The past year has certainly seen a great deal of change.

Campus-wide changes that impact our department: Dr. Jaimie Hebert was the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences last Fall, then the Dean of the College of Sciences as the Arts and Sciences split into two colleges, and now he is the Provost. Dr. Jerry Cook, Associate Vice President of the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, is also the Interim Dean of the College of Sciences for this year. And we are now using a new set of computer programs collectively referred to as Banner. Banner has made life very interesting.

Personnel changes within the department: Dr. Gang Gong has been promoted to Associate Professor, granted tenure, and is the Applied GIS Graduate Program Coordinator. Dr. Marcus Gillespie has been appointed Associate Dean of the College of Sciences. We hired Dr. Pat Harris and he is teaching Geochemistry and two sections of the Geologic Hazards course this semester. Dr. Reihaneh Peiman was appointed as a Visiting Scholar and has been working with Dr. Mark Leipnik. Theresa Garvin was our afternoon secretary last Fall, but has moved on to the heights of academia and works full-time in the Office of the President. Carleen McIlvain started working as our afternoon secretary last November, but recently obtained a more cosmopolitan full-time position in the Office of International Programs.

In other news: Dr. Joe Hill was awarded a research grant that included funds for undergraduate students to participate in field studies in Pennsylvania. Enrollment is up substantially in the Applied GIS Graduate Program. There were a record number of Geography graduates this summer (12). Two additional geography courses are making their way through the curriculum process, and the GIS lab in LDB 328 is in the process of being upgraded with a new printer and dual-drive central processing units.

Upcoming changes: The department has submitted a proposal for a 40' x 30' steel building associated with the Agricultural Engineering Technology Center. This building will be used for storage, a workshop, and additional research lab space. Unfortunately, the new Biology building has been put on hold. This is also a hold on our development because we are running out of space. The plan is to obtain some additional space in the Lee Drain Building when Biology moves into their new building. We need this additional space for research laboratories, faculty offices, graduate student offices, classrooms, and a proposed Geospatial Analysis/Geographic Information Systems Center. The GIS faculty, Dr. Gang Gong, Dr. Mark Leipnik, and Dr. Falguni Mukherjee are working on “proof of concept” projects that will illustrate the type of work that can be accomplished by a GIS Center.

So...despite a rough economy, our department is doing well because of the support of the university’s administrative officers.

Dr. Brian Cooper
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Congratulations to the 2010-2011 Award Winners

The following students received awards for Geography and Geology during the 2010-2011 academic year:

Joshua Hale—SHAGS Student Scholarship
Tiffany Hall—Bounds Geography Award
Elizabeth Jackson—Scott & Holder Geography Award
James Scott—Barron Geography Award

Deedra Bumgarner—Williams Geography Award
Christopher Capps—SHAGS Student Scholarship
Jason Oestreich—Cannan Geological Scholarship

Geology award winners Joshua Hale and Jason Oestreich.
Upcoming International Geography Field Course

In the summer of 2012, Dr. Gillespie will lead an international student trip to exotic Thailand. On this trip (worth 3 credit hours), students will travel from Bangkok (with its amazing Buddhist Temples), to the spectacular beaches of Southern Thailand, and to the forested mountains of Northern Thailand. Along the way, students will snorkel on coral reefs, go sea kayaking and white water rafting on a river, hike in rainforests in both coastal areas and in the mountains, work with elephants for a day, go to a cave, visit with hill tribe peoples, see the ancient ruins at Ayyuthaya, and see an example of a bay restoration project in Chantaburi province. The course covers virtually all of the main themes of geography, but it’s emphasis will be on population, resource issues, and associated environmental impacts (e.g. loss of coral reefs and mangrove forests, deforestation, etc.). The premise is that we more greatly understand what we’ve seen and understand. If you’ve ever seen the beauty of a coral reef, you’ll understand what we’ve seen and understand. If you’ve ever seen the beauty of a coral reef, you’ll understand the type of adventure activities that this trip will include. In short this is a great deal! Students can apply for a scholarship through the Office of International Programs located in the Farrington building. These scholarships are worth $650 - and possibly more. If you’re interested, please contact Dr. Gillespie in LDB 336 or LDB 200, or call him at 294-1233 or 294-1945.

