CHANGE IS THE ONLY CONSTANT
A Message from the Chair

Newsletter editor extraordinaire, Dr. Velvet Nelson, has been promoted to Associate Professor and granted tenure. Congratulations!

The College of Sciences has a new Dean, the third since I have been writing these chair messages. Our new Dean is Dr. John Pascarella who has worked at Valdosta State University in Georgia, Georgia Southern University, and most recently at Kansas State University (Manhattan and Olathe). He is a botanist with research in areas such as the effects of hurricanes on endangered beach plants in Florida and forest recovery in Puerto Rico.

Camy Dawson joined our Department as afternoon secretary late last Fall when Carleen McIlvain accepted a full-time position in the Office of International Programs. We were fortunate to steal Camy from the Department of Biological Sciences, where she had been working full-time since 2009.

Dr. Chris Baldwin and Dr. Dennis Netoff are both retiring at the end of this academic year. Their company, experience, and wisdom will be missed by everyone in our Department. Dennis has served this Department since 1990 and done a fantastic job of teaching, coordinating the Weather and Climate labs, and generating world-class geomorphological research. Chris started his career at SHSU in 1994 as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences which is now the College of Sciences, the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, and the College of Fine Arts and Mass Communication. Chris moved to our Department in 2000 and was interim Chair from 2007 to 2010. He has done a wonderful job of teaching, coordinating the Historical Geology labs, and producing world-class research in sedimentology and ichnology. In fact, it will require the hiring of at least three new faculty members and a permanent staff lab coordinator to take up the slack when Chris and Dennis retire.

Dr. Chris Baldwin

Chris has been a fantastic teacher and mentor, and his commitment to our students and our Department is truly appreciated by everyone in our Department. Dennis has served the Department since 2000 and was interim Chair from 2007 to 2010. He has done a wonderful job of teaching, coordinating the Historical Geology labs, and producing world-class research in sedimentology and ichnology. In fact, it will require the hiring of at least three new faculty members and a permanent staff lab coordinator to take up the slack when Chris and Dennis retire.

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New courses are proceeding through the curriculum approval process.

Environmental Geography (GEOG 2301) will be the entry-level course for the Environmental Geography track. Transportation Geography (GEOG 4359) will be an advanced elective option for the Human Geography track. Geospatial track, and the graduate program in Applied Geographic Information Systems (graduate students may take up to 6 hours of 4000-level coursework). GIS in Law Enforcement (GEOG 5368) will be an elective course for the graduate program. Field Methods (GEOL 3301) will help geology majors be better prepared for summer field camp. Petroleum Geology (GEOL 4320) is designed to prepare geology majors for a career in the petroleum industry.

The GIS component of the Geography Program is growing and changing. There are 28 students enrolled in the Applied GIS Graduate Program this semester, compared to 7 two years ago. An adjunct will be teaching a graduate GIS course at the Woodlands Center in the Spring semester. The remote-sensing lab (LDB 327) has been upgraded with new workstations that have dual hard-drives. Planning is taking place for a GIS facility on the fourth floor of The Woodlands Center so that the graduate program can be offered there. Drs. Gong, Leipnik, and Mukherjee are working on “proof of concept” projects that will illustrate the type of work that can be accomplished by a GIS Center of Excellence, a concept being promoted by Dr. Jack Hill in the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs.

Dr. Pat Harris has turned room 318A into a fully functioning research laboratory that is producing data, some of which has been presented to the Texas Department of Transportation. The lab has an X-ray diffractometer, an oven, a centrifuge, analytical scales, and a still (no, not that kind of still… this one produces doubly distilled water). There is also an ultrasonic homogenizer down the hall. The purchase of this equipment was made possible by HEAF funds from the University and Pat’s TexDOT grant.

Planning is also taking place so that the Geology Program can convert the current Animal Care Facility adjacent to the Lee Drain Building into a rock preparation and research lab. This concept was originated by Dean Pascarella who felt that this would be more convenient than constructing a building over by the Agricultural Mechanical Complex.

So…once again, a supportive University Administration has enabled our Department to make substantial changes.

