Inside this issue:

- Find out what some of our alumni are doing now
- Learn about the department's new Masters in Applied Geographic Information Systems program and meet some of the students
- Discover the new courses that are being offered in the 2010-2011 academic year
- Get involved with our student organizations
- Meet our new faculty
- Catch up with existing faculty

Message from the New Interim Chair

The Departmental search for a new Chair with GIS background did not work out. Dr. Baldwin’s three years of service as Interim Chair is highly commendable and the sacrifices he made to carry out this service are greatly appreciated. However, enough is enough, it is time to let Dr. Baldwin get back to doing research and having the time to enjoy his house in France. So, I volunteered for this duty (obviously I never served in the military or I would know better) and the Board of Regents (see below), in their haste, approved my appointment as Interim Chair.

Our favorite Newsletter editor, Dr. Velvet Nelson, has returned after completing her Fulbright Fellowship to Slovenia, and has kindly consented to continue serving as the editor with the proviso that we only publish one newsletter a year. Dr. Nelson has also agreed to give a presentation (sometime this semester) concerning her work in Slovenia. You can read a little about what she accomplished in this semester’s Heritage magazine.

Dr. Falguni Mukherjee has applied Geographic Information Systems to a variety of areas and joins our department as we launch the Masters Degree in Applied Geographic Information Systems this semester (more information on this is contained within the newsletter). Dr. Mukherjee is currently teaching an undergraduate course about advanced GIS applications for local government and a graduate course to introduce advanced GIS techniques to graduate students. She is also teaching an online Weather and Climate section.

Ms. Heidi Estep has returned to Sam Houston after having received a BS in Geology and a BS in Physics, then attending Baylor University where she earned an MS in Geology, and is presently finishing her doctoral studies in environmental geophysics. We are keeping her busy teaching Geologic Hazards and Physical Geology, plus she is teaching a section of astronomy for the Physics Department.

We want to extend a warm welcome to our new and our returning members of the department. I want to thank Dr. Joe Hill for his hospitality in hosting the faculty and staff get-together in August. I also want to thank Dr. Marcus Gillespie for his offer to host the departmental get-together (students invited) October 6, 2010 at 4:30 p.m. (more information and maps to come).

Dr. Brian McCall
bjcooper@shsu.edu

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Fall 2010 Newsletter
A Measure of Quality...

In cases where everything is ... measured, and reduced to rule, love is out of the question.  
(William Godwin*)

We seem to be living in an era when those who exhibit a particularly tiny mind subscribe to the idea that the only things that are really worth knowing are those that can be measured by some sort of “inert” and hence implicitly trustworthy (?) medium such as a Scantron™ sheet. So, kids come to universities blessed with an ability to memorize for some sort of TEKS, TAKS or TOKS et al... test, but understanding practically nothing, certainly not anything much to do with science.

And we come eventually even to the merit or effectiveness of whole academic programs (or at least the merit of the products of said programs.) Some, such as accreditation agencies and their camp followers still insist that we continue with some form of “objective” testing in order to ascertain that we are effective. But Lord forbid that you use the actual exams and scores for the courses in your demonstration of effectiveness. No. You must use some other “objective” test.

However our Geography and Geology department (and, I think, many others as well) can offer alternatives to this department (and, I think, many others...)

However our Geography and Geology department (and, I think, many others as well) can offer alternatives to this department (and, I think, many others...)

Some of us think that education is about more holistic issues than can be covered by even sophisticated tests. We are trying to prepare and educate our students to be happy and productive members of society. All the better if they achieve this while being professional geographers or geologists but that is not the whole point. For some the next step in this holistic preparation will be graduate school and this year our department had some notable success in placing students in good graduate programs. The following is a partial list of where a number of the class of 2010 were offered places:

Jeff Cook, Cal. State-Northridge  
*Initially offered a partial TA-ship, expanded to full

Nancy Morris, University of Miami  
*Full scholarship

Ryan Lewis, Imperial College, London  
*Considered by most to be the #1 oil geology MA program in the World

Jonathan Marshall, Imperial College, London

Peyton Lisenby, University of Mississippi  
*Offered a Research Assistantship

Others, for a variety of reasons, choose industry over further training and this year’s class once again was significant for the placement of good graduates with good environmental consulting companies. They included Reyna Loosmore (née De la Cruz) and Ian Madison and a number of others who are “still waiting to hear”.