This will be the third time he has taken students to Thailand and he thinks it will be the best trip yet. The course will be offered as Geography 4375 (Special Topics) and may count as both upper-level credit for majors, or as a substitute for Introduction to Geography (GEOG 1321) or Regional Geography (GEOG 2356). It can certainly count as an elective in Geography!

Details are still being worked out, but the trip will last 17-21 days. Students will stay in hotels (3-star rating or better with 2 students per room), the modern homes of his relatives in Thailand (to experience Thai-style living), and possibly national park accommodations (rooms - not tents!). Travel will be by large bus and, when that is not possible in the mountains, by VIP minivans. The approximate cost of the trip is $3770. This includes the estimated plane fare of $1700, about $870 for tuition, and $1200 for ALL travel expenses in Thailand (including transportation, lodging, and meals). By way of price comparison, a student tour company, EF Tours, charges almost $1000 more (including tuition) for a much shorter trip of only 11 days to SE Asia to visit three cities, and it does not include the type of adventure activities that this trip will include. In short this is a great deal! Students can apply for a scholarship through the Office of International Programs located in the Farrington building. These scholarships are worth $650 - and possibly more. If you’re interested, please contact Dr. Gillespie in LDB 336 or LDB 200, or call him at 294-1233 or 294-1945.

Geography and Geology Program Updates

The Master’s Program:
The Applied GIS Graduate Program has grown rapidly in the past year from seven students last fall to the current thirty plus. We are expecting new courses to be offered online or at the University Center in the coming semesters. Please check our website at www.shsu.edu/gis periodically for updates.

Welcome all the new graduate students!

Undergraduate Lab Instructors:
The Department continues to take great pride in the high quality of instruction provided by its lab instructors. The 2011-2012 lab instructors are as follows:

Geologic Hazards—Kirby Mackey, Jason Dvestreich, Michael Richmond
Historical Geology—Joshua Hale, Leah Hughes, Jamie Russell
Physical Geology—Roberto Cortez, Jr., William Fay III, Kyle Fitzgerald, Joshua Hale, Jason Dvestreich, Jamie Russell, Zack Smart
Weather and Climate—Elizabeth Snyder & Amber Ansley (co-head lab instructors), Megan McFarland, Damon Morton, Makinzie Nicks, Leslie Remlinger, Chelsea Vancleave, and Amy Dane.

SHAGS:
The Sam Houston Association of Geography Students (SHAGS) held their elections earlier this Fall. Jamie Russell will be the President (or Prime Minister since he’s Canadian). The Vice President for the Fall semester will be Joshua Hale. Zachary Smart will be Treasurer and Leah Hughes will be Secretary.

The new President’s platform includes more social events such as the Bowling Party that was held on September 16th plus an increase in the number of academic speakers at SHAGS meetings. The club is going to recruit graduate students from Texas A&M to talk about their current research. Field trips include a site along the coast of Southern Thailand, and to the spectacular Temple (including tuition) for a much shorter trip of only 11 days to SE Asia to visit three cities, and it does not include the type of adventure activities that this trip will include. In short this is a great deal! Students can apply for a scholarship through the Office of International Programs located in the Farrington building. These scholarships are worth $650 - and possibly more. If you’re interested, please contact Dr. Gillespie in LDB 336 or LDB 200, or call him at 294-1233 or 294-1945.

Brazos River containing evidence of a K/T boundary impact and leasing a Lear jet for a trip to Hawaii. If the Lear jet thing does not pan out, then SHAGS will go with Dr. Joe Hill and his Plate Tectonics class to an undisclosed location (unknown at the time of printing).
Geology Summer Field Camp Experiences

Over the past summer a handful of us Sam Houston students were fortunate enough to have the opportunity to study under the tutelage of the University of Missouri’s faculty at Branston Field Laboratory located approximately 10 miles south of Lander, Wyoming. The field station is nestled alongside the Popo Agie, a river that experiences high levels of snow melt as well as a daily “Popo Agie jump” from the camp's residents. The field laboratory is comprised of cabins with military style bunks, shower facilities with intermittent hot water, a dining hall, laundry room, reading room and lab facility. The camp itself is within visual range of the Wind River Mountains and is situated within Sinks Canyon, sitting at an elevation of about 6,000ft.