Dr. Brian Cooper
bjcooper@shsu.edu
Geographers of Sam Houston

After a few semesters of inactivity, Geographers of Sam Houston (G.O.S.H.) experienced a fresh new burst of life—becoming active yet again, expanding its membership, and conducting several group activities with an ideal in mind: promoting camaraderie and community involvement within and beyond the department while never forgetting the geographic perspective. Starting from scratch and taking only the name of the organization from previous years, G.O.S.H has grown into a cohesive group of students from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds—bringing to the table a unique mixture of people and possibilities.

Among the several activities G.O.S.H. has been planning, the highlight of October was participating in the Huntsville Main Street Program’s “Scare on the Square” which was taken as an opportunity to spread geographic awareness and the geographic perspective to children in the Huntsville community. The outlet of Halloween was utilized in comparing different countries that also celebrate a holiday similar to what we know as Halloween, in most cases, where the dead and spirits are honored with food and festivities—opening up the avenue of allowing other places in the world to become more relatable and present in the minds of children. Along with this information, crafts were offered with hopes to relate back to a culture.

Several other events and activities are also in the works as the fall semester draws to a close, such as a camping trip, a possible mentoring program beginning in the spring, and as well as taking initiatives to reactivate SHSU’s GTU (Gamma Theta Upsilon) chapter by spearheading the induction process.

The officers for this academic year are: Heather Hughes (President), Jensen Angelloz (Vice President), Cliff Connor (Secretary), Cody Coffel (Treasurer), and Fariha Alam (Public Relations).

G.O.S.H. vs. S.H.A.G.S.

In October a friendly softball game was organized in attempts to settle the unrelenting battle between Geographers and Geologists—G.O.S.H. vs. S.H.A.G.S. Charging through a horrifying cold front with lows in the 30’s, G.O.S.H came out the victors after a close score of 21:20.

Sam Houston Association of Geology Students

The Sam Houston Association of Geology Students (S.H.A.G.S.) held their elections early during the Fall semester. The officers for this academic year are Will Fay (President), Gabe Cozart (Vice President), Kirby Mackey (Secretary), Alex Ruff (Treasurer), and Taryn Smith (Adventurer Seeker).

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. 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 16 – 18. 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.

G.O.S.H. vs. S.H.A.G.S.
The following students received awards for Geography and Geology during the 2011-2012 academic year:

- Fariha Alam—Barron Geography Award
- Lori Franco—Williams Geography Award
- Heather Hughes—Bounds-Holder Geography Award
- Michael Kowalczyk—Cannan Geological Scholarship and Houston Geological Society Scholarship
- Trent Ludtke—Scott Geography Award
- Ryan Replogle—SNAGS Scholarship
- Jamie Russell—Houston Geological Society Outstanding Student Award

Congratulations to the 2011-2012 Award Winners

Megan McFarland (co-head lab instructors), Makinzie Nicks, Lori Franco, Chelsea VanGleave, Heather Hughes, Kathleen Dikibo and Brant Johnson (they also did a bang-up job rejuvenating the weather and climate lab, see right).

Update on the Applied GIS Masters Program

In Spring 2013, a new “Python Programming” course will be offered under GEOG 5375 section 01 in the new Woodlands Center. Dr. Leipnik will offer a new course “Law Enforcement GIS” under GEOG 5375 02. In addition, Dr. Mukerjee will offer GEOG 5366 “Cartography and Visualization”. Please contact the GIS faculty for more information about these courses.

In May 2012 Sam Houston State University alumnus Nancy Morris obtained a Master of Arts in Geography from the Department of Geography and Regional Studies at the University of Miami. She completed a thesis titled “The election of a lesbian mayor in a religiously conservative city: The case of Houston, Texas.” While at Sam Houston State University Nancy Morris co-authored a paper with Drs. Albert and Tiller titled “International Date Line: Time travel made easy” which was published in The Pennsylvania Geographer.

Another undergraduate alumnus, Libby Kutch, is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Geography at Michigan State University.