But even before we come to these post-undergraduate placement successes the geologists enjoy further scrutiny and sensible evaluation in the form of the mandatory field camp that completes the undergraduate program. At field camp students use all the concepts and skills that they acquired in our classes and labs and then they exercise them with their peers from elsewhere, including Ivy League schools. Simply put, our students uniformly excel. Most make As, a few make Bs, and practically none make Cs or lower. Our students come out of these external field camps frequently having made the highest grade of the whole class and as a result some are invited back to act as TAs for subsequent classes.

Thinking about this short essay last summer I asked Peyton Lisenby to send me some of his reflections on his experience at the University of Wyoming field camp. His comments include these observations:

“...I’m inclined to agree that a good indication of how our department prepares and educates its students is by their performance at field camp. It’s certainly better than any standardized test. From my own experience at the University of Wyoming Field Camp, I believe that I was more than well prepared for each geologic discipline practiced in the field.

...Mineralogy/Petrology and Sed/Strat were the disciplines I felt I was best prepared for compared to the other students at the camp, and I was on par or better with regard to vocabulary and conceptual understanding in all disciplines...”

Congratulations to all of our graduates. Every one of you helps to make what we do worthwhile and meaningful and your successes bathe us in your reflected glory! More tests are not the only way of knowing how good you are. In our department we pride ourselves on knowing our students at a personal academic level and our running experience shows that what we teach and what we do is going to be of value over the long-haul; not just for the duration of some mindless little test.

“William Godwin (1756- 1836) “… considered one of the first exponents of utilitarianism, and the first modern proponent of anarchism…” He also wrote children’s books under the pen name Edward Baldwin [Wikipedia] so he must have been a good lad.

Dr. Chris Baldwin  
baldwin@shsu.edu

Congratulations to the 2009-2010 Student Award Winners

The following students received awards for Geography and Geology during the 2009-10 academic year:

Cody Coquel—Bounds Geography Award

Reyna De La Cruz—SHAGS Student Scholarship  
Ryan Lewis—Houston Geological Society Undergraduate Scholarship, SHAGS Student Scholarship

Peyton Lisenby—Cannan Geological Scholarship, Houston Geological Society Outstanding Geology Student Award

Aaron Morgenroth—Barron Geography Award

Also recognized were Chris Capps, Jeff Cook, Ian Madison, Jonathan Marshall, Kyle Spezia and Josh Woodall for their contributions to the geology program.
Alumni Updates

We encourage all our former students and lab instructors to let us know what they are doing after they leave the program. We recently heard from the following alumni:

Nancy Morris, 2009 Geography grad, was recently accepted as a graduate student into the Department of geography and Regional Studies at the University of Miami. Nancy was awarded a graduate assistantship and couldn’t be more excited. Dr. Ira M. Sheskin, Professor and Graduate Program Director in the Department of Geography and Regional Studies, on hearing about Nancy’s upcoming paper in The Pennsylvania Geographer entitled International Date Line: Time Travel Made Easy (co-authored by Dr. Albert and Dr. Tiller) wrote, “Good news! A publication before you even join the MA program.”

Ted Owen, former Geology student, lab instructor and assistant on Dr. Netoff’s 1994 field trip to Glen Canyon, recently wrote:

Awesome to hear back from you. I went to a three week course this summer at Colorado School of Mines. Great little school. We were out climbing around Red Rocks and a few other places and it took me back to playing pack-mule on Lake Powell. What a fantastic trip / time in life that was.

I’ve been with Marathon for around 7 years. Lived in Houston, London and now Libya. Who knows where next. I really dig expat life. My family and I have been able to visit, France, the UK, Italy and Malta so far this year, as well as a few spots here in Libya (fantastic Roman ruins).

Next time I have some time in the states, I’ll try and make it up to Huntsville. Would love to show the kids my old stomping grounds.