Daily camp life was well organized and structured, with rigorous physical activities. You were expected to be up for breakfast before 7 a.m. otherwise you went hungry. Morning lectures were conducted at 7:30 followed by field lectures and daily assignments which encompassed field and mapping principles that tested and enhanced your geological knowledge. Strenuous ridge-over-ridge hiking, sometimes over miles amounting in the double digits and at elevations exceeding 7,000 feet were the norm. Groups were assigned for the individual assignments that we were to complete. This gave us the chance to work with students from various universities and different personalities. Just a few of our assignments consisted of pace-and-compass mapping, identifying primary sedimentary structures, paleocurrent analysis, and geologic mapping.

An hour break was usually allowed after hours in the field at the town of Lander which allowed us a quick drink or snack at the local bar. Following the time to relax in town, dinner was at 6 p.m. and on a general evening a full night of studying, with the occasional evening lecture, and lab work until you couldn’t keep your eyes open any longer.

We would wake up and repeat this routine for six days a week. For six weeks. Sundays were the only “off” days but those were best spent catching up on sleep.

A field trip was conducted on the fourth week of camp highlighting: the Absaroka volcanic field, the Teton Range and Jackson Hole, Yellowstone National Park and associated hydrothermal features, as well as a short stop atop the Beartooth Plateau. The final two weeks of camp were devoted to advanced projects. We were able to experience a day of each subfield which included projects in surface and groundwater hydrogeology, geophysics, structural analysis and stream terrace mapping. In the concluding week of camp we were to choose one of which to specialize in and ultimately take the final field exam over.

Sure, field camp was laborious and it irrefutably tested our fortitude and capacity to work in teams and to retain a multitude of concepts and knowledge in a range of geologic settings but it was truly a rewarding and unforgettable experience. As intensive and tiring as camp proved to be there was always a jovial atmosphere among the faculty and students. Having a hearty meal prepared by a great cook and her friendly family didn’t hurt either.

Looking back on the six weeks spent in the Wind River Range you must think of the adventure, the wildlife, the beauty, grandiosity and mesmerizing geology of the land as well as the camaraderie and bonds formed between a dynamic group of young geologists. The sky and magnificence of the mountains of Wyoming appeared endless. The magnitude of the stars in the night sky was incomparable to anything I’ve set my eyes upon. The diversity and abundance of the geology that we experienced through our various field trips and projects only constituted a small portion of what the surrounding area had to offer.

We have to salute our geology faculty members, Dr. Cooper, Dr. Baldwin, and Dr. Hill, for their hard work and making sure we were well prepared for the six week endeavor of field camp. Due to their teachings and tireless efforts, the students of Sam Houston State University were able to compete with students from more esteemed schools such as the University of Missouri.

By Joshua Hale and Jamie Russell
Our destination for this trip, the Mississippi Delta provides the perfect laboratory for learning, as a collective experience in the region promotes a form of learning that simply cannot be garnished from textbooks or traditional classroom experiences. Yet aside from academic learning, there is a personal component to this adventure that will open your eyes to all the biases, stereotypes and preconceived notions that you’ve carried throughout your life. On the first full day in Memphis we found ourselves standing near the exact spot at the Lorraine Motel were the fatal shot was fired that killed Martin Luther King, Jr., an extremely powerful experience that quite simply left us speechless. Later we visit Soulsville’s Stax Studios (Museum of American Soul Music), Sun Studios, and Graceland, vital centers of cultural expression responsible for the most creative and influential art forms this country has to offer, art that embraced and embodied the very soul of our country.

