Brief History of Geography at South Dakota State University
by
Edward Patrick Hogan
Roger K. Sandness
Charles F. Gritzner

Geography was one of seven initial courses offered under a general science category when South Dakota State University was founded in 1881. Whereas, geography courses were offered from time to time over the years, no other major development culminating in a formal program occurred until the 1966 - 1967 academic year. Former President Hilton M. Briggs provided the leadership that brought geography to SDSU at that time. Dr. Briggs had taken a geography course at Oklahoma State University that profoundly influenced him and he thought it would be an important addition to the curriculum of the institution. At that time, geography became part of the newly named Department of History, Political Science and Geography. During the Spring Semester of 1967, the first three courses were offered in the new geography program. During the summer of 1967, the South Dakota Board of Regents authorized the offering of the Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Arts degrees with a major in geography. The first student enrolled as a geography major fall 1967.

Geography became an independent department in 1973 and by 1974 the program began to offer a Master of Science degree. The degree was authorized in part to help support the needs of the newly established EROS Data Center in Garretson, South Dakota. Today, because of a regental consolidation plan, the Department of Geography no longer offers the B.A. degree. In addition to the B.S. and M.S. degrees in Geography, the department is also authorized to deliver the B.S. in Geographic Information Science, a graduate minor in Planning, and several Certificate Programs in GISc. In 2004 the department also began to offer a joint Ph. D. degree in Geospatial Science and Engineering. Over the years nearly a thousand geography majors have graduated from South Dakota State University with degrees in the various programs. In May 2004, the South Dakota Board of Regents and SDSU established the Geographic Information Science Center of Excellence (GIScCE). Currently the GIScCE employs thirteen recognized Senior Scientists, eleven of whom hold academic rank and teach in the Department of Geography.

Edward Patrick Hogan joined the SDSU faculty in 1967 and was charged with the task of developing a geography program. During the 1967-1968 academic year the University established a geography major. In 1969 Political Science became a separate department, and the Department of History and Geography was formed. Michael McGilvary became the second faculty member in geography in fall 1968. He departed after one semester and was replaced by Donald Ellis who, in turn, was drafted into the US Army at the end of the spring term. Dr. Lee A. Opheim joined Ed Hogan in fall 1969, followed by Roger K. Sandness and Maynard L. Samuelson in 1971. Ronald Weinauf joined the faculty in 1972 and Orville Gab in 1976. In 1980, Weinauf left SDSU and was replaced by Charles F. "Fritz" Gritzner. Dr. Janet H. Gritzner also joined the department's faculty in 1980. A joint position shared with the Department of History
was filled first by Robert Ostergren, then Larry Roberts, followed by John Rorabacher and finally Donald Berg. Dr. Mark Okrant served on the faculty for four years when Sandness and Samuelson were working on doctorates. Most recently Darrell Napton, Robert Watrel, and Mary O'Neill have joined the faculty. Dr. Bruce Millett has also joined the faculty in support of Dr. Napton's on-going temporary assignment with EROS Data Center. Current adjunct faculty members include Norman Bliss, Jeffrey Eidenshink, Eugene Fosnight, Erin Hogan Fouberg, Chandra Giri, Thomas Holm, Rachael Kurtz, Bradley Reed, James Sturdevant, and Eric Wood.

With the establishment of the Geographic Information Science Center of Excellence the department's faculty was dramatically expanded to include GIScCE Co-Directors Matthew Hansen and Thomas Loveland and Center Senior Scientists Mark Cochrane, Kevin Gallo, Geoffrey Henebry, Shuguang Liu, David Roy, James Vogelmann, Michael Wimerly, Chunsun Zhang, and Zhi-Liang Zhu. In addition to their major research responsibilities, each of these scientists also mentors students and teaches one class a year in one of the department's degree programs, or elsewhere on campus.

