What faces us in the near future?

Picking a new permanent chair has to be our biggest preoccupation but we also have to be playing our full part in the massive expansion that is taking place throughout Sam Houston State University. We are at the limits of classroom capacities and at the limits as to the teaching sections that our faculty can offer. We will have to grow – certainly in terms of faculty in both Geography and Geology, but also in terms of support staff and physical space. We are up against the limits when it comes to offices, research labs and other facilities that support our mission.

All of these are good “problems” and should help us to attract a new chair who wants to build the next phase of this department that will most certainly be both significant and exciting.

Dr. Chris Baldwin
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As most of you will know Dr. Marcus Gillespie stepped down as Departmental Chair at the end of last summer and returned to full time teaching. During his period as Chair he propelled the two programs of this Department into a number of new avenues of opportunity and expansion and we all owe him a considerable debt of gratitude for the leaving us so strongly positioned.

I’m in post for just this academic year, I presume, during which time it is my job not to waste the strong platform built by Dr. Gillespie. Indeed, it is my intention to build upon the reservoir of goodwill established during Dr. Gillespie’s tenure and present the new full time chair with an even stronger “regime”.

Who will be the new chair? Almost certainly he or she will be an accomplished Geographer with research interests somewhere in the fields of ‘applied geography’ – perhaps in GIS or some other field related to Geospatial Analysis. But he or she will also need to have some breadth of experience or interest with Human Geography as well and at least more than a nodding acquaintance with Geology. The reason for the identification of these fields of expertise is because we are some way along in the process of developing a whole new graduate Masters program in applied geography and we will benefit from the wisdom of someone already established in these areas of scholarship and teaching.

Other matters to report. Dr. John Solum, our initially one year and then permanent replacement for Betsy Torrez left us to go to Shell Research in Houston. John has retained some linkages with the department, both in terms of borrowing some analytical field equipment, but more importantly in continuing to support some of our undergraduates as field assistants. He is also collaborating with John Degenhardt and his Ground Penetrating Radar system on fault research in Utah. For this year we were lucky to get Charles Shaw (see biographic details below) as a temporary replacement.

What faces us in the near future? Picking a new permanent chair has to be our biggest preoccupation but we also have to be playing our full part in the massive expansion that is taking place throughout Sam Houston State University. We are at the limits of classroom capacities and at the limits as to the teaching sections that our faculty can offer. We will have to grow – certainly in terms of faculty in both Geography and Geology, but also in terms of support staff and physical space. We are up against the limits when it comes to offices, research labs and other facilities that support our mission.

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New Faculty: Dr. Shaw

Dr. Shaw received his B.A. from the University of New Hampshire, M.S. and Ph.D. from Brown University. His first professional work was with the Groundwater Branch of the USGS, and he taught at Windham College (Putney, Vermont) for seven years.

In 1988 Dr. Shaw moved to Akumal, Mexico, located 60 miles south of Cancun on the Caribbean coast of the Yucatan Peninsula. He became Science Director at Centro Ecologico Akumal, a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the ecosystem of the Caribbean coast, particularly the coral reefs. The ecosystem was, and is, under assault from large and rapid tourism development. During this period he used his USGS experience as a groundwater geologist to study the geohydrology of the region’s underground drainage through caves. Some new things were learned about how the fresh water lens in the caves discharges to the sea as a pod of cold, fresh water afloat on top of warm salt water of the ocean. Anyone who wants to know more can simply ask.

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Dr. Albert is offering Population Geography in the Spring 2008 semester. Students enrolled in this course will be exposed to both the applied and theoretical sides of population geography. We will be using Peters and Larkin’s Population Geography: Problem, Concepts, and Prospects 8th edition and ESRI’s GIS Tutorial for Health. Those interested in this course should enroll in GEO 475-04W (3 credits) or contact Dr. Albert at 294-1453 or geo_dpa@shsu.edu for more information. GEO 475-04W will be meeting on MWF from 11:00-12:00 in LOB 319. No prerequisites.

New Courses: Population Geography

Dr. Albert finds his way to and around Biloxi’s Hard Rock Casino.

