Greetings to all alumni, students, and friends of Geography. The Department of Geography is happy to once again share with you a little bit of what has been going on over the past year. Our students have been hard at work; 30 of our majors were on the honor roll this year. Many of them won national academic achievement awards, have received NASA scholarships, taken prestigious internships across the country, and presented research projects at national conferences as well as to our own state legislators at the Iowa Capital.

The faculty in Geography have been busy too. We taught over 2,700 students this past year! We also continue to make contributions to Iowa and the U.S. through cutting edge research and outreach programs. In fact, Geography faculty received $2.5 million in grants this year! This money not only funds research activities, but also helps us employ students, provides scholarships, allows us to expand our laboratories with new equipment, and funds public workshops. In these years of dwindling state support, such grants are one of the few mechanisms we have to support student and faculty work. We hope that all the work we do not only benefits today’s students, but also makes UNI Geography a department with which you can be proud to be associated.

Our web page was recently updated and we now post news of recent events. Please check it out at www.uni.edu/geography. There is a link on our home page where you can update your contact information. Please drop us a note about job changes, moves, or just a general update. We are always looking for ways to help current students, so if you have job openings or other announcements you would like current UNI geographers to see, just send them to me at patrick.pease@uni.edu. Also, if you are interested in being involved with the department, there are a lot a ways to give back, including gifts, visiting classes, interning or mentoring students, advising the department, giving guest lectures, and many more. Feel free to write or call if you’d like to know more. Until then, we wish you well.

Patrick Pease
ITTC, Office 205 c
(319) 273-7117
Patrick.Pease@uni.edu

Geography Students Receive NASA Scholarships

Congratulations to Philip Cavin, Jonathon Launspach, Susan Meerdink, and Andrew Wille. These four UNI Geography students were selected to receive the NASA Space Grant Scholarship 2010-2011. The scholarship program aims to provide opportunities for students in Science/Technology/Engineering/Math (STEM) disciplines and to involve undergraduates in research.

Students Present Research at National Conferences

Several undergraduate and graduate students have been busy with research project and have been traveling to conferences to present their findings. Jonathon Launspach, Kevin Jacque, Munshi Rahman, and Bill Burkett all presented at this year’s West Lakes AAG meeting in St. Paul, MN. William Burkett, Dossay Oryspayev, Dmitry Ershov, Munshi Rahman, Borislav Nikoltchev, and Anna Pestereva went to Washington DC to the national AAG meeting, and Jonathon Launspach— to the State of the Arctic conference in Miami, FL.
Vice President of the Russian Geographic Society

The Program for Research and Outreach in Geography between Russia and the United States (PROGRUS) and UNI Geography welcomed a Visiting Scholar from Russia. Professor Yuri Gladky is a prominent Russian geographer, the Vice-President of the Russian Geographic Society and the Head of the Economic Geography Department at the Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia in St. Petersburg. Dr. Gladky is a renowned specialist in economic and political geography of Russia, regional development, philosophy of human geography and geography education. Yuri is the Member of the Russian Academy of Education and co-editor of the Russian Geographic Society's flagship journal. He authored a dozen books and numerous articles. Dr. Gladky previously served as a visiting professor at several U.S. and Eurasian universities, including UNI.

During his visit, Dr. Gladky delivered the PROGRUS Speakers Series Lecture on regional economic development policies in contemporary Russia. He also accompanied UNI faculty to the Association of American Geographers meeting in Washington DC. The PROGRUS activities were made available by the generous contributions of Jim and Connie Schuerman of Cedar Falls.

Chilean Scholar to Exchange Ideas on Geographic Education

In January and February, the department was pleased to host Dr. Fabián Araya Palacios, a visiting geographer from the Universidad de La Serena in La Serena, Chile. Dr. Araya’s interest is in geography education and rural water use, including working with Chilean Ministry of Education to establish nationwide K-12 geography standards and an effort with the University of Regina (Canada) to explore how arid rural communities in Chile and Canada can better manage their water resources. While at UNI, Dr. Araya presented a colloquium, guest lectured, visited a local school, and participated in National Geographic’s campus visit. Fabián looks forward to more collaboration between our two departments, and notes that February in La Serena is in the low 80s, but perhaps a “little cold” right along one of its many beaches.

News from the Geographic Alliance of Iowa

In September 2009 Dr. Alex Oberle joined Dr. Kay Weller as the new co-coordinator for the Geographic Alliance of Iowa. With Kay thinking a bit more about retirement and Alex becoming more involved with GAI activities, the timing is great to have a smooth “handing off of the baton.” Timing is also good because the National Geographic Society is having all state alliances complete a comprehensive, long-term strategic plan, so Alex can work to build on Kay’s outstanding successes and ensure that the GAI is in a great position for the future. In addition to the Fulbright-Hays grant to Chile, the GAI hosted a railroads themed workshop in Council Bluffs (co-led by our own Don Peterson), a series of technology focused workshops for the Waterloo Community School District, and a curricular development trip to Russia. In the next year we have scheduled an agricultural workshop in Des Moines, a study trip to Alaska, and two Iowa Core Curriculum Workshops in traditionally underserved areas (rural SE Iowa and the Quad Cities).