Really nice to hear from you... hope you’re well.

Cheers, Ted O.

The New Masters Program in Applied Geographic Information Systems

After a lot of hard work and a very long wait, the Masters Program in Applied Geographic Information Systems (GIS) has finally arrived this fall semester and is now operational! The department welcomed eight graduate students into the program in its inaugural semester. The M.S. degree program was designed to provide participants the critical knowledge to succeed in the challenging world of geospatial technologies. This includes advanced classes and labs in global positioning systems (Trimble), remote sensing (ERDAS IMAGINE), digital image processing, GIS (ArcGIS) and web-based mapping and spatial analysis. The applied focus of the program will enable students to develop skills critical to the application of geospatial technologies towards a number of fields including the oil and gas industry, parcel mapping, resource management, local and regional government, urban planning, national security and market research. As the program develops courses will become increasingly available at The University Center campus in The Woodlands, and eventually at the Sam Houston campus in that area. Contact Dr. Jim Tiller (JimTiller@shsu.edu: 936-294-1455) or Dr. John Strait (jstrait@shsu.edu: 936-294-4077) for more information on the program.

The following are some of our new graduate students:

Chandan Rasaily graduated from Tribhuvan University, Nepal with a B.S. in Environmental Science. He worked for Environmental and Public Upliftment(EPU) Non Governmental Organization (NGO) for more than two years. His long term goals are to enter a GIS company or governmental office as a consultant, or to earn a Ph.D. with research in Remote Sensing, GIS transportation or GIS in Health. He is currently working as Dr. Leipnik’s TA.

Keith Herzog graduated from SHSU with a B.S. in Geography and was a member of the ROTC Program. He received his military commission as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Army on May 13th 2005. During active duty he attended the U.S. Army’s Engineer Officer Basic Course at Ft. Leonard Wood, MO, and his first duty station was at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. He made a permanent change of station in 2007 to Ft. Bragg, NC and then was transferred to the XVIII Airborne Corps Staff to deploy to Baghdad, Iraq 2008-9. There he was involved in long range planning for military operations. He left active duty with an honorable discharge in 2009. His interest in GIS stems from his previous exposure to its many applications in Dr. Leipnik’s classes. He is interested in GIS applications in military and foreign relations.

Shane Johnson was born in Houston, grew up in Conroe and now lives in New Caney. He works in Houston for an engineering pipeline company. His degree is B.S. Major in Geography minors in GIS and Geology. His research interests are using GIS and applications in Oil and Gas industry use. In remote sensing, he is interested in extracting data from image data sets, particularly Wetlands and building feature extraction from Raster data sets.

William Smith was born in Houston, TX where he lived until 1994 when he moved to Huntsville. He began attending classes at Sam Houston State University in the fall of 2008, where he received his B.S. in Geographic Information Systems, and a B.S. in Sociology in 2010. He plans to further his education by attaining a Ph.D. His interests are in disaster/hazard research and the use of remote sensing (ERDAS) and GIS applications to further understand pre/post mitigation efforts and its affect on communities and social structure.
Changes in the Undergraduate Geography Curriculum

Over the course of last year the undergraduate geography curriculum has been redesigned in order to better fit the academic needs of students. The new and improved curriculum offers more flexibility and will effectively prepare students for life beyond SHSU, specifically in terms of graduate study or employment opportunities. Student majors may choose to focus their program within one of three tracks, each providing a broad geographical background yet emphasizing different foci of study. The human geography tract is designed for students primarily interested in the broad geographical study of human or cultural phenomena. The environmental geography tract is designed for students interested in orienting their program of study around the spatial interactions between human society and the physical environment. The geo-spatial information sciences tract is designed for students more interested in developing skills in the application of a variety of geo-spatial technologies. Beyond the new track system, plans are in the works to expand the course offerings so that the students have opportunities to more intently study specific world regions (e.g. Latin America & the Caribbean, South Asia).

Contact Dr. Strait (jstrait@shsu.edu; 936-294-4077) for more information.