Applied Geophysics Field Instruction at Normangee, Texas

Mr. Bill Jones of B. R. Jones and Associates recently hosted students enrolled in the department’s new course entitled Methods in Applied Geophysics taught by Dr. Degenhardt. Mr. Jones and his associate delivered lectures and instruction on a number of geophysical instruments that the students had been learning about in the classroom. Students took advantage of the opportunity to gain valuable hands-on field experience using a ground penetrating radar (GPR) system, two inductive conductivity meters, a magnetometer, and a portable seismic survey system to carry out several surveys. The one-day field instruction was held on the Jones ranch in Normangee, TX.

Above: Students gather around the portable seismic survey controller as the system is readied for the first readings.
Left: Molly Mayer and B. R. Jones Associate Vince assist Nathan Drapela in ‘suiting up’ with a GPS-equipped Geonics EM-31 conductivity meter.

Spring Break 2008: Piggyback Basins in the Spanish Pyrenees

Dr. Baldwin is taking seven upper level students from the Department of Geology to the nappes of the Spanish Pyrenees and the sea cliffs of the Basque region of northwestern Spain over spring break. The trip was originally conceived as a component of a new modular Field Camp course that would, in part, replace the need for students to go to other universities for their mandatory field camp experience. Unfortunately, circumstances prevent us from starting this new modular program just yet but a number of students requested that the Spanish trip be run anyway. The group will fly to Barcelona via Paris and rent a van for the duration of the trip. The main base will be in the small mountain town of Ainsa, but side trips will take us up over the high Pyrenees, into France, and back into the Basque Country of northeast Spain.

As the Pyrenean mountains emerged and were forced to rise as a result of the collision of the scissors-like closing of the Iberian Peninsula with Europe the layers of covering sedimentary rocks slid into troughs or foredeeps in both Spain and France, producing piles of nappe sheets. The side of the nappe closest to the Pyrenees sloped up towards the high mountain while the leading edges of the sliding nappes tended to also buckle upwards – just as the leading edge of a carpet might fold over itself and pile up as it slides over the floor. What is left between these two uplifted margins is an elongate trough known as a piggyback basin because its rides piggy back above the nappe sheets.

This trip will provide students with a geological setting and an introduction to sedimentary systems that are not readily available here in the United States. With this experience they will be better prepared for their concentrated field camp experience next summer and have an experience that is normally reserved for professional practicing geologists who already work for some of the major international oil corporations. The message: come to Geology at SHSU and get ahead of the game!

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A nappe pile in the Central Pyrenean Foreland basin

http://www.shsu.edu/~gel_geo/
Race, Blues, Rock ‘N’ Roll & the Geography of the Mississippi Delta

Dr. Strait is offering a field-trip based course that will use “musical culture” as a lens to explore the cultural and physical geography of the Mississippi Delta. The primary focus of this course will involve a 5 day field trip that will progress from Houston, Texas, through Memphis Tennessee and ultimately conclude with a visit to Cleveland, Mississippi.

The content of the course will focus on the evolving cultural geography of the region and will include some discussion of the inter-relationships between the geomorphology of the Mississippi river and cultural dynamics. Emphasis will be placed on the role this geographical region has had on the formation of our broader culture.

In addition to studying the Delta, the course will also explore the history and geography of blues-influenced culture in Houston, Texas. A major topic we will address is the degree to which blues culture is utilized and memorialized as a means to foster economic development. In contrast to Memphis and the Delta, we will view Houston as an example of a community that has largely ignored its musical legacy.

Projected site visits include:
- Sites significant to the long-forgotten musical heritage of Houston
- Memphis, Tennessee and world famous Beale Street
- Stax Soul Museum utilizing musical culture as a means of neighborhood-based urban development
- National Civil Rights Museum
- Sun Records Studio
- Pilgrimage to Graceland, the Mecca of American culture
- Tunica Riverpark Museum
- Fitzgerald’s Casino & Hotel
- Cleveland, Mississippi, home to Delta State University, the Delta Center for Culture & Learning and the Blues Highway Association
- Dockery Farms, the famous

Dr. Gillespie is taking fourteen students to Thailand next summer for Geo 475 credit. The interest expressed by students in the “Thailand Adventure and Culture Trip” has been very high. In fact, fourteen students (the maximum) have already signed up and there is a growing waiting list.