Unfortunately, Dr. Lee Opheim died shortly after his retirement. He had a profound influence on many SDSU geography students often providing the attention and guidance they needed to get their academic life and personal lives in order. Professors Gab, Samuelson, and Hogan have all recently retired. Mr. Gab continues to teach courses for the department in Sioux Falls. Dr. Hogan is Professor Emeritus and has been deeply involved with establishing and developing the GIScCE.

Ed Hogan became Head of the Department of Geography in 1973. In 1976, he was also appointed Associate Dean of the College of Arts & Science. He held both posts jointly until 1990. In 1991, Hogan was promoted to Assistant Vice President of Academic Affairs at SDSU and Roger Sandness became Head of the Department of Geography. As a result of the leadership of Dr. Sandness a new undergraduate major in Geographic Information Sciences (GISc) was approved by the Board of Regents in 2001. The intent of this major was to lend credence to the plan of study many of the Geography majors had undertaken. Dr. Sandness continues to provide resourceful leadership for the department and its various programs today.

Throughout its existence, the Department of Geography has been blessed with an excellent faculty and staff comprised of bright, dedicated, and caring scholars with eclectic interests and true missionary zeal. These men and women have provided solid, creative, and nurturing learning environments for our students. They have also served SDSU, South Dakota, the discipline, and indeed the world in a variety of meaningful ways.

One of the departmental faculty’s most significant impacts occurred in 1984, when Dr. Charles Gritzner, with the assistance of Ed Hogan, provided the needed leadership to convince the South Dakota Board of Education to make geography a statewide requirement for high school graduation. They were successful and South Dakota became the first state to approve such a mandate. For several years a number of
faculty members taught short courses for teachers at locations throughout the state. In 1992, Fritz Gritzner founded and became coordinator of the South Dakota Geographic Alliance. Since that time, he has worked tirelessly to ensure that a pool of competent, geographically prepared teachers was developed and maintained to meet the instructional needs of South Dakota schools. To date over 700 teachers have benefited from his "Alliance" summer short course programs.

In 1989, Governor George S. Mickelson named Ed Hogan the State Geographer for South Dakota. In that capacity, he serves the public, state educators and officials on geographic curriculum, materials and matters. He continues to serve in that role today. Since 1988, Dr. Fritz Gritzner has served as State Coordinator of the National Geographic Society's State Geography Bee. Fritz and "BOOV" (the world's only known living Homo canis and one of the world's oldest living GeoBuddies) have made hundreds of visits to South Dakota and elsewhere throughout the country. BOOV is a stuffed animal that Dr. Gritzner had as a child and through this prop thousands of K-12 students have learned about geography.

Service to the students, university, public, and profession is important to all SDSU geographers. Faculty members have provided leadership and served on numerous campus committees including the Academic Senate, the Graduate Council, University and College of Arts & Science Curriculum Committees, and many others. The geography faculty also is actively involved as members of city, county, state and national community and service organizations.

Service to the profession of geography is especially important to our faculty. This can best be exemplified by the following examples. Dr. Fritz Gritzner has served as both the President and the Executive Director of the National Council for Geographic Education. Dr. Darrell Napton has served the Association of American Geographers as Treasurer, Executive Committee Member, Parliamentarian, and Regional Councilor. Dr. Erin Hogan Fouberg is presently Vice President for Publications for the National Council for Geographic Education. Dr. Thomas Loveland serves as Director, Remote Sensing Applications Division of the American Society of Photogrammetry and was President, of the Cartographic and Geographic Information Society. Dr. Donald Berg is the Regional Councilor for Gamma Theta Upsilon Professional International Honorary Fraternity. Drs. Berg, Napton, Hogan, and Loveland have all held major leadership offices in the Rocky Mountain-Great Plains Division of the AAG.