New Courses in Geography

Dr. Gong is offering two graduate level courses this Fall in our new Applied GIS Master program. One is GEO 534 Spatial Analysis which is offered online. The other is GEO 535 Digital Image Processing which focuses on the analyzing of remote sensing imageries using ERDAS software. Dr. Gong will offer two more new courses next semester (Spring 2011): one at the graduate level GEO 537 GIS Programming and one undergraduate online course GEO 475 Transportation Geography.

Contact Dr. Gong (ogong002@shsu.edu; 936-294-4564) for more information.

GEO 438—Race, Blues & Rock ‘N’ Roll: Advanced Cultural Geography and Field Experience

In August, Dr. Strait directed his annual student field experience to the Delta as part of the SAM course GEO 438. He and eleven students engaged in a six-day trek from Huntsville to Memphis, Tennessee, and south through various portions of the Mississippi. In Memphis they were joined by legal and musical consultant “Coal Davie Lee” Strait, and newcomer Dr. Alan Marcus of Towson State University. The purpose of this trip was to provide the group an authentic field experience via direct immersion into the very core of blues culture.

The group visited several sites in Memphis – including Beale Street, Graceland, Stax Soul Studios, Sun Studios, and the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel. Upon traveling “deeper” into the Delta the group ventured to several Mississippi sites, including Dockery Plantation, the unofficial birthplace of the blues. The group also visited the Riverside Hotel, Stovall Farms, and the crossroads where Robert Johnson sold his soul to the Devil in return for guitar virtuosity. One notable stop included a stimulating discussion of the Civil Rights Movement in Money, the site of Emmett Till’s supposed “wolf whistle” on August 24, 1955. The lynching of this 14-year-old boy from Chicago and the trial that followed vividly commemorated in Bob Dylan’s song The Death of Emmett Till is viewed as the spark that set off the Movement. They visited Broad Street Park in Greenwood, a site from which the cry for “Black Power” first exploded into the national consciousness in 1966. One highlight included a hypnotic live blues performance by Robert “Walfman” Balfour in Red’s Lounge in Clarksdale, where the group feasted on Red’s famous ribs and barbecue spaghetti. On the climatic educational evening of the week the group witnessed Dr. Strait performing his best “rubber band man” lesson on the dance floor of Po’ Monkey’s lounge, one of the last remaining rural juke-houses.

Students interested in participating in the course and the field experience next year should contact Dr. Strait. Dr. Marcus of Towson State is planning on joining on the group again and may be bringing some graduate students in tow. The potential synergy realized with two different student groups sharing such an experience should be very beneficial to all involved. For example, this coming year Dr. Marcus and Dr. Strait will be collaborating on a book project that will focus on the ways in which the sights and sounds of blues culture influence the geography of memory across the Delta. Aside from being a student of the blues, and a geographer, Dr. Marcus is also a musician. He offered his gratitude to this year’s group for making his first trip to the Delta an invigorating experience by dedicating the following blues song to the Department of Geography and Geology:

Goin’ to Mississippi

Going to Mississippi, I see my friend John Strait
Gonna barrelhouse at Po’ Monkeys, tell him ‘don’t be late’
I’m a witness (at the Lorraine Motel), long ways from home
I’m leaving Beale Street, boy I’m so alone
Going down to Clarksdale, with no rider by my side
I’m going to Red’s this evening, saw Wolfman n’ thought I’d died
Red turned to me: ‘world can do me no wrong’
I’ve got the blues, just sing it in a song
Driving back to Memphis with my friend Coal Davie Lee
I miss Mississippi, just got these blues can’t you see

Going back to Mississippi next year, tell my friend
John Strait
Gonna barrelhouse at Po’ Monkeys, tell him to be there and don’t be late.

jstrait@shsu.edu
Upcoming Guest Lecture

Mr. Carl Rosa, Executive Director of The Japan-America Society of Houston, will deliver a guest lecture on November 8, 2010, from 11:00 to 11:50 AM in Room 215 of the Lee Drain Building. His presentation is titled “The Fascinating Facts of Japan” which integrates Japan’s struggles with over population while simultaneously offering a glimpse into daily life.