The days that followed were filled with visits to numerous sites that pulled our minds and souls into the myths, legends and realities of the Delta’s blues culture—the Tutwiler rail station where W.C. Handy was first exposed to this “strange” music we now call blues, the home of Charley Patton on the Dockery plantation, Robert Johnson’s grave site (at least one of them) and the crossroads where he presumably sold his soul to the devil in return for guitar virtuosity. Additional stops on our itinerary related less directly to music, yet led us to sites that witnessed the unfolding of major economic, political and social forces that swept across our country in the last century. In the 1980s, the U.S. South to this transition. For many of us, the heart of the trip was the visit to Stovall Plantation, the former home of blues great Muddy Waters. A historical marker located on the site where Muddy’s cabin once stood includes a quote by music legend Eric Clapton that reads, “Muddy Waters music changed my life, and whether you know it or not, and like it or not, it probably changed yours, too.” The electrified “urban” blues Muddy created in Chicago, rooted in the very soil of the Stovall Plantation that we visited, eventually spawned a host of musical progeny—i.e. Rock “N” Roll, Rock ’n’ Roll, ‘a’ Billy, Soul, Funk, Heavy Metal, Rap, among others—and fueled the sounds of the “British Invasion” that overwhelmed the American soundscape in the 1960s. Beyond music, the story of Muddy Waters is emblematic of the larger American narrative of the twentieth century. He participated in the twentieth-century migration that transitioned a southern rural culture into a northern urban one and which transformed America in numerous other ways, and the attitude with which he expressed his music as this the migration unfolded reflected the triumphant voice of impatient people demanding both respect and change.

The epic last night of the trip took place right outside Merigold, MS at Po Monkey’s, one of the last remaining authentic rural juke joints. Nothing can prepare you for the ambiance the place radiates. From the infinite hanging monkeys and pictures on the wall, to the booming music, the endless spirits and the wild dancing, one cannot help but abandon all their doubts or fears and join in the elation. At Po Monkey’s, you are not a tourist, spectating from the sidelines; you become a local and, complete the cycle of the blues journey. Our group embraced this journey in proud fashion and realized that night that there is no better way to learn about the blues culture than to live it for a spell.

Coming home, we all knew we had experienced something together that we would carry with us for the rest of our lives. We started out as strangers piled together on a ten-hour van ride and returned as Voodoo Butter blues trippers, a proud badge to wear. The epic last night of the trip took place right outside Merigold, MS at Po Monkey’s, one of the last remaining authentic rural juke joints. Nothing can prepare you for the ambiance the place radiates. From the infinite hanging monkeys and pictures on the wall, to the booming music, the endless spirits and the wild dancing, one cannot help but abandon all their doubts or fears and join in the elation. At Po Monkey’s, you are not a tourist, spectating from the sidelines; you become a local and, complete the cycle of the blues journey. Our group embraced this journey in proud fashion and realized that night that there is no better way to learn about the blues culture than to live it for a spell.

“IT IS AS IF WE LEAVE THE DELTA WITH ONE SHOE ON, AND WITH ONE LEFT BEHIND. SOMEWHERE WITHIN THE CONVERGENCE OF GEOGRAPHICAL, HISTORICAL, AND SOCIOCULTURAL PROCESSES WHICH TRAVERSSED THE DELTA, WE WITNESS THE TRUE MEANING OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN WITH ALL ITS COMPLEXITIES WITH SOME OF THE BEST AND WORST EXAMPLES OF IT—HOW HUMANITY HAS ENDURED AND OVERCOME HARDSHIPS, AND HOW HUMANS ARE CAPABLE OF PRODUCING HAUNTINGLY WONDERFUL AND UNIQUE MUSIC. THIS IS AMERICAN MUSIC. AMERICAN CLASSICAL MUSIC. AMERICAN BEAUTIFUL MUSIC. MUSIC WHICH HAS CAPTIVATED THE WORLD. THE EXALTATION WE EXPERIENCED IN THE DELTA PROVIDES BUT A GLIMPSE OF WHY WE MIGHT ALSO FEEL THE RAPTURE IN OUR OWN SELVES—WITH ALL THE UPS-AND-DOWNS. PERHAPS THAT IS WHY WE MUST RETURN TO THE DELTA AND FIND THAT OTHER SHOE WE LEFT BEHIND.”