New Equipment for the Geology Program

The department acquired a new piece of research equipment during the summer of 2012: a Rigaku Miniflex 600 X-ray diffractometer. Dr. Cooper was like a kid in a candy store when the instrument was installed. The technicians installing the instrument noted his excitement and gave him the honor of being the first person to turn on the X-ray diffractometer. Drs. Harris and Cooper used the instrument extensively over the summer to characterize expansive soils (Vertisols) and fluorescing gypsum crystals, respectively.

New Look for the Weather and Climate Lab

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Dr. Netoff’s long-term association with weather and climate lab instructors has been one of the most gratifying aspects of his tenure at SHSU. He would again like to extend his thanks and appreciation to the quality instruction provided by them. Current lab instructors are Amber Ansley and Megan McFarland (co-head lab instructors), Makinzie Nicks, Lori Franco, Chelsea VanGleave, Heather Hughes, Kathleen Dikibo and Brant Johnson (they also did a bang-up job rejuvenating the weather and climate lab, see right).
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Dr. Baldwin is a firm believer in getting his students working in the field. During Sedimentology and Stratigraphy (GEO 4400) he takes his students to various localities. At the Blue Lagoon (north of Huntsville) the students study sedimentary rocks and sketch sedimentary structures exposed in the quarry walls. Along the Brazos River (photo) students dig trenches in sand and create sandcasts that preserve sedimentary structures. This exercise emphasizes that “the present is the key to the past.” The field work in this course prepares students for their summer field camp and their career.

Dr. Hill took his Structural Geology class to the area around Lake Ouachita State Park in Arkansas last Spring in what promises to become an annual event. The geology of the region represents a complex and folded mountain belt formed by the collision of continents. It provides the perfect field laboratory to study and map thrust-faulted and folded strata of Paleozoic age. The field exercises associated with this trip are evolving.

This summer, Dr. Gillespie led his third study abroad trip to Thailand. Fifteen students went and nine of them were geography majors or minors (Jensen Angelloz, Ashleigh Baker, Mary Coleman, Ashley Dehayo, Lori Franco, Emily Gruger, Heather Hughes, Matthew Nelson, and Cristina Renteria). Having so many geographers along really added to the trip. There was something for any geography major to enjoy—culture, climate, landforms, new foods (to us), religion, and ecology. They first visited several amazing temples in Bangkok and then travelled to southern Thailand where they snorkeled on coral reefs, visited a monkey college (which teaches monkeys how to harvest coconuts and ride on motorcycles), and floated on rafts through caves inside spectacular tower karst landforms. (If you get a chance, ask Jensen about his short ride with the monkey!) They then flew to Chiang Mai in Northern Thailand where they practiced being ‘mahouts’ (elephant trainers) for a day so that they could ride elephants—and without ‘saddles’! They even got to bathe the elephants in a river. They also visited a few national parks, including a rain forest in the highest mountains in Thailand. Nature obliged by providing rain, fog, and a lot of wind—all of which made it a magical experience. They also visited the Sukhothai and Ayuthaya World Heritage sites and two of the Thai King’s palaces. Several of the students plan to go back, including Ashleigh, who wants to work on an organic farm we visited in Northern Thailand. The students were enthusiastic and took the occasional unplanned problem in stride. Coupled with the things everyone got to see and do, it was a great trip. If any of you geography majors and minors missed the opportunity to go to Thailand this past summer, and for those that want to go back, the university will be sponsoring a study abroad trip to Thailand next Christmas (December 2013-January 2014) during the Christmas break. Dr. Gillespie and his wife, who is Thai, will serve as chaperones, and students will live on campus at a university in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The course will count as three hours of credit in geography or sociology and will be conducted on campus. However, almost every day, students will be taken on field trips to local temples, national parks, and cultural sites. The instructors from the Thai university will conduct classes in English. It’s a three-week cultural immersion experience in which students learn all about Thailand. If you’re interested, please contact Dr. Gillespie.