For more information about The Japan-American Society of Houston visit http://www.jashouston.org/mainpage.htm.

Contact Dr. Albert (geo_dpa@shsu.edu; 936-194-1453) for more information.

Geographers of Sam Houston (GOSH)

Geographers of Sam Houston is a group available for all students who are interested in geography and its many aspects. Members will organize educational trips, outings, social events, and even guest speakers. There will be efforts put into geography promotion through Geography Awareness Week, Earth Day, and other volunteering opportunities throughout the community. Group meetings will be held twice a month, usually on Tuesday or Thursday, and will be advertised for the date and location. For more information please contact Cody Coquel.

President - Cody Coquel - ccc018@shsu.edu
Vice President – Lannie Upton – Lannie@legendgismapping.com
Secretary – Matt Shipley – mjsh025@shsu.edu
Treasurer – James Scott – livinlion@shsu.edu
Activities Directors – Haley Hanson – hch005@shsu.edu; Leah Hughes – hughes2014@yahoo.com
Community Service Liaison – Joshua Munguia – jjm017@shsu.edu

Sam Houston Association of Geology Students (SHAGS)

SHAGS held their elections at the beginning of the semester. The officers for this academic year are Kyle Spezia (President), Joshua Hale (Vice President), Kate Otto (Secretary), and Tiffany Engle (Treasurer).

So far there has been a general meeting to elect officers, an officers meeting, and a general meeting to discuss plans for the semester and to listen to Dr. Joe Hill’s presentation on his current research project. Day trips to the Houston/Galveston region (museums) and Lake Whitney (fossil collecting) are being worked out. SHAGS will tag along with Dr. Hill’s Geology of North America trip to central Texas. They will camp at Inks Lake State Park, near Burnet, Texas the weekend before Thanksgiving, November 19-21. Saturday morning will be spent climbing Enchanted Rock and getting an overview of central Texas geology. Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning tours of the region will give students an opportunity to observe and sample Proterozoic and Paleozoic rocks. There will also be a banquet/dinner near the end of the semester.

Contact Dr. Cooper (bjcooper@shsu.edu) or Kyle Spezia (kasp022@shsu.edu) for more information.
**Dr. Falguni Mukherjee** received her Bachelor’s degree in Civil Engineering from Birla Vishvakarma Mahavidyalaya in India, MS in GIS from UT - Dallas and PhD from University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee. Her research is concerned with Social Construction of GIS and she specializes in the process of spatial knowledge production by local government agencies. She has worked with Dane county officials in Wisconsin to explore the history of their GIS usage and its repercussions on their contemporary GIS knowledge production. Dr Mukherjee is looking forward to working with local government agencies in Walker, Montgomery and Harris County to explore their GIS Knowledge production and develop a comparative case study of the process.

She is currently teaching a course on Intro to GIS and GIS applications for local government agencies. She will be developing other GIS application courses and graduate course on Internet Mapping.

**Ms. Heidi Estep** was hired this fall as a geology lecturer. She is currently teaching physical geology, geologic hazards, and astronomy (in the physics department). Her area of expertise is in environmental geophysics. She completed her BS in physics and geology at Sam Houston State University, an MS in geophysics at Baylor University, and is currently working on her PhD in environmental geophysics at Baylor University. She is expecting to complete her PhD in the summer of next year. She worked in the petroleum industry a short time as a geomechanics consultant before pursuing an academic career. Before accepting the current position at Sam, she was geology coordinator at San Jacinto College in South Houston. Her research interests include characterizing water reservoir sediment and determining sedimentation rates, watershed fingerprinting, erosion modeling, and landuse management.

**Dr. Donald Albert** (second from left) was promoted to full professor (Geography) effective September 1, 2010. He joined the Department in 1999 after one-year stints at George Mason University (Fairfax, VA). Department of Veterans Affairs (Durham, NC), and Tennessee State University (Nashville, TN). Dr. Albert currently serves as the Editor-in-Chief of the International Journal of Applied Geospatial Research.