By John B. Strait, Libby Jackson, and Alan Marcus
Libbey Kutch, 2007 SHSU graduate, has been studying place vulnerability theory and neighborhood characteristics at the University of North Texas where she earned a master of science in applied geography, emphasis in medical geography and a minor in epidemiology. Her thesis looked at the relationship between the spatial variation of HIV and the location of prison facilities in Texas. After completing her degree at UNT, Libbey moved to Michigan. She is now pursuing a Ph.D. at Michigan State University. At MSU, she is a teaching assistant for Global Diversity and a research assistant under Dr. Sue Grady. Her main research will focus on the geographic disparities in maternal health, place vulnerability, and neighborhood characteristics. Her research will examine the relationship between the environments in which people live, and the factors that comprise those environments, and adverse health circumstances in women. We expect great things from Libbey and know she represents SHSU well. Libby sends out special thanks to all of her SHSU professors and to Dr. Cecil Hallum for his support and mentoring.

Introducing Dr. Harris

Dr. Pat Harris was hired this fall as an Assistant Professor. He received his BS and MS degrees in geology from the University of Arkansas. He worked as an exploration geologist for a small, independent oil company before returning to school to pursue a doctorate. He earned a PhD from Texas A&M University and worked a short time for an oilfield services company doing research on core samples from oil reservoirs around the world. Prior to accepting the position at Sam Houston he worked as a research scientist at Texas A&M for 13 years. The position at A&M was on soft money which means that one has to pay his/her salary and the salaries of support staff by writing research proposals and obtaining grants. Currently, Dr. Harris has research funding to evaluate mechanisms responsible for the formation of an expansive mineral (ettringite) in Texas Vertisols. He is also investigating the origin of gold mineralization in the “V-Intrusive” located near Hot Springs, Arkansas. Most of Dr. Harris’ work requires use of scanning electron microscopy (SEM), differential scanning calorimetry (DSC), electron probe microanalysis (EPMA), X-ray diffraction (XRD) and X-ray fluorescence (XRF). To accomplish his research, periodic trips to Texas A&M are required to use analytical equipment currently not available at Sam Houston. Dr. Harris would like to offer a clay mineralogy course in the near future which coincides with his research interests in the fields of clay mineralogy and low temperature geochemistry.

Congratulations Dr. Gong

Dr. Gong joined the Department in 2005 after finishing his PhD from Boston University. He currently serves as the Graduate Advisor of the Applied GIS Program. He will be attending the 34th Applied Geography Conference in Redlands, California in October and presenting his paper “Assessing Vulnerability to Hurricanes in Harris County, TX.”

New Things for Dr. Gillespie

Over the summer, Dr. Gillespie was asked to serve as one of two new Associate Deans in the College of Sciences. So, his time will be divided between teaching and administrative responsibilities. He’ll be working with Dr. Jerry Cook, the new Interim Dean, and Dr. Anne Gaillard, who is also an Associate Dean. Dr. Gillespie will work with curriculum proposals, assessment issues, and students who have been placed on suspensions. As regards the latter, he said he hopes that none of our Geography or Geology majors will have to ‘visit’ him in that capacity! Of course, students are always welcome to drop by and visit.

Dr. Gillespie will present a paper in Dubrovnik, Croatia in October at the 22nd annual Alliance of Universities for Democracy conference. The paper concerns the Foundations of Science course and the success the course has had in dramatically improving the critical thinking of students. The topic of teaching critical thinking in colleges is relevant to the conference because of the importance of critical thinking to maintaining a healthy democracy. He’s never been to Croatia and so he’s looking forward to seeing a part of the world he’s never visited before. He’ll also give a similar presentation at the annual SACS conference in Orlando in December.

http://www.shsu.edu/~gel_geo/
Dr. Baldwin

Life on Land One Billion Years Ago:

During late May and early June Chris Baldwin worked on a field project in a rain-soaked Isle of Skye and the western Highlands of Scotland. The project is funded by The National Geographical Society and the Principle Investigator is Dr. Paul Strother who works at Boston College. Previously, Baldwin worked with Strother on the development and paleoenvironmental context of much younger land “plants” in Cambrian rocks of the Grand Canyon here in the USA. This summer Baldwin and Strother were joined by Dr. Charles Wellman who is a paleobotanist at the University of Sheffield, UK.