Dr. Cooper asked the field camp director at the University of Missouri at Columbia to evaluate the performance of Sam Houston State University students attending camp during the summer of 2011. She provided a detailed description of weaknesses and strengths of the group. Dr. Hill modified the Arkansas trip to address the weaknesses. His efforts proved successful. The same field camp director evaluated SHSU students attending the 2012 camp and noted significant increases in their field geology skill levels. This assessment process is what prompted the design of the geology field methods course that is progressing through this year’s curriculum cycle.

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In August, Dr. Strait and 14 students, accompanied by Dr. Wally “Mop Top” Barnes, made the annual trip to the Birthplace of the Blues; the Mississippi Delta. The trip represents the field component of the advanced cultural geography course he directs entitled “Race, Blues, and Rock ‘N’ Roll” (officially known in the world of Banner as “Cultural Field Studies”).

The field experience included 6 intense days of geographical inquiry that entailed travelling by van from Huntsville to Memphis, Tennessee, and ultimately farther south into the Mississippi Delta, the region now referred to as the birthplace of American music. The course utilizes blues music and culture as a lens to investigate a host of geographical topics: migration, urbanization, religion, food, gender relations, race, ethnicity, social change, technological change, heritage tourism, and others.

Aside from listening to a lot of great music, the group visited several sites critical to the evolution of blues culture, including Sun Studios, the National Civil Rights Museum, Graceland, and Po' Monkey's Lounge, the last remaining rural juke joint. Throughout the extent of this year’s trip, the group was vainly attempting to track down Robert Plant, former lead singer of rock super group Led Zeppelin, who was scheduled to perform at a musical festival in Clarksdale. Unfortunately, Mr. Plant was nowhere to be found, but while in Clarksdale the group did stumble upon a commemorative Sam Houston State brick now enshrined in the new wing of the Delta Blues Museum devoted to the celebration of blues legend Muddy Waters. Undoubtedly the highlight of the entire trip was the amazingly “mannish” performance of geography major Cody “Waters” Walker, who sang a live version of Muddy’s classic song “Mannish Boy” inside the famous juke joint known as Red’s Lounge. In no uncertain terms, the man turned the place out! With or without a brick, thanks to Cody and the rest of the students the Delta blues community in Clarksdale will be talking about those folks from Sam Houston State for years to come.

The outcome of this year’s field experience leads to one conclusion: no academic arrangement generates more interactive learning than a van full of geographers with a full tank of gas and a few musicians sprinkled in. Reflecting upon this experience brings to mind comments by two born and bred Mississippians. William Faulkner once famously said, “In order to understand the world, one must first understand a place like Mississippi.” Years later, when asked to explain his so-called provocative and lewd live performances, an even more famous Elvis Presley uttered the following response – “I didn’t realize that my body was moving. It’s a natural thing to me.” These two statements summarize quite well the motivations and outcomes that account for the continued visits that SHSU students and faculty make to the Mississippi Delta. As geographers, we suffer from a continual yearning to explore and learn about the world around us, and our place in it. And when we arrive to that mystical classroom we call the Delta, we simply can’t help but “move” our bodies and our minds when the groove is on. We from Sam Houston juke up in there. It’s a natural thing for us.

Anybody interested in enrolling in Dr. Strait’s course in Fall 2013 should contact him personally.

Upcoming Spring Break Geology Field Trip

Drs. Hill and Harris will be leading a geologic field trip to the Grand Canyon and surrounding areas during spring break. They plan to leave Huntsville early on Friday, March 8th and spend the first night at Monahans State Park. They will then tour Carlsbad Caverns and drive on to White Sands National Monument. White Sands will be followed by a trip up the Rio Grande Rift and study the Jemez Mountains, Sandias, and rift geology. At Albuquerque, the SHSU group will take a geologic tour of New Mexico and Arizona along Interstate-40 (and a possible detour or two along Route 66). The group plans to make stops at the Petrified Forest, Meteor/Barringer Crater, and Sunset Crater. They will spend a couple of days enjoying the geology that is exposed in the walls of the Grand Canyon before returning to Huntsville on Saturday, March 16th. If you’re interested, please contact Dr. Hill or Dr. Harris.
In the Field: Island Geography