The 4-week trip will run from May 22nd through June 17th and will include adventure activities such as snorkeling on coral reefs, riding elephants, whitewater rafting, hiking through a rainforest, sea kayaking and cave kayaking, as well visits to major cultural sites such as Angkor Wat in Cambodia, Buddhist temples in Bangkok, and the Sukhothai ruins in western Thailand. The trip will also include an overnight stay in a village located along a river in Thailand so that students can experience the lifestyle of traditional Thai river villagers. The group also will visit fruit farms in Chantaburi Thailand, as well as an ecological research center on the coast that focuses on sustainable fishing and shrimp harvesting.

In short, the activities and experiences on this trip encompass much of the breadth of geography.

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

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http://www.shsu.edu/~gel_geo/
The Department of Geography and Geology at Sam Houston State University is pleased to announce that it has been awarded a 3-year grant valued at $804,000.00 from the Landmark Graphic Corporation. The grant for GeoGraphix software, maintenance, and support includes an agreement that makes Sam Houston State one of only a few licensed academic users of GeoGraphix in Texas.

GeoGraphix software, licensed by the Halliburton Digital and Consulting Solutions Division, is the industry’s most integrated and comprehensive Windows®-based geoscience interpretation system. Landmark, a brand of Halliburton’s Digital and Consulting Solutions division is the leading supplier of Windows-based software for the upstream oil and gas industry. The company’s integrated software solutions span geoscience, engineering, economics and data management.

Faculty and students in the Department of Geography and Geology will use the GeoGraphix software for both lab and field research. Students will now have the opportunity to use state-of-the-art software, giving them a definite advantage when applying for graduate school and for jobs in petroleum or environmental fields. Access to industry-leading software technology also provides a compliment to faculty research and lecturing activities, while offering students practical tools for petroleum reservoir analysis.

Dr. Degenhardt, an assistant professor of geography and geology at Sam Houston State, accepted the grant from Landmark in early August of this year. The department is pleased that students will benefit from training and equipment that few universities can offer. The presence of GeoGraphix is expected to increase the quality and quantity of research and educational activities in the department and will significantly facilitate the achievement of one of its long-term goals: to be the center of academic excellence in the fields of geospatial science and applied geophysics.

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Faculty Notes: Dr. Albert

Dr. Albert has co-authored a book entitled The Geography of Naturopathic Physicians in the United States: A Rising Profession that was published in 2006 (shown right). The following description was written by Dr. Susan A. Gaylord from the Program on Integrative Medicine, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and may be found in the preface to the book.

“This book represents the first in-depth geographic treatment of naturopathic physicians (NDs) since the most recent revival of naturopathic medicine in the United States. The authors have examined patterns of NDs and licensure at the international (Canada and the United States), state (especially Arizona, Connecticut, Oregon, and Washington), city and ZIP Code scales of analysis using data from 2000 to 2004. These studies describe distributions of ND locations and predict patterns of state and provincial legislation providing licensing credentials for naturopathic physicians. This comprehensive, scholarly work will provide a benchmark for measuring the continued growth of the naturopathic profession that is expected to occur in the next decade or so. The detailed description and critique of methodologies used to assess and predict patterns of growth of this emerging profession will provide useful guidelines for future studies ... The authors also address potential health policy implications that might arise from counting NDs as MDs for the purpose of designating health professional shortage areas (HPSAs) ... The recent success of naturopathic medicine bodes well for the eventual integration of NDs, or at least naturopathic therapies, within biomedicine. While the success of naturopathic medicine rests outside the scope of geographic inquiry, this important compilation provides one perspective from which to measure its growth in the coming decades.”

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Faculty Notes: Dr. Leipnik

On Aug 14, 2007 at 6 pm Sofia Elka Leipnik was born at Huntsville Memorial Hospital to Dr. Leipnik and his wife Olena. Olena is from the Kyiv in the Ukraine and was a professor and United Nations Development Program staffer there and is a research professor in the Political Science Department here at SHSU. Dr. Leipnik has been sleeping a little less but has been busy working on GIS applications including work with Ukrainian universities.