Geography faculty members have been productive scholars. They have served as national and regional officers in professional specialty groups and presented numerous papers, posters, and workshops at state, regional and national meetings. They also have written or edited an impressive number of books, chapters in books, professional articles, and general articles. Several SDSU geographers have recently made unique contributions to middle school and high school geography. Dr. Charles F. Gritzner serves as Editor of the Chelsea House Publishing's Modern World Nations series. Five SDSU geography faculty and three alumni have authored or co-authored twenty-two volumes in that grades
6-12 series. The Center Senior Scholars and selected faculty members have been successful in obtaining grants from a variety of agencies and foundations.

In 1993, Dr. Charles Gritzner was named Distiguished Professor of Geography by the South Dakota Board of Regents. Both Fritz Gritzner and Ed Hogan have received the Distinguished Teaching Achievement Award from the National Council for Geographic Education. Dr. Gritzner's outstanding contributions to geographic education are most evident by the fact that he has received virtually every major award given within the profession. These include: the George J. Miller Award for Distinguished Service from the National Council for Geographic Education, the Distinguished Mentor Award from the NCGE, the Distinguished Teaching Honor Award from the Association of American Geographers, and the Gilbert S. Grosvenor Honors for Geographic Education also from the AAG. Dr. Hogan has received the Distinguished Service Award from the SDSU Alumni Association. With his retirement, he was also honored when the Edward Patrick Hogan Faculty Award for Excellence in Teaching was established at SDSU.

The faculty's greatest service has been to the students of South Dakota State University. Geography plays a vital role for all students in addressing the natural science, social science, and international studies requirements of the Regential, Institutional and College Core Requirements. Students majoring in geography can specialize in a physical geography, human/cultural geography, remote sensing, GISc and other geographic sciences and techniques, teaching, environmental management, urban and regional planning, and regional geography. Some 150 of the nearly 1,000 SDSU geography graduates have earned the MS degree in geography at SDSU. Another 19 SDSU geography graduates have gone on to earn the PhD degree. Today, there are more than a dozen SDSU geography alumni actively pursuing the doctorate degree.

SDSU geography faculty members were pioneers and innovators in some specialties in the discipline. Weinkauf, Samuelson and Loveland were among the first geographers to teach remote sensing classes. Dr. Janet Gritzner was the first certified GIS teacher in South Dakota. Dr. Roger Sandness provided the leadership and creativity required to move Physical Geography labs from paper to the computer and Internet. Maynard Samuelson's planning courses played vital roles in developing many of the state's planners. Darrell Napton and Donald Berg expanded student interest in environmental issues and natural and manmade hazards. Berg and Fouberg bring unique insights to Native American geography. Ed Hogan developed the first geography of South Dakota course. Lee Opheim developed a successful summer "Classroom on Wheels" program enjoyed by hundreds of students over the years. Today Dr. Robert Watrel is leading our students on field experiences to West Africa. Perhaps the contributions of the entire geography faculty over the years can best be recognized by the fact that the book honoring outstanding geography educators, Leaders in American Geography, features both Ed Hogan and Fritz Gritzner. Both these men recognize that they attained such recognition through the academic excellence, joint efforts, and contributions of all the SDSU geography faculty members.
The SDSU geography faculty is extremely proud of the excellence, creativity, leadership and citizenship of its students. They are desirous of learning and capable of addressing the most difficult of challenges. Nowhere are their talents better reflected than in the success of the South Dakota State Geography Convention. This annual student initiated and directed convention brings together well-known geographers from throughout the country (and occasionally internationally). The convention affords SDSU geography students an outstanding educational opportunity. Since 1969, SDSU geography students have conducted the most successful student run program of its type in the nation. Students plan and organize the convention, select and invite the lecturers, conduct fund raising, and are responsible for all other phases of the event.

Perhaps Professor John Fraser Hart of the University of Minnesota best summarizes the success of this endeavor when he noted:

My most vivid impression of the South Dakota State Geography Convention is the intense commitment and dedication of the students who have been involved in it over the years. I can remember the “good old days” when they unloaded truckloads of aluminum extrusions to help pay for it. They have taken their work very seriously, and they have worked hard, but they have also known how to enjoy themselves, and they have appreciated the fun of being geographers. The Convention has given me a rich opportunity for interacting with students, but it would be invidious for me to attempt to enumerate the long list of students whom I have had the privilege of getting to know. I cherish my memories of all of them.