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**New Faculty Biographies**

**Dr. Gillespie** (with Dr. Joan Maier and Mrs. Lori Rose) - “Pushing Boundaries: A Novel Approach to Teach Geography.” The National Council of Geographic Education Meeting in Savannah, Georgia (October)

**Dr. Cong** (with student Joe Hallonquist) - “Population Growth, Wildland-Urban Interface, and Wildfire in the Greater Austin, Texas”; (with Dr. Strait) - “Census Tract and Spatial Analysis.” The 33rd Applied Geography Conference in Dallas, Texas (October); “Improving Wildland-Urban Interface Delineation with Satellite Imagery.” The Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers in Seattle, Washington (April)

**Dr. Mukherjee**—“Tracing the Historic Trajectory of GIS and its Implications on Modern Practices.” The 17th Annual Mini Conference on Critical Geography at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (November); “Complexities in GIS Construction and Spatial Knowledge Production in Dane County, Wisconsin.” The Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers in Seattle, Washington (April)


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**Congratulations to Dr. Albert**

**Faculty Conference Presentations**


Updates from the Faculty

This summer Dr. Chris Baldwin continued his research on the island of Labuan, offshore from Borneo. While working on a geological section a local gentleman approached him and asked if they had seen the mud volcano? This was quite an impressive little active cone, periodically and regularly burping pale gray liquid mud which ran down through a rather beautiful banana and coconut grove - marred only by man eating mosquitoes in millions if not billions!

Dr. Brian Cooper and his kids spent part of their summer at Lake Powell. They rented a houseboat for five days and toured the southern end of the lake. Finally saw some of the giant weathering pits that Dr. Dennis Netoff has described in several publications and has photos of in and around his office. As “captain” of the boat, Dr. Cooper had a very steep learning curve when it came to running a houseboat. Dr. Cooper can handle a kayak; however, a forty-eight foot houseboat does not handle quite the same as a kayak. The kids said he did okay, did not hit any other boats during the entire trip, and only slammed the stern of the houseboat into a dock one time. They did have some anchor issues their first day, and offer the following advice: do not bury your anchor too close to the shore when the lake level is rising. Apparently it took them two hours to extract an anchor buried two feet in sand that was underwater. Overall, the trip was an interesting learning experience, they had a good time and found that Lake Powell lived up to Dr. Netoff’s enthusiastic endorsement. They also were able to visit Monument Valley and the North Rim of the Grand Canyon during this trip.

Dr. Mark Leipnik was invited over Christmas to present a graduate course on GIS at Mahidol University, the oldest university in Thailand located next to the Royal Palace in downtown in Bangkok. This class was presented to 3D faculty and graduate students on use of GIS in public health. The hosts were very hospitable providing lavish meals of local delicacies and when challenged to produce something “out of the ordinary” in the way of Thai cuisine a bowl of deep fried insects including scorpions, locusts, crickets and silkworm larvae. All were reported to be good to eat, but the crickets were a little mushy.

Dr. Leipnik visited the Ukraine and the Republic of Georgia over the summer for a month including visits to Kyiv, Tbilisi (the Capital of Georgia), and the resort city of Batumi on the Turkish border. Dr. Leipnik met with GIS experts in both countries and made a presentation to students and faculty at the State University in Tbilisi. He also visited many areas, including Jvari a mountaintop monastery dating to the year 310 on the list of UNESCO world heritage sites.

Also over the summer Dr. Leipnik attended the 30th annual Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) International GIS conference. This event is the largest gathering of “geographers” in the world. Held at the San Diego Convention center it attracted about 15,000 GIS professionals plus 5,000 software vendors, geospatial technology sellers and employees of ESRI, the world’s top GIS Company. The highlight of the conference was the presentation of the Bell Medal to Roger Tomlinson - the geographer who “invented” GIS (if any one man did) and to Jack Dangermond the founder and sole owner of ESRI (below). The Medal is the highest award of the National Geographic Society and has only been presented 4 times. Dr. Leipnik brought 8 poster papers to the conference which were created as class projects by students in the spring semester in the applied GIS class (Geo 435). These were exhibited in the Map Gallery along with over 1,000 other maps and models. SHSU’s maps were respectable and received some attention, particularly one made by Steven Provenza that rated which European countries were best to live and work in.

