



Department of Geography
Franklin College of Arts and Sciences
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY

Fall Newsletter



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WELCOME

The Department of Geography at the University of Georgia (UGA) is a leading center of teaching and scholarship on the physical and social processes that shape our world. We are a community of faculty members, researchers, undergraduate students, graduate students, staff, and alumni. Together with our state-of-the-art laboratory facilities, we seek to foster a stimulating environment for intellectual growth and collaboration. Our department offers a diverse range of Bachelor's, Master's, and Ph.D. degree programs tailored to meet the unique goals of each individual.

OUR MISSION

The mission of UGA Geography is to advance understanding of social and natural processes in a complex and changing world. As geographers, we are interested in where things happen, how people and places near and far are interconnected, and the impact of humans on the landscape and environment. Our undergraduate and graduate programs cultivate geographical curiosity, critical thinking, and a rich array of methods for solving real-world problems. We support instruction and research in climate studies, atmospheric sciences, landforms, biodiversity, geoarchaeology, environmental change, geographic information science, remote sensing, urban processes, dynamics of the global economy, food systems, and social movements, such as those for food, climate and racial justice. As a community, we seek to understand how the world works and to contribute to the conditions for a more just and sustainable future.



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A MESSAGE FROM THE DEPARTMENT HEAD

This fall marks an exciting new chapter for the Department of Geography at the University of Georgia. I'm honored to step into the role of Department Head, alongside David Porinchu as Associate Head, as we guide our department into a new era of innovation, collaboration, and excellence.

Together, we are deeply committed to UGA geography's mission: to better understand the social and natural processes shaping our complex world, to prepare the next generation of geographers, and to strengthen the connections between people and places.

Over the past year, our students, postdocs, and faculty have achieved remarkable things. From cutting-edge environmental and social research to the integration of advanced technologies, their work continues to push boundaries in geographic research. In atmospheric sciences, UGA geographers are using state-of-the-art modeling to study extreme weather, air quality, and climate variability, contributing to the science of climate resilience and environmental forecasting.

In physical geography and geospatial science, faculty are leading groundbreaking research on health and transportation, global environmental change, biodiversity, coastal water resources, carbon cycling, and human-environment interactions. Our human geographers are producing transformative work on climate justice, food insecurity, migration, dynamics of the global economy, urban processes, and sustainability.



Deepak Mishra
Geography Department Head
University of Georgia



This fall, we are thrilled to welcome three new faculty members: Kayla Anderson (Community Geography), David Fastovich (Physical Geography), and Weiming Hu (Environmental AI). Their expertise and energy will further enrich our department.

We are equally proud of our students, who continue to shine on regional, national, and international stages. Many have earned prestigious fellowships, research awards, and national recognition for their innovative projects. Their achievements reflect the energy, curiosity, and passion that make UGA geography such a vibrant community.

Looking ahead, we are inspired by the ongoing support of our alumni, donors, and friends. Your engagement helps us continue the work that defines UGA Geography. We warmly invite you to visit the department, reconnect with our faculty and students, and see firsthand the exciting work happening across the department. We also welcome you to stay connected through our newsletters, social media, and website as we continue to explore and shape the world we share.

Warmly,

Deepak Mishra

Merle C. Prunty, Jr. Professor and Head
Department of Geography
University of Georgia



ALUMNI UPDATE: CASTLE WILLIAMSBERG

UGA Geography Alumnus **Castle Williamsberg** was awarded the Outstanding Early Career Award by the American Meteorological Society. Williamsberg graduated with his Ph.D. in Geography in August 2020 and now works as Chief Social Scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Program Office. Williamsberg posted the following on his LinkedIn profile about the award:



“I am deeply honored to have been named the recipient of the Outstanding Early Career Award by the American Meteorological Society Board on Societal Impacts. This award recognizes individuals who, within 10 years of earning their highest degree or under the age of 40 at the time of nomination, have made significant contributions to the social science discipline and demonstrate exceptional potential to become leaders in the scientific weather community. I’m truly grateful for this recognition, which highlights both past achievements and the promise of continued leadership and impact in advancing the integration of social sciences in weather research and practice. I’m excited to see what this community continues to achieve over the next 10 years!”