Two vital parts of the SDSU geography student’s life is Gamma Theta Upsilon International Honorary Fraternity and the Geography Club. These two organizations are not only responsible for the South Dakota State Geography Convention but also play key roles in other departmental educational, social and cultural activities. The Delta Zeta Chapter of GTU has initiated over 600 members over the years, most at an annual ceremony conducted during the South Dakota State Geography Convention. In 1996, Delta Zeta was the first to ever be recognized as Chapter of the Year by Gamma Theta Upsilon.

The SDSU Geography Department is widely recognized for its splendid record of job placement. Many graduates are employed in the cartography/GISc fields at National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) facilities in St. Louis, MO and in the Washington DC area. Over fifty geography alums are employed in remote sensing science and research at the USGS EROS Data Center. Other graduates are employed at a wide variety of other federal, state, and local governmental agencies. The military, business, industry, law, and teaching fields appeal to many graduates. Others continue their education to earn advanced degrees. Some SDSU geographers have earned degrees in medicine, optometry, priesthood/ministry, and law.

Distinguished SDSU Alumni include: David Gilbertson Chief Justice of the South Dakota Supreme Court; four key administrative and scientific leaders of the EROS Data Center, Thomas Loveland, James Sturdevant, Tom Holm, and Jeffrey Eidenshink; Jon
Liebsch, Head of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency Office of Future Warfare Systems; Catherine Lockwood, Department Chair at Chadron State College, and Editor of the Journal of Geography; Kyle Ezell, urban planner, and Founder of Get Urban America Ltd.;

Brigadier General Tom Lien, recently retired Chief of Staff of the South Dakota Air National Guard; Debra Salonen, noted author of 14 Harlequin American Romance novels; William Ripple Director of the Oregon State University Environmental Remote Sensing Laboratory; and Ralph Borkowski, City Manager of Huron, South Dakota.

Geography was originally housed in the former Knight House then located where the Scobey Hall parking lot now exists. Following a boiler failure the Department of History and Geography moved to East Men's Hall on Medary Avenue for two years. From there the department moved to the third floor of the Administration Building. Geography was given a nice classroom in ADM 301 and occupied several offices on the third floor. In 1975, the then separate departments of Geography and History were both moved to their present day locations in Scobey Hall. The basement of nearby Wecota Hall was remodeled to provide classroom and laboratory space for geography. Today, Wecota basement is home to the main geography classroom, the Physical Geography Laboratory, the GIS Laboratory, a new Remote Sensing Laboratory, and an enlarged Seminar room. Large enrollment classes are held in select large lecture hall across the campus. The first floor of Wecota Hall houses the Geographic Information Science Center of Excellence offices and the GIScCE Science Training Laboratory. Despite significant expansion of space over the years, with growing program, curriculum, and research responsibilities, both the Department of Geography and the GIScCE still face demands for additional facilities.

The establishment and growth of Geography at South Dakota State University has truly been a great adventure. In the last forty years, it has grown from a university president's vision into an outstanding educational program for our students, SDSU and South Dakota. Much of the success of the program can be attributed to the quality, dedication, caring, teamwork, and missionary zeal of the geography faculty. Their efforts supported by excellent students and a supportive university administration, have created one of the nation's most successful geography programs. Together, they have established a strong geographic foundation and tradition, upon which they can design, build, and create the geography of the future. The talents and resources of the Department of Geography, enhanced by the graduate initiatives of the new doctoral program in Geospatial Science and Engineering, and wedded to the Geographic Information Science Center of Excellence combine to provide our students unique, personalized, high quality, cutting edge learning opportunities in the discipline.

6