Dr. Leipnik also made two formal presentations, one on Cadastral Development in the Ukraine and Baltic Republics (landownership map development in the former Soviet states) and another on Issues with ARCGIS Online use in Education in a separate Educational GIS Conference.
Faculty Updates Continued

This summer, Dr. Marcus Gillespie traveled with his family and seven members of his wife’s family from Thailand on a 23-day, 6000-mile trip to 15 national parks and monuments in the Western U.S., including the Grand Canyon, Yosemite (top), Sequoia, King’s Canyon, Bryce Canyon, Crater Lake (bottom), Death Valley, Guadalupe N.P., and Redwood National Park, among others. According to him, the trip was excellent - the weather was good everywhere they went and, of course, the scenery was amazing. Although he thought Yosemite had the most impressive vistas, he especially enjoyed walking among the largest trees on the planet - some of which are more than 300-feet tall and 1500 years old. Dr. Gillespie first went to many of these national parks as an undergraduate Earth Science major at SHSU and those trips had a tremendous impact on his life. He hopes that all of the students in the department will have the opportunity to experience these places, because their grandeur is awe-inspiring and simply can’t be captured on film.

Dr. Dennis Netoff continues to work on weird landforms and sedimentary structures on Earth and their Martian analogs. He and several Departmental colleagues have updated and published new editions of the lab manuals for physical geology and for weather and climate, and a new edition of the eWeather book will come out in the Spring 2011 semester. His research continues to focus on Glen Canyon, Utah, and a special publication on potential Martian life habitats (top), with some 30 co-authors, will be released by the Geological Society of America sometime in 2011 or 2012. Dennis and his wife Nancy made their annual ‘escape’ to the Pacific Northwest over the summer (bottom: Florence, Oregon).

Dr. Velvet Nelson had the opportunity to spend the past spring and summer in Central Europe. While there, she lived in Koper, Slovenia and taught in the Department of Geography, Faculty of Humanities at the University of Primorska. Similar to here at SHSU, Dr. Nelson taught regional geography, particularly focusing on the Western Hemisphere. She taught in English, even though English is, in many cases, the students’ third language. (Slovene is the first language, and, since Koper is located near the Italian border, Italian is often the second language spoken.) During the spring semester, she participated in a week long field course on urban geography in Austria and Germany with 30 third-year Slovenian geography students (left). She was also invited to give lectures to geography students at Slovenia’s two other public universities: the University of Ljubljana and the University of Maribor. After the semester ended and the weather improved, she traveled as much as she could in Slovenia. For being a country that is slightly smaller than the state of New Jersey, Slovenia has a tremendous amount of geographic diversity. While she enjoyed living across the street from the Adriatic Sea, her favorite place in Slovenia is the Soča River Valley in the Julian Alps. She also traveled in neighboring Italy and Croatia and even had the opportunity to travel to Novi Sad, Serbia (which involved 15 hours by bus, two trains and a taxi) to present a paper at Geotrends – an international conference on Geoheritage and Geotourism research.

Although she misses the view from her classroom at the Faculty of Humanities (below), she is happy to be back teaching her own classes.

http://www.shsu.edu/~gel_geo/
Doing his best to emulate Jack Kerouac, Dr. John Strait spent the bulk of Summer 2010 “on the road.” The month of June saw he and his family visiting the Hawaiian Islands, where they vacationed on both Oahu and the Big Island (Hawai`i). At the onset of the trip Dr. Strait participated in the International Conference on Social Sciences in Honolulu. Following the conference, the Strait family visited with plenty of ohana (family), hung loose on the beach, consumed mass quantities of local food, and participated in the King Kamehameha Festival and parade in Kaapau. Like “old school” geographers, Dr. Strait and son Prezley spent one exciting morning searching off-road for King Kamehameha’s birthplace along a very remote portion of the Kohala coast.

Chinatown as part of their ongoing effort to understand the spatial dimensions of the area’s racial and ethnic diversity. Their findings will inform an ongoing research project focused on neighborhood dynamics across the islands. The Straits are collaborating with Dr. Gang Gong on this project.