ALUMNI UPDATE: JOSHUA INWOOD

UGA Geography Alumnus **Joshua Inwood** has been appointed as a 2025 American Association of Geographers (AAG) Fellow. Inwood received his Ph.D. from UGA Geography in 2007 and now works as a Professor of Geography at Penn State University. In a recent press release, the AAG shared the following about Inwood's research and career:

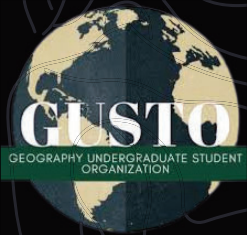


“Joshua Inwood’s career has centered on developing theoretical frameworks to study racism, white supremacy, and the legacies of social justice movements while ensuring this research is accessible and impactful to multiple audiences. His work has positioned him as a leading voice in examining white supremacy within the field of geography, illustrating how geographic concepts and practices both perpetuate racial oppression and serve as tools for resistance.

At the core of Inwood’s scholarship is an exploration of power dynamics in social and political discourse, alongside a commitment to understanding how grassroots resistance movements challenge systems of oppression and demand accountability. Inwood is widely recognized as one of geography’s most effective advocates and communicators. Through public forums, he demonstrates the critical role of geographic storytelling and perspectives in addressing pressing social issues. A prolific writer, he contributes extensively to both scholarly publications and broader public research platforms, bridging the gap between academia and the wider community.”



GUSTO'S TRIP TO LEGACY MUSEUM AND NATIONAL MEMORIAL FOR PEACE & JUSTICE



In April, the University of Georgia's **Geography Undergraduate Student Organization (GUSTO)** took a transformative day trip to the Equal Justice Initiative's (EJI) Legacy Sites in Montgomery, Alabama.

This educational experience included visits to the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, the Legacy Museum, and the Freedom Monument Sculpture Park—sites that confront the history of racial injustice in the U.S., including slavery, lynching, segregation, and mass incarceration. Immersing students in these spaces offered firsthand insight into the intersection of geography, history, and social justice, deepening their understanding of the built environment, spatial inequality, and community resilience.



The field trip enriched the academic experience by engaging students with the historical and spatial dimensions of racial justice. Through EJI's exhibitions, students explored how historical events shape landscapes and inform present-day social structures, gaining a deeper appreciation for geography's role in activism and systemic change.

This experience benefited students across all Geography concentrations. Human Geography students examined race, place, and power; GIS students engaged with mapping initiatives; and Physical Geography students participated in soil collection and landscape analysis activities.

UGA AMS CHAPTER ATTENDS 150TH ANNUAL MEETING



In January, students and faculty from the University of Georgia's chapter of the **American Meteorological Society (AMS)** participated in the 105th AMS Annual Meeting, held in New Orleans, Louisiana from January 17–22.

The conference is recognized as the world's largest annual gathering of professionals and students in the fields of weather, climate, and atmospheric sciences, with over 6,000 attendees this year.

The 2025 meeting centered on the theme "Towards a Thriving Planet: Charting the Course Across Scales," and featured sessions addressing topics such as renewable energy, extreme weather, and environmental health. UGA's AMS chapter was represented by 14 undergraduate students, 3 graduate students, and 3 faculty members.



STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS

UGA Atmospheric Sciences master's degree alumna, **Alex Music**, was named recipient of the 2025 American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Mass Media Science & Engineering Fellowship. The 10-week summer program places science, engineering, and mathematics students at media organizations nationwide to use their academic training to research, write, and report on pressing issues, sharpening their abilities to communicate complex scientific issues to the public.



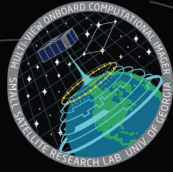
UGA Ph.D. candidate **Ashley Cornish** received the 2025 Peter B. Wagner Memorial Award for Women in Atmospheric Sciences from the Desert Research Institute. The \$1,500 award honors outstanding publications by women in graduate atmospheric science programs nationwide. Cornish was recognized for her paper, "The Impacts of Plant Physiological Responses to Rising CO₂ on Humidity-Based Extreme Heat," based on her master's and early doctoral research, which she presented at a ceremony in Reno, Nevada.



