like everything this department works so hard to create shouldn't end at graduation so, we created the LinkedIn group. Originally, the group was to house a space for students to transition to alumni with the help of other graduates. Now, it is actively used as a way to recognize alumni accomplishments, provide support for recent graduates, and networking. As membership grows, we hope to continue to foster meaningful conversations amongst UT geography alumni."

- Kelly Baar

In addition to the LinkedIn group, alumni connect with our students through a capstone course, Geography 499: Practicing Geography. More than 30 alumni volunteered to serve as mentors during the fall 2021 semester. The goal of the program was to connect students and alumni to help share professional experiences and advice while building meaningful connections.

"Being a mentor has been an invaluable experience," said Kelly Baar, who graduated with a bachelor's in geography in 2019. "I have thoroughly enjoyed giving back to a department that immensely shaped my experience as a student, and now continues to allow me to share my passion with likeminded people."

Kelsey Roche will graduate this spring and is ready to explore her career options thanks to her experience with the program. Her mentor, Jeff Smith, is the regional business manager for Trimble Inc. and based in Florida.

"I was lucky enough to be paired with a mentor to help me navigate the intimidating job-hunting world," Kelsey said. "I have gained so much appreciation for Jeff as he's helped me define my strengths as a future employee, strengthen my resume, written me a recommendation, and offered the help of his professional friends along my journey of finding a job out of college. Jeff has given me endless amounts of advice about the real world that I plan on taking with me beyond my professional life. He has not only made me prepared, but excited for the job-hunting experience. I couldn't imagine being as ready as I am to start exploring my life after college without the help of my mentor."

Bennett Meeks, who graduated in 2021 with a bachelor's in geography, enjoyed the opportunity to get to know an alum during the program and speaks to her on a regular basis.

"My mentor provides a wealth of knowledge," Bennett said. "There is something special about getting advice from someone who has just gone through the same transitions as you - especially having it been so recently. The ability to speak with a friend in the professional field is also invaluable because I often get a lot of advice that is inferred and often overlooked, and I receive advice on the things that I have yet to do or have not done in my college experience and hear their perspective while learning from their ventures. As I started my new job this semester, my mentor was one of the first people to hear about it, and the advice she gave me was always spot on. I love the connection between my mentor and I, and I am really looking forward to doing the same for the next generation."

If you are interested in being a mentor, contact Michael Camponovo, program coordinator, at [mcampono@utk.edu](mailto:mcampono@utk.edu).



KELLY BAAR



KELSEY ROCHE



BENNETT MEEKS



While a student in the geography department, **Alex Webb** ('20) took Professor Micheline van Riemsdijk's age of migration course – a study abroad course in Oslo and London. The experience provided Webb with a broader perspective and ignited her passion for international education.

"Not only did this course lay the ground work for my academic, and now personal, interest in international migration, but it also gave me the opportunity to experience places, people and ideas that were literally foreign to me," Alex said.

After finding her academic passion for international migration, Alex pursued research opportunities within the department, such as working for a graduate student and presenting at conferences to hone the skills she would need to earn a graduate degree. She followed her passion to the Netherlands where she earned a Master's degree from Erasmus University.

Alex lives in Rotterdam and works as a teaching assistant for the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Erasmus. She is working on converting her thesis into a policy brief focused on advocacy.

"In my free time, I am writing essays and op-eds about issues that I am passionate about, including international migration, refugee resettlement, politics, and gender," said Alex, who received a scholarship to attend an Op-Ed Project workshop, which facilitates access to publishing opinion pieces for women and minority groups.

**Emily Craig** ('19) serves as the sole GIS staff member for the East Tennessee Development District, fulfilling all the organization's map and data related needs. In 2020, TDOT requested Emily take the lead in mapping the Cumberland Historic Byway for a Federal Highway Administration application seeking National Scenic Byway status. Her responsibilities included provision of a statewide reference map and nine inventory maps displaying scenic features along the byway.

In 2021 the application was deemed a success. As a result, counties and cities located along the byway now have access to federal grant funding and national marketing through the National Scenic Byways and America's Byways programs.

"Seven of the eight counties are economically-distressed or at-risk, so access to these resources have the potential to make a large impact on the region in the future," Emily said. "Also, thanks to the designation, Tennessee is fourth in the country for its number of nationally recognized scenic byways."

Explore Emily's storymap at [tiny.utk.edu/storymap3](https://tiny.utk.edu/storymap3).



ALEX WEBB



EMILY CRAIG



## GIST Program

The Bachelor of Science program in Geographic Information Science and Technology (GIST) premiered in the UT Department of Geography and Sustainability fall 2021. This exciting new program, which has already attracted the attention of students, is designed to teach students to combine data science, management, visualization, and the discipline of geography to answer real world problems. Spatial thinking combined with hands-on experience will prepare students to go into a spectrum of sectors including public, private, government, nonprofits, and academia.

This degree track differs from others that geography offers in that there is a deeper background in computer science and mathematics required. Several sub-specializations are available, including natural resource/environmental management, remote sensing, urban planning, transportation logistics, emergency management, and public health. Students that graduate from this program can go on to a multitude of high-paying positions from entry level technicians to mid-level analysts to senior management. In the United States, there is a much higher demand for GIST trained personnel than supply, looking for those especially with a BS in GIST, and the median annual pay across these positions is \$81,540.

We were very pleased to welcome a new faculty member in the program's inaugural year! Olusola Festus, lecturer, specializes in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) in urban terrestrial wetland landscapes and public health. Festus is currently teaching several introductory and intermediate GIS courses with large positive feedback from students. Our department is offering several intriguing new courses that address real world issues in GIST, so please be sure to check the course catalog for more information.

This semester we had several conferences that featured the works of our GIST students, including the Tennessee Geographic Information Council (TNGIC) fall forum and the Southeastern Division of the American Association of Geographers (SEDAAG). Students also attended the Geographic Awareness Week, GIS Day Career Mingle, featuring many employers from GIST industries with an opportunity to engage with them further.





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& SUSTAINABILITY**

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## Director's Corner

In a world where most do not know what geography is, even fewer know what GIST is. In the coming years, this already critical discipline is going to continue to increase in importance. In taking on the position of director, on the forefront of my mind is increasing diversity in this discipline, which is currently behind. As a female Latina, I am honored to be a leader in the field of applied remote sensing for early career faculty members. The greater diversity we have in our classrooms, in our research, and in our leaders, the more we will start to see this diversity reflected in our undergraduate and graduate students, who will be taking GIST into the next generation.

This program is currently being promoted across campus through academic advisors, digital advertisements, and on [geography.utk.edu](https://geography.utk.edu), but all questions can be directed to [hherrero@utk.edu](mailto:hherrero@utk.edu). My office door in Burchfiel 315 is always open so feel free to stop on by!

**Hannah V. Herrero**

Assistant Professor of Geography, Director of the GIST program

FALL 2022

# Place Matters

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