Aside from Hawaii, Dr. Strait also visited the Mississippi Delta on three separate occasions during the summer. On two of these trips he served as a Guest Scholar in summer workshops in Cleveland, Mississippi co-sponsored by the National Endowment for Humanities (NEH) and the Delta Center for Culture and Learning entitled “The Most Southern Place on Earth: Music, Culture and History in the Delta.” These workshops are designed to provide advanced instruction and curriculum consultation to groups of university faculty, teachers, scholars and other educators. Dr. Strait’s roles in these workshops were to direct field trips and provide participants geographical perspectives on a wide variety of subject matter, including civil rights, ethnicity, religion, music and food. He was particularly responsible for directing discussions focused on the various ways in which migration has been responsible for both the Delta’s unique cultural heritage, and for the impacts this region has had on the wider world.

One noteworthy topic Dr. Strait introduced and explored during the course of these NEH workshops is the practice of geophagy – the eating of “earth”, or dirt. This cultural practice is common throughout various parts of the world, but specifically diffused to portions of the U.S. South via the relocation of African slaves. The prevalence of geophagy has generally declined overtime, yet the practice remains somewhat evident within the Delta. During the course of the workshops Dr. Strait led participants to sights within the region where local people continue to “mine” for certain clays known for their unique culinary properties. This exercise in “tasting terroir” led him to be interviewed for separate articles in Heritage: The Magazine of SHSU, The Oxford American, and a dream outlet for cultural geographers – Food and Wine Magazine.

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Aside from their 10th wedding anniversary, Dr. Strait and his wife Ava also engaged in an urban field reconnaissance through Honolulu’s Chinatown as part of their ongoing effort to understand the spatial dimensions of the area’s racial and ethnic diversity. Their findings will inform an ongoing research project focused on neighborhood dynamics across the islands. The Straits are collaborating with Dr. Gang Gong on this project.

During their visit John and Ava made arrangements with the headmaster of the Hawai`i Preparatory Academy in Waimea to offer their services next summer (2011). Waimea is the largest town in the interior of the Big Island and lies amidst Parker Ranch, the largest privately-owned cattle ranch in the U.S. Accordingly, it is the center of paniolo (Hawaiian cowboy) culture and is well-known for being the birthplace of the Hawaiian version of country music. John will be directing a field-oriented workshop focused on understanding the island’s diverse ethnic influences, particularly in regards to food and music. The workshop will be entitled “The Ukulele and the Mixed-plate: The Impact of Immigration on the Hawaiian Cultural Landscape.” Ava will be teaching a mini-course on Environmental Geography using Hawaii as a case study. Daughter Memphis and son Prezley will be spending their time learning how to hula and surf, respectively.
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Fall Student Get-Together

The Departmental Student Get-together will be held at Dr. Gillespie's house on Wednesday, October 6th, beginning at 5:00 PM. The goal is to provide a fun, relaxing opportunity for students and faculty to get to know one another and it gives students an opportunity to form friendships with other students in the department. So, both new students and 'old' students are welcome! We'll have pizza, chips, snacks and drinks (non-alcoholic of course). Dr. Gillespie lives 4 miles west of town in Timberwilde subdivision across from the Alpha Omega school and County Fairgrounds. (See map and directions below.) We hope to see you there! Please e-mail Dr. Gillespie if you plan to come so that he'll know how much food to order.

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The Timberwilde subdivision is across from the County Fairgrounds on Hwy 30, going west toward College Station about 5 miles past I-45 and a quarter mile past FM 1791. Timberwilde is on the right side of the road and there is a right turn lane at the entrance. Turn into the subdivision, take the first left on Autumn Way and go down the road to Tanglewood Drive - the only street that intersects Autumn Way. Turn right on Tanglewood, and then go up the road past the stop sign. Dr. Gillespie's house is at 59 Tanglewood Drive and is the first (and only) house on the left past the stop sign and before the community swimming pool. The house is a two-story house surrounded by trees with a white mailbox.