UGA Ph.D. candidate **Farnoosh Roozkhosh** has been awarded the NSF Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement (DDRI) Award for her dissertation proposal, "Electric Vehicle Users' Charging Behaviors: A GeoAI Approach." This project investigates how electric vehicle users choose when and where to charge, combining geospatial analysis with machine learning to identify charging patterns and infrastructure needs. The findings are expected to inform both urban planning and sustainable transportation policy.

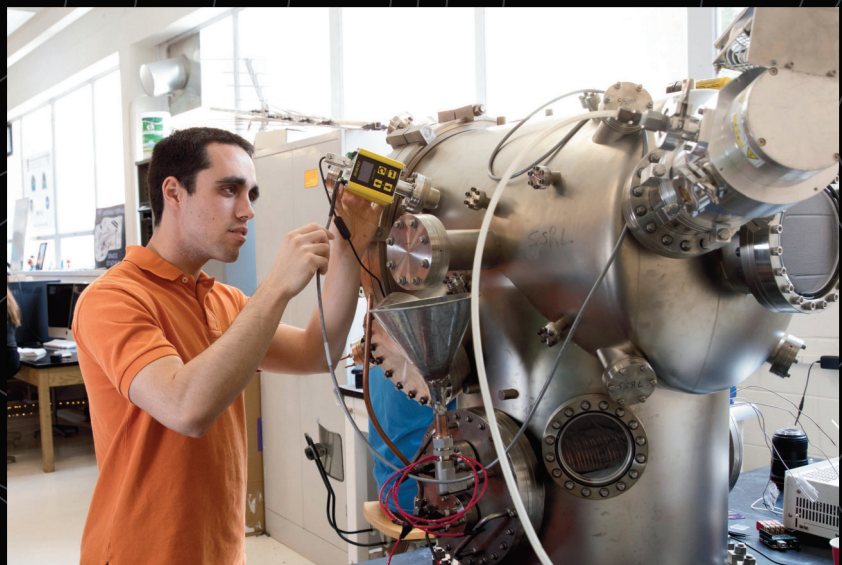


UGA GEOGRAPHY'S SMALL SATELLITE RESEARCH LAB (SSRL)



The University of Georgia's **Small Satellite Research Laboratory (SSRL)**, housed within the Department of Geography, is marking a significant milestone this fall: the fifth anniversary of its first satellite launch into orbit. The lab will also celebrate its tenth anniversary in 2026. In recognition of these achievements, UGA President Jere Morehead, Vice President for Instruction Marisa Pagnattaro, and Franklin College of Arts and Sciences Dean Anna Stenport visited the SSRL to observe its ongoing missions and accomplishments.

Established in 2016 with support from NASA and the U.S. Air Force, the SSRL designs, builds, and tests space-ready CubeSats capable of conducting research in environmental monitoring, space health, artificial intelligence, and K–12 STEM education. The lab currently includes more than 90 undergraduate members and continues to expand in size and scope as its mission portfolio grows.

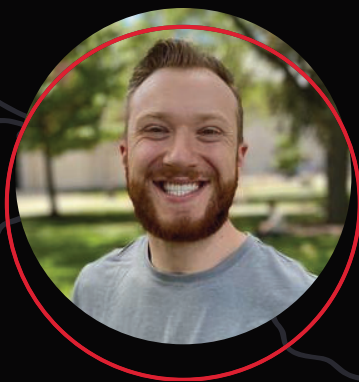


NEW FACULTY WELCOME

In fall 2025, the Department of geography proudly welcomed three outstanding new faculty members: Kayla Anderson, specializing in community geography; David Fastovich, focusing on physical geography; and Weiming Hu, whose work advances Environmental AI. Their diverse expertise and fresh perspectives will strengthen our teaching, research, and engagement across the discipline.



Kayla Anderson joined UGA geography as Assistant Clinical Professor of community geography and outreach. Anderson earned her PhD from Vanderbilt University in Fall 2025. Her research uses community-engaged, participatory, and action-oriented approaches to examine and support communities engaged in social change efforts.