Dr. Strait and his family once again spent most of the summer exploring and adventuring on the Big Island of Hawai‘i. Over the course of their visit the Straits essentially circumnavigated the entire island. Perhaps the most fulfilling part of the trip saw the family accompany Ava Fujimoto-Strait’s father, Dr. Ed Fujimoto, in a quest to find the original Hamakua Ditch on the Hamakua coast. This was a 25 mile long irrigation canal built in the early 1900s as a means to bring fresh water to newly developed sugar cane fields on the north side of the island. Shortly after migrating to Hawai‘i from Japan, Ava’s great grandfather worked on the crew that built this canal by hand, an accomplishment that enabled the island to be developed into what it is today.

One of the other highlights of their visit included an adventure into the beautiful Waipi‘o Valley, a luscious valley of rainforest and taro fields isolated along the Hamakua coast. Waipi‘o means “curved water” in Hawaiian, and this valley marks the Kohala Mountains’ steep drop into the ocean. Driving down the extremely steep and windy road into this luscious valley literally resembles driving down into another world and stepping back into time. Their ultimate destination on this trip was Hi‘ilawe Falls, a waterfall that is almost as high as the tallest building in the world. The hike to this destination entailed fording a river in their jeep, following a narrow trail on foot that crossed an ancient graveyard, and climbing up two miles up a narrow, rocky and very wet valley trail. After swimming up and across a stream a couple of times, and climbing a rocky levee surrounded by a bamboo forest, they finally heard the hiss and witnessed the stupendous view of water plunging 1,450 feet down into a pool abounded by broken rock from above. Despite the beauty they encountered, recovering from this strenuous adventure required a full day of beach lounging. A lot of time was naturally spent at various beaches, but the most interesting beach the Straits visited was Green Sand Beach near Ka Lae (meaning “the point”). Ka Lae represents both the southernmost land end of the volcano Mauna Loa and the southernmost point in the U.S. This isolated and eerily windy part of the island, now commonly referred to as South Point, was the place where Polynesians first came ashore and settled when they discovered Hawai‘an islands around 300 AD.

Over the summer, Dr. Nelson was able to obtain an educational visa to travel to Cuba with a group of American university professors to meet with faculty at the University of Havana. Of course, one of the things that people associate with Cuba today is the cars – American cars from the 1920s to the 1950s, some of which have been excellently preserved. Most of the visit was spent in Havana, but in line with her research interests – she had the opportunity to travel to two very different types of tourism destinations: Verdeado, one of the country’s primary mass tourism destinations, and Las Terrazas, a sustainable ecotourism destination.

She also traveled to Malta – an island nation in the Mediterranean Sea. The islands are dry but the physical geography of their coastlines is often quite spectacular (see below). There is also a tremendous amount of human history there. The oldest structures are 5,000 years old.
In February, Dr. Strait and Ms. Fujimoto-Strait visited New York City to participate in the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers (AAG). Ms. Fujimoto-Strait attended sessions focused on distance education, while Dr. Strait made a research presentation entitled “Sou ndscapes of the Hoochie Coochie Man: The Music of Muddy Waters & The Southern Diaspora.” Dr. Strait also took advantage of the trip to engage in some ‘ol’ fashioned, ‘boots-on-the-ground,’ geography – on one single day he set foot in all five boroughs of the city (Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, Staten Island, and the Bronx). His travels focused on sights and scenes associated with the city’s diverse musical heritage. For example, he visited several sites in East Harlem, the South Bronx that were significant to the cultural evolution of other salas, hip hop/rap, and/or other Afro-Cuban musical forms, including the apartment building where the first known hip hop jams took place. He also visited several places within Greenwich Village that were favorite haunts of Bob Dylan during the heyday of the 1960s New York folk scene. Last, but not least, he sought out the former location of CBGBs in the East Village of Manhattan, the bar/club considered to be the birthplace of punk music. Aside from all the memories and pictures of places among New York’s musical landscape, Dr. Strait also brought back an important artifact: a piece of the curb from a corner on Bowery, in the East Village, the exact spot where British punk rock star Johnnie Rotten passed out after visiting the U.S. for the first time (he had just stumbled out of CBGBs – apparently Brits can’t hang). This precious artifact now sits in Dr. Strait’s office in the Lee Drain Building. Dr. Mukherjee also presented a paper titled, “Social Construction of Geospatial Data”.