During their visit, Marina and Yuri Gladky met with Connie and Jim Schuerman, who made their trip possible with a generous contribution to the department.
Professor Ramanathan Sugumaran (“Sugu”) named NASA-Iowa Space Grant Consortium’s New Director

Dr. Ramanathan Sugumaran (Sugu) from the Department of Geography has been named as NASA-Iowa Space Grant Consortium’s (ISGC) new director. Sugu will succeed Dr. Bill Byrd from Iowa State University (ISU), who served as director for the past 19 years. Sugu is currently Professor of Geography and Director of the GeoTREE Center (Geoinformatics Training, Research, Education, and Extension Center, www.geotree.uni.edu). Sugu has also served as ISGC base program manager at UNI for the past six years.

The ISGC is part of the NASA National Space Grant College and Fellowship Program, authorized by Congress in 1987. The ISGC was formed in 1990 by the three Regents’ universities - University of Northern Iowa, Iowa State University, and University of Iowa - and Drake University, as well as affiliates from government, industry and nonprofit organizations. The mission of the ISGC is to coordinate and improve Iowa’s future in aerospace science and technology and to stimulate aerospace research, education and outreach activities throughout the state. In order to achieve this mission, ISGC has five program categories: precollege, higher education, fellowships, research and the general public. Detailed descriptions of each category and other activities can be found at http://www.ia.spacegrant.org/.

Some of the key roles for Sugu in the new position are to: serve as the state representative to NASA space consortium, develop and implement ISGC strategic and annual implementation plans, chair the Space Grant Executive Committee, serve as the Principle Investigator for NASA EPSCoR, and chair the State Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) for NASA EPSCoR. Congratulations to Sugu for this prestigious position!

UNI’s Leadership in Geographic Education Continues to Benefit Teachers and Students in Iowa

Alex Oberle received a Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad grant to take 12 Iowa K-12 teachers to Chile for four weeks in July 2009. Led by Alex and Kay Weller, the teacher group traversed over 3,000 miles by bus to visit universities, schools, and sites of interest. Focusing on the theme of population change—such as rural depopulation, rapid urbanization, and international migration—the participants drafted outstanding lesson plans and other curricular materials that fit directly with the new Iowa Core Curriculum. The curriculum materials are available for free to teachers in Iowa and the nation and can be found at http://www.uni.edu/gai/ under the link “Chile.” When not pursuing the goal and theme of the project, the group spent their “downtime” by doing such things as attending a 4th of July flag-raising ceremony at the U.S. Embassy in Santiago, visiting Chile’s largest winery, staying with host families in Arica, and watching alpacas and flamingos at 15,000+ feet in the altiplano.

Geography Faculty Receive Grants from the National Science Foundation

This year Geography faculty were awarded two major NSF grants: Drs. Sugumaran, Pease and Petrov received funding to acquire a Hyperspectral Imaging System for Multidisciplinary Research that will allow the advance research and teaching in geography, biology, geology, and environmental sciences. Dr. Petrov was also awarded an NSF research grant to investigate the geographies and economic impacts of creative capital in the Arctic. The “Creative Arctic” project will last for two years and involve all circumpolar countries.
Congratulations Award Winners!

Student Perspective

Three years ago I found myself back in school again for the third time since I graduated high school. While completing my gen-ed degree at Hawkeye Community College I was trying to decide in which direction to take my education. I've always liked maps, so, on a whim I came to check out the UNI Geography Department and stumbled on to GIS. Two years later, here I am ready to graduate with a B.A. in GIS. It's been a challenge coming to the university as a non-traditional student, and being on average ten years older than most of my classmates. It has also been difficult, when asked what I'm majoring in, trying to explain to people outside the department what GIS is. However, I've managed to maintain my status on the Dean's List every semester, and have learned a lot along the way. The professors in the Geography Department have been so nice and helpful, and I'd like to express my gratitude to them. My plans for the immediate future are as yet undecided, but tentatively I'd like to find a position in a county government level GIS department. -Allison Gallery

Outstanding Alumnus Award

This issue we have two Alumnus Awards to recognize. Last year our newsletter was produced too early to report the 2009 award winner so we are doing some catching up.

George Kuhter
The 2010 Outstanding Alumnus Award was presented to George Kuhter. George finished an MA degree in 2002 and is an 8th grade teacher at South Tama Middle School. George has been a teacher consultant for the Geographic Alliance of Iowa since 1995. He has served on the GAI’s Steering Committee, co-developed and implemented five teacher summer institutes and workshops in Geography Education, and represented the GAI on three Fulbright Hays Curriculum Development trips to Nigeria, India and Bangladesh. He has also worked with Dr. Kay Weller and the National Geographic Society to lobby Congress for passage of the “Geography is Fundamental” bill. George is also the recipient of the 2004 Distinguished Teaching Award from the National Council for Geographic Education.

Nicole Breitsprecker
The 2009 Outstanding Alumnus Award was presented to Nicole Breitsprecker. Nikki graduated from UNI in 2001 with a degree in Geography with an Environmental Emphasis and a certificate in Cartography and Geographic Information Systems (GIS). She currently resides in Dubuque where she is the GIS Coordinator/Analyst for the City of Dubuque. Nikki is active in statewide GIS applications, serves as the Secretary of the Executive Board of the Iowa Geographic Information Council (IGIC) and chairs the conference committee.

National Council of Geographic Education Award for Excellence of Scholarship
Chad Arp
Allison Gallery

Annual Outstanding Undergraduate Research in Geography
Kevin Jacque
Jonathon Launspach

Annual Academic Certificate of Achievement
Katie Bunch