David Fastovich joined UGA geography as an Assistant Professor of physical geography. Fastovich earned his PhD from the University of Madison - Wisconsin in 2022. He uses organic molecules preserved in geologic archives, such as lake and ocean sediments, to understand the spatial patterns and mechanisms of past climate changes during periods in Earth's history that resemble current and projected future conditions



Weiming Hu joined UGA geography as an Assistant Professor of environmental artificial intelligence. Hu earned his MS and PhD from Penn State University in 2021. His research focuses on machine learning and large-scale spatiotemporal data analytics, with a particular interest in quantifying uncertainty across multi-source datasets

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: WAFFLE HOUSE GEOGRAPHIES

In the run-up to this Fall's UGA-Alabama game, ESPN contacted Community geography Professor **Jerry Shannon** about the possibility of doing a short feature related to his Waffle House Geographies seminar for first-year undergraduates.

The class uses Waffle House as a way to explore a number of geographic issues, such as the importance of community spaces or the geographic distribution of retail chains. Shannon appeared on Sportscenter with hosts Marty Smith and Ryan McGee to talk about the class, with several students from the class also in attendance. While UGA did not in fact "smother and cover" the Alabama offense, this was a great opportunity to talk about how places matter and why everyone has a Waffle House story.



FACULTY KUDOS



Anna Harper, Associate Professor of Geography, played a key role in a nationally recognized rebuttal to a U.S. Department of Energy climate report. Led by Andrew Dessler of Texas A&M, the response challenged the DOE report's selective use of scientific literature to support the claim that carbon dioxide has a net positive impact on people and the planet. The rebuttal identified multiple instances of cherry-picked data and misrepresentation of climate science. It garnered widespread media attention, with coverage from The New York Times, CNN, NPR, The Guardian.



Andrew Herod, Distinguished Research Professor of Geography, has been named a 2025 Regents' Professor by the University System of Georgia (USG). This title represents the highest academic honor awarded by the USG Board of Regents and recognizes faculty whose research is considered both innovative and pace-setting. Herod's internationally recognized work in political and economic geography, especially his scholarship on labor and globalization, continues to shape critical conversations across disciplines. His appointment reflects a deep commitment to academic excellence and leadership at the UGA.



Nik Heynen, Distinguished Research Professor of Geography, received the 2025 James Blaut Award from the American Association of Geographers. Presented at the AAG annual meeting in Detroit, the honor recognizes Heynen's transformative scholarship in abolition ecology, urban political ecology, and socialist geography. His lecture, "Echoes of Bombingham," explored the enduring legacy of racial terror and the role of geography in advancing collective liberation.

Thomas Mote, Distinguished Research Professor of Geography and Associate Vice President for Instruction, has been named a 2024 Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). This honor, awarded by the AAAS Council, recognizes extraordinary achievements leading to scientific advancement. “I am honored to be recognized by AAAS,” Mote said, “and grateful to UGA for supporting my scientific journey.”



David Porinchu, Professor of Geography, has been named a recipient of the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences Sandy Beaver for Excellence in Teaching Award. This annual honor is awarded to outstanding faculty members who show a sustained commitment to high-quality instruction, creativity in the development of new courses, external recognition for teaching accomplishments, and evidence of former students' accomplishments.



Fausto Sarmiento, Professor of Geography, has been awarded the 2025 Distinguished Landscape Practitioner Award by the International Association of Landscape Ecology (IALE) North American Chapter. This honor is bestowed to individuals or organizations that have made significant contributions to the applications of landscape ecology principles to real-world problems.



Xiaobai Yao, Professor of Geography, has been elected President-Elect of the University Consortium for Geographic Information Science (UCGIS). Her term will span 2025–2028, during which she will serve as President-Elect, President, and Past-President. In this leadership role, Prof. Yao will help advance the mission of UCGIS and support the GIScience community through research, education, and collaboration.



RESEARCH NEWS



In March, geography professor **Andrew Grundstein** published a study in *Geo Health* titled “Evaluating Heat Risk: Comparing On-Site WBGT Measurements Versus Smartphone Application Estimates.” Grundstein’s research explored the shortcomings of a common smartphone application in its ability to accurately gauge heat related risks and activity modifications. “Heat is the leading weather killer in the U.S. and among the top three causes of sudden death in sports,” said Andrew Grundstein, lead author of the study and a professor in the UGA Franklin College of Arts and Sciences. “Effective environmental monitoring is essential to protecting communities from the growing risks of extreme heat.”