In May, Dr. Nelson traveled to Romania to present a research paper entitled “The Spatial Construction of Transylvania as a European Tourism Destination” at the 8th World Congress of the Regional Science Association International. The theme of this congress was Changing Spatial Patterns in Globalising World. She flew into the capital city, Bucharest, and took a train across the country to reach the conference site in Timișoara. This historic city was the first in Europe to be lit by electric street lamps in 1884, and it was where the Romanian Revolution began in 1889.

Dr. Don Albert was one of twelve panelists participating in an open forum titled “Rethinking Applied Geography” on October 10, 2012, at the 35th Annual Applied Geography Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Also in October, Dr. Nelson, Dr. Strait, and Ms. Fujimoto-Strait attended the Race, Ethnicity and Place conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Dr. Nelson’s presentation was entitled, “Rijeka’s Mornić: Symbol and Souvenir” and Dr. Strait’s presentation was entitled, “The Migration of the Hoochie Coochie Man: The Music of Muddy Waters and the Racial Dynamics of the Southern Diaspora.” In addition to attending conference activities, these geographers got to experience the beginning fury of Hurricane Sandy, indulge in Puerto Rican cuisine, and visit some historic sites in Old San Juan and beyond. In February 2013, Ms. Fujimoto-Strait will be presenting a fun, tourist-informative lecture on the “Geography of Puerto Rico” to all interested faculty, staff and students.

Dr. Gillespie will present information about the use of the Critical thinking Assessment Test (CAT) in the Foundations of Science course (GEOG 1436) at the Southern Association of College and Schools (SACS) meeting in Dallas this December. (SACS is the entity that accredits our university.) This will be his second joint presentation at a SACS conference with faculty from Tennessee Technological University who developed the CAT exam.

In June, Dr. Mukherjee presented details on geospatial topics in urban geography for the journal (vol. 3 no. 4). Dr. Mukherjee, along with Dr. Rina Ghose of University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, published a paper titled “Exploring the Complexities of Community Engaged GIS for Urban Governance” in this special issue.
Dr. Albert has published the 2 edited volumes entitled “Emerging Methods and Multidisciplinary Applications in Geospatial Research” (together with G. Rebecca Dobbs of the University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill) and “Geospatial Technologies and Advancing Geographic Decision Making: Issues and Trends” (see below).

Dr. Gillespie, Dr. Rowe (Biology department), and colleagues at Michigan State University received a $50,000 grant from the Gates foundation to create an online version of the Foundations of Science course. Matching funds for an additional $50,000 are also being provided by another organization. The $100,000 grant will be used to develop a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) that can be offered to students anywhere in the U.S. and, indeed, to anyone in the world. So, tens of thousands of students could potentially take the course in any given year. Credit for initiating this grant goes to our colleagues at Michigan State, but their interest in developing this project was sparked by a talk Dr. Rowe made at MSU – and by the proven success of the course at improving critical thinking. Dr. Rowe, Dr. Gillespie and these colleagues will work together over the coming year to implement this project.

Dr. Netoff continues research on sandstone landforms of Glen Canyon, Utah as well as various Mars projects. Current research focus is on a long term project to write a book on the geomorphology of Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, Utah-Arizona, tentatively titled Landscapes of Lake Powell. The book will include much of the research done by Netoff and his SHSU field assistants. Netoff and Shroba (U.S.G.S.) are wrapping up another paper on sandstone landforms in Glen Canyon titled “Influence of joints, fluidization pipes, and deflation in the formation of giant sandstone weathering pits in south-central Utah.” Mahaney, Netoff, Dahm, Costa and Miller are finalizing a paper on Turbulent Flow and Grain Velocity Calculations in Geothermal Pipes of the Entrada and Navajo Sandstones, Southwestern US: analogues to tsunami models and projected sites on Mars.