Around a billion years ago western Scotland sat within the interior of a supercontinent called Rodinia. As with Africa today Rodinia began to split with the development of long rift valleys, some of which contained lakes with no river outlets, and which were fed by rivers flowing out of adjacent continental highlands and mountain ranges. The sediments that filled these supposed rift basins are mostly very distinctively red pebbly and gravelly sandstones and are well over 10km (~35,000 feet) thick. They form a very distinctive part of the geology and landscape of the north-west highlands and islands of Scotland and are collectively referred to as the Torridonian Group. Locally, within these sandstone sequences are very distinctive fine-grained horizons of dark mudstones, slates and thin dark sandstones.

Strother and Wellman (plus two others from Oxford University) earlier this year published a paper in the prestigious scientific journal *Nature* where they describe a variety of organic walled microfossils that they interpret as various types of cysts, filaments and multicellular structures that suggest eukaryotes (in contrast to prokaryotes that are much simpler and much smaller and which are well known from even older rocks worldwide). Strother and his co workers claim that their well-preserved microfossils represent a community that grew not in the ocean, where marine microfossils of a similar age are quite well known, but from land environments. This work, therefore, pushes back by some tens or even hundreds of millions of years the time at which relatively complex eukaryotes colonized “dry land”. 

But what was this “dry land” like? This was Baldwin’s task this summer: to analyze sequences of Torridonian rocks and determine the specific environment – the paleohabitats – of the eukaryotes previously described by Strother et al.

Field work began on the northeastern end of the Isle of Skye and then moved on to a small island north of Skye called Raasay. After a wait in the pouring rain for the tide to drop Baldwin and his colleagues scrambled across a boulder tombola on to the small islet of Ielean Fladday. Here they found hints of lake margins with storm-related outwash of sands. After this the work got even better and the accommodation more sumptuous but it continued to rain heavily every single day. Research moved on to the mainland and to the southern and northern shores of Loch Torridon and eventually further north to the southern shore of Loch Gairloch. 

Results so far indicate some very peculiar, persistently shallow lakes that were unlike most common modern lake basins that become significantly deeper towards their centers. The Torridonian lakes are characterized by numerous desiccation cracks that are present throughout the existence of the lakes and suggest no really deep water. The analysis of field note, photographs and graphic logs of sedimentary sequences continues.

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Dr. Strait

Dr. John Strait and his family had the opportunity to spend most of the summer working and playing on the Big Island of Hawai‘i. John and wife Ava were both teaching in the Summer Program at the Hawai‘i Preparatory Academy (HPA), a private boarding school located in the rolling highlands of Waimea (Kamuela). The HPA summer program enrolls a diverse collection of extremely bright students from all over the world, with ages ranging from 6th to 12th grades, so it was very much a new classroom experience for faculty accustomed to teaching college students from the mainland. This summer the more fortunate of the HPA students learned a lot about geography and more than a little about blues music and Elvis Presley. Dr. Strait, meanwhile, learned and heard more about Justin Bieber than he ever cares to know.

Culturally speaking, Waimea is the center of paniolo (Hawaiian cowboy) culture, and is well-known as the birthplace of the Hawaiian version of country music. Aside from jamming at the local brewery to bands covering Johnny Cash tunes Hawaiian style, the Strait family spent a lot of time hiking, fishing, gorging on local grinds (food), lounging on the beach, and hangin’ loose with HPA students and faculty. During a visit to the most eastern point of the Big Island, the Puna, the Strait’s explored the remnants of a village (Kalapana) that was buried under the Kilauea’s 1980 lava flow. The whole family experienced the amazement and wonder associated with walking on rock that is far younger than either John or Ava and not much older than the kids! Another fascinating weekend was spent on a speed boat, exploring volcanic vents along an isolated section of the Kona Coast, near the site where famed British explorer Captain Cook was killed in 1779. Dr. Baldwin will be proud to know that Dr. Strait and son Prezley shared some “chips” while taking a break on the stretch of British soil that surrounds the Cook Monument!

