

# Portland State University Department of Geography Newsletter

Fall 2007

[www.geog.pdx.edu](http://www.geog.pdx.edu)

## PSU Weekend Alumni Lecture

The Geography Department held an alumni lecture and reception on October 26 in conjunction with PSU Weekend. Robert Voeks (B.S., 1975 and M.S., 1980 from PSU; Ph. D., 1987, University of California, Berkeley) presented the guest lecture titled *Healing Habitats: The Geography of Rain Forest Medicine in Brazil and Borneo* on his research on the biogeography of medicinal plants in the humid tropics.



From left: Bob Voeks, Mike Newsome, Nancy Price, Steph Gaspers, Elaine Lycan, Celia Latz, Dick Lycan, Geoffrey Duh, Limin Yang



From left: Heejun Chang, Joe Poracsky, Keith Mountain



From left: Leslie Anderson, Dan Johnson, Celia Latz, Dick Lycan, Laura Greene, Tom Harvey, Syed Kazmi, Martin Lafrenz, Hunter Shobe, Jon Franczyk



MJ Riehl and grandson Sawyer (also Joe Poracsky's grandson!)

## Oregon Geographic Alliance: Focus on new atlas!

The Oregon Geographic Alliance, with principal funding from the Oregon Community Foundation and the National Geographic Society, has been working on a new atlas for use in Oregon elementary and middle schools. The Geography Department's Center for Spatial Analysis and Research is doing the cartography and the Alliance is working with teachers throughout the state to identify the content maps and related lesson plans. The atlas is due to be published on line in 2008 and will be free for everyone to use and enjoy, but especially those elementary and middle school students who have never had an atlas dedicated to Oregon content for their grade levels.

In addition to its atlas project, the Alliance conducted two summer institutes for teachers on the Geography of Oregon. We continue with our well-regarded mentorship program for teachers and provide outreach in Oregon for National Geographic Society's My Wonderful World program and Geography Awareness Week.

Geography Awareness Week is the third week in November. Plan to celebrate by logging on to [MyWonderfulWorld.org](http://MyWonderfulWorld.org) and participating in the exciting and challenging work of getting and keeping geography in the core of our K-12 school curricula.



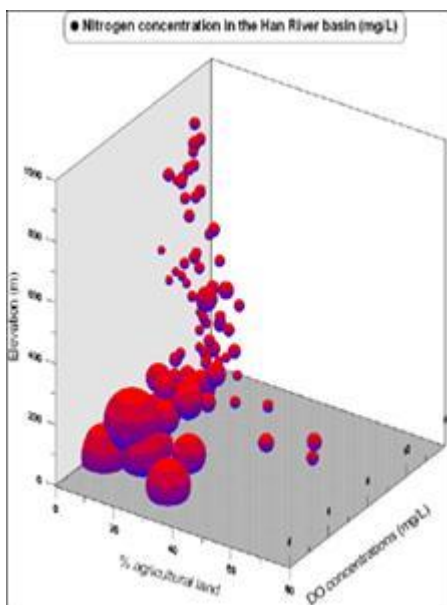
Sample map page for geography of Oregon atlas.

## Faculty study graphical approach to teaching spatial quantitative methods

As part of an NSF-funded research study on teaching spatial statistics using numeric visualization, **Heejun Chang**, **Joe Poracsky**, and **Teresa Bulman** are developing curriculum materials for two geography courses – GEOG 496/596 Visualization of Spatial Data and GEOG 497/597 Spatial Quantitative Analysis. The focus of the first course is descriptive spatial statistics, particularly graphical representations of sets of numbers, while the focus of the second class is inferential spatial statistics.

To date, they have tested the usefulness of a visual approach using two different groups. A control group was instructed by traditional lecture-based learning, while the experimental group was instructed by visual-based learning that incorporates extensive exposure to graphics and reduced reliance on formulas. Preliminary survey results indicate that visuals are more beneficial in helping students (many of whom are mathphobic) to grasp fundamental concepts.

Presentations have been made at the annual meetings of The Association of American Geographers, The Association of Pacific Coast Geographers (APCG), and the North American Cartographic Information Society (NACIS). In February 2008, the work will be presented in a workshop format at the annual meeting of the Oregon Academy of Sciences. While the education materials will primarily contribute to the teaching of statistics in geography, the materials will also have relevance to other social and biophysical sciences, such as sociology, demography, criminology, urban studies, environmental studies, geology, biology, ecology, and atmospheric science.