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Faculty Notes: Dr. Degenhardt

Dr. Degenhardt was recently invited by Shell Oil Company to participate in a cooperative geologic and geophysical study of the Moab fault system in Moab, Utah. The objective of the study is to better understand the subsurface nature of the fault system so that petroleum traps and migration routes can be identified by geologists at Shell. Dr. Degenhardt and senior geology student Molly Mayer participated in the project, which involved the use of the departments new ground penetrating radar (GPR) and portable X-ray fluorescence systems. In addition to Shell Research International and SHSU, the Southwest Research Institute in San Antonio, TX is also a participant in this study.

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Faculty Notes: Dr. Nelson

Dr. Nelson spent three weeks in China in June participating in an International Faculty Development Seminar conducted by the Council on International Educational Exchange. The theme of the seminar was Exploring China’s Southwest: Culture, Society and Ethnicity on the Frontier. The seminar began in Beijing and traveled to Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan and Xizang (Tibet) provinces. It included lectures by scholars from Central University for Nationalities, Sichuan University, and the Guizhou Institute for Nationalities, as well as site visits to the Giant Panda Research Institute, sacred Emei Mountain, Tunpu and Miao villages, a rural primary school, and the Potala Palace.

In October, Dr. Nelson attended the 2nd International Conference on Climate Change and Tourism, sponsored by the United Nations World Tourism Organization, in Davos, Switzerland.

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Faculty Notes: Dr. Netoff

Dr. Netoff’s current and recent research activities include: (1) continued work with USGS on giant sandstone weathering pits in Utah, particularly those at the Rock Creek Bay research site in Glen Canyon that are influenced by joints and fluidization pipes; (2) recently-published (summer 2007) research with co-authors Margie Chan (U Utah), Gary Kocurek (U TX Austin), Ron Blakey (N AZ univ) and Walter Alvarez (U CA Berkeley) on mega-fluidization pipes and associated soft sediment deformation in Jurassic strata of S Utah and N AZ; (3) research on terrestrial Moki Marbles and Martian counterparts Blueberries with planetary scientists from Canada, Utah, and Arizona to determine paleohydrologic and paleogeochemical conditions on Mars; (4) research with planetary scientists to identify likely site on Mars that might preserve fossil evidence of microbial life on Mars using terrestrial analogs; (5) research with Margie Chan on eolian activity associated with the Inselberg Pit on the Escalante Bench area of Utah, and (6) research w. Chan et al. on the weathering implications of polygonal joint patterns in the Burns Formation on Mars and terrestrial analogs developed on the Navajo Sandstone in Utah. (see photos, page 8)

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Faculty Notes: Dr. Shaw

Dr. Shaw was a GeoCorp Fellow this past summer (2007) at the California Coastal National Monument. The GeoCorp program is run by the Geological Society of America to place geologists in the National Parks, National forests and National monuments for a period of ten to twelve weeks. His project was to characterize the geology of the California Coastal National Monument along the entire California coast.

His current research interests focus on the tectonics of the Yucatan Peninsula, with particular emphasis on the large amount of ejecta left by the 6-mile diameter Chicxulub meteorite that struck the Earth 65 million years ago on the Yucatan Peninsula and which lead to the extinction of 65 percent of the species then alive on Earth, including the dinosaurs.

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Dr. Tiller also received the Thirty-five Year Service Award in August (pictured second row, second from the left). Congratulations Dr. Tiller!

Faculty Notes: Dr. Strait

Over the summer, Dr. Strait, together with Dr. Gong, was engaged in a research project that investigates the evolving nature of neighborhood-level poverty among racial and ethnic groups within Houston, Texas. Initial findings generated from this project resulted in a paper entitled “Poverty Evolution in the Capital of the Sunbelt: An Investigation of Neighborhood-level Poverty Among Racial and Ethnic Groups within Houston, Texas: 1930-2000”. This paper will be published in a special issue of the *Southwestern Geographer* focused on the Geographies of Texas (sample maps shown left). They expect their efforts to result in a second paper before the conclusion of the current academic year.

Faculty Notes: Dr. Tiller

Dr. Tiller spent most of the summer in Austin at the General Land Office and State Archives where he more or less completed the research on a book dealing with conditions along the Texas-Louisiana line between Caddo Lake and the Sabine River during the 1836-1841 period. He has been diverted from this project this fall while he and his brother complete a 6 year family history project - the results of which is scheduled to go to press in January (hopefully).