Prior to returning home to the mainland, the Straits made a quick jaunt to the island of Oahu in order to visit with several ohana (family and friends). They say that all work and no play makes the Straits dull girls and boys, but Ava and John did engage in some professional field work in Honolulu’s Chinatown. Their ongoing scholarly effort to understand the neighborhood dimensions of the area’s racial and ethnic diversity required some “urban” field work – the need for this work was made even more pressing by the fact that the best manapua (barbecued pork-filled buns) in the world is made and sold at the Royal Palace, a culinary institution conveniently located in the middle of their Chinatown study area. Stimulating research generates considerable hunger – or maybe it works the other way around?

Aside from Hawaii, this August Dr. Strait also made his annual summer trek to the Mississippi Delta while directing the field component of his upper-level geography course offered in the fall semester (see section entitled Dr. Strait’s Voodoo Butter Blues Trip 2011 for details). This year the course is entitled “Race, Blues & Rock ‘N’ Roll: Advanced Cultural Geography (GEOG 4375), although in future years it may be referred to by another name. The purpose of the trip is to provide students enrolled in the course an authentic field experience via direct immersion into the Mississippi Delta, the birthplace of blues music and culture. This year Dr. Strait and 12 students were joined by Dr. Wally Barnes (SHSU), Dr. Alan Marcus (Towson State University) and the very house they were staying in – a dividing line located somewhere between the master bedroom and the living room. The Strait’s spent many a day sweatin’ at the beach nearly naked, only to scramble for hoodies and long sleeves at the conclusion of the eight mile drive up the hill to their Waimea abode.

“Cool Davie Lee” Strait (legal and music consultant) on a seven-day adventure that took them from Huntsville to Memphis, Tennessee, and south through various portions of Mississippi. The trip and the course utilize blues music and culture as a lens to investigate several topics and themes related to the field of cultural geography. Students interested in learning more about the class or the trip should contact Dr. Strait.

Dennis Netoff continues to dabble with sandstone landforms of Glen Canyon, Utah as well as various Mars projects. The upper Colorado River watershed had a water-surplus year in 2011, resulting in a large rise in the level of Lake Powell (below), submerging the Hite Delta, which has been the focus of recent research by Netoff and Baldwin. Mars’ early history of abundant surface water has led to speculations of modern or fossil life forms, and Netoff and 34 other scientists from around the world have put together a Geological Society of America Special Paper (#483, to be published in October 2011) entitled An inventory of potentially habitable environments on Mars: Geological and biological perspectives. The study identifies places on Mars that have Earth analogs known to contain microbial life.

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Over the summer, Dr. Nelson divided her time between travel and writing (about travel). After the end of last semester, she had the opportunity to return to Central Europe – primarily Croatia and Slovenia (although she did get lost at one point and ended up in Italy). She met with some of her former colleagues at the University of Primorska to develop a proposal for a new research project comparing patterns of tourism between Texas and Slovenia. She also visited friends in both countries and made a point to see some new places. Some of her favorites include Lake Bohinj in Slovenia’s Julian Alps (left) and the stunning Plitvice National Park in Croatia (above), which frequently appears on “top 10” lists (lakes, waterfalls, national parks, places to see before you die, etc.).

Prior to the start of this semester, she also had the opportunity to visit Zimbabwe. After 30+ hours of travel that took her from Houston to Washington, D.C. across the Atlantic to Dakar, Senegal, then Johannesburg, South Africa, and finally Harare, Zimbabwe, she spent nearly three weeks traveling the country, from the Zambezi River on the border with Zambia to Victoria Falls, Lake Kariba, and the Yumba Mountains near Mozambique.

In addition, she will travel to her fourth continent this year when she goes to Santiago, Chile in November to attend the International Geographic Union Regional Conference and present a paper entitled, “Situating Slovenia: Regional Geography, Tourism Geography and Identity.” These experiences contribute to her work in the geography of tourism. Her major project over the last year has been to write an introductory level tourism geography textbook. She is working hard to complete a draft of this manuscript in preparation for teaching GEO 3352: Tourism Geography in spring 2012.

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