In May, geography PhD candidate **Ashley Cornish** published a study in the *Nature* journal *Climate and Atmospheric Science* titled “The impacts of plant physiological responses to rising CO₂ on humidity-based extreme heat.” This research was published alongside geography professors **Gabriel Kooperman** and **Andrew Grundstein** as well as co-authors Christopher Skinner and Abigail Swann. Their research examines the coincidental nature of plant physiological responses to increasing heat and humidity



In July, Geography professor **Lan Mu** co-authored a study titled “Staying active in cities: dimensions of urban built environment and mass sport participation.” The study investigates how various dimensions of the urban built environment influence individuals’ sport participation, utilizing the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory. The study found that cities with formal, informal or adapted urban sports spaces caused people who lived in them more likely to participate in sports.

PROGRAM UPDATES

UGA's Department of Geography is proud to announce the approval of its newest undergraduate certificate, **Climate Change Geographies**. The certificate proposal, created by Geography professors Jennifer Rice, Gabe Kooperman, and John Knox, was approved in early March and will be active beginning in Fall 2025. The department has shared the following abstract on the certificate:

“The Undergraduate Certificate in Climate Change Geographies trains students for careers that address the varied challenges of climate change from local to global scales. Through the program’s curriculum, students will advance their understanding of the social and natural processes of climate change and develop the knowledge and skills needed to tackle issues at the intersection of the physical and human dimensions of climate change. This program is rooted in expertise on climate change research and instruction within UGA’s Department of Geography and expands broadly to provide connections with scientific, economic, and political fields of study across the UGA campus. In completing the certificate, students will be prepared to apply an array of geographical and critical thinking skills to solve real-world problems aimed at contributing to a more just and sustainable future in a changing climate. The certificate requirements include two core courses on the physical and human geographies of climate change, one geography elective selected from an array of topics tailored to the student’s needs, and one elective from a list of those available across campus to broaden the student’s perspective, for a total of 12 credit hours. Students will also be required to participate in an annual knowledge and cohort-building event with the certificate coordinator from the year they declare the certificate until the year of graduation that includes a written assessment examining the program’s learning outcomes and integration of the student’s knowledge across courses.”

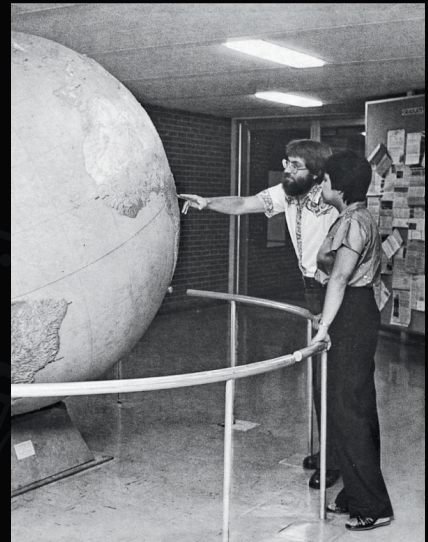


INVEST IN THE FUTURE OF GEOGRAPHY AT UGA

The University of Georgia's Department of Geography is shaping the next generation of leaders in climate science, geospatial technologies, urban systems, and environmental sustainability. With a legacy of excellence and innovation, our faculty and students are tackling real-world challenges through research, outreach, and hands-on learning.

Your gift helps us continue this vital work. Contributions support student travel to conferences, fieldwork opportunities, classroom and lab enhancements, and faculty-led initiatives that make a difference locally and globally. Annual gifts provide flexible resources to meet emerging needs, while endowments and planned giving create lasting legacies that honor mentors, loved ones, or personal passions.

To explore giving opportunities, visit UGA's giving portal or contact the Franklin College Office of Development at (706) 542-3581 or franklingifts@uga.edu.



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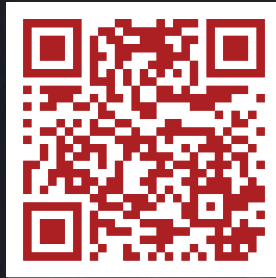
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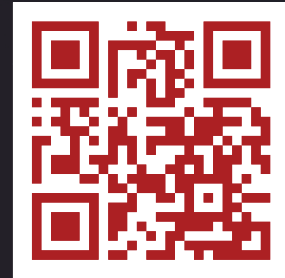
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Edition 1



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