The graph illustrates dissolved oxygen (DO) concentrations as a function of % agricultural land in the basin and basin mean elevation. Basins located at higher elevations with lower % agricultural land tend to have higher DO concentrations.

## **Graduate Certificate in GIS**

The Graduate Certificate in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) is one of the academic programs offered in the Geography Department at PSU. The certificate was officially approved in 2004 by the Educational Board of the Oregon University System. It provides introductory and in depth study into the design and applications of GIS, remote sensing, cartography, and GPS technology. Seventy people have been awarded the GIS Certificate since Spring 2004, with an estimated 40 students entering the program each year (see Table below). There were 54 students enrolled in the program during Fall Term 2007.

Our certificate students come from 25 different states (and Canada), approximately half of whom earned their undergraduate degree at PSU. The diverse educational background of our students ranges from Geography, Anthropology, Archaeology, Biology, Civil Engineering, Computer Sciences, Environmental Studies, History, Planning and Transportation, indicating the wide acceptance of a modern technology stemming from the discipline of Geography. For more information contact Karin Waller, office administrator, at 503-725-3916, [wallerk@pdx.edu](mailto:wallerk@pdx.edu)

## **Friends of Geography**

The Friends of Geography student group has welcomed several new faces to the club this year, and both monthly meetings have been a great success. FOG kicked off its new discussion forum with an engaging, and surprisingly relatively calm, discussion of Measure 49 on November 1st. Representatives from 1000 Friends of Oregon and Oregonians in Action debated the issue, and over thirty people from around the university attended. On a lighter note, FOG also held its first monthly Quiz Night of the year on the same night. A lively bunch came out to the Tugboat to participate in the event, and several people have volunteered to come up with questions for the next round on December 6th, which will be followed by miniature golf to celebrate the (almost) end of finals week. Hope to see everyone there!

## **Martin Lafrenz works with middle school students on stream survey methods at Fairview Creek**

In the spring of 2006, Geography Assistant Professor, Martin Lafrenz, and Geography graduate student, Steph Gaspers, accompanied several groups of students from Walt Morey Middle School on a stream survey project in Fairview Creek. The objective of the project, funded by a PSU Faculty Enhancement Grant, was to assess the quality and repeatability of fieldwork conducted by middle school students. The kids had a great time, and Steph promptly graduated (although she will be working with kids again soon). The results of the project demonstrated that students and community groups could effectively survey stream channels and collect data of high scientific merit. This has important implications for the future success of community-scale monitoring of watersheds and for the possibility of collecting stream habitat data on a grand scale.



## **Tuscany: Sustainability in City and Country**

**Dates:** September 8-22, 2008

After several years of leading the Spannocchia/Tuscany program in collaboration with Gil Latz, Tom Harvey is turning the reins over to alumnus and now GIS Lab Manager, Dave Banis who will take the student group to Italy this fall. The focus of the program is urban and rural sustainability in the Tuscany region of Italy. After spending two days in Siena, the group will be based at Spannocchia, a rural estate located southwest of Siena. The Spannocchia estate dates back to the 12th century, and today is a working organic farm and forest and part of the Alto Merse nature reserve. PSU's relationship with Spannocchia began in 2001-02 when Professor Latz studied landscape conservation there under a Fulbright Research Scholarship with the University of Florence, Italy.

At Spannocchia students will explore sustainable agriculture and agritourism practices in self-defined, individual projects. As a group, students will participate in several ongoing mapping projects and contribute to an interpretive plan for the cultural landscapes of the estate and its surroundings. Day trips will examine urban design and social life in Italian hill towns, noted as models of urban sustainability. In addition to the two days in Siena, the group will visit Volterra and Massa Marittima, the small village of Chiusdino, and the 13th century Abbey of San Galgano. Check the Winter Newsletter for more information or contact Dave Banis, [dbanis@pdx.edu](mailto:dbanis@pdx.edu) (503-725-8903).

***More on the Italian Connection:***

**Gil Latz** recently published a comprehensive analysis of his 2001-02 Fulbright funded Italy research project, "Comparative International Research on Agricultural Land-Use History and Forest Management Practices, Italy and the US," in Mauro Agnoletti (ed.), *The Conservation of Cultural Landscapes* (London: CABI, 2006). He is currently working on a grant with Mauro Agnoletti, the University of Florence (and former visiting professor in the Geography Department at Portland State) and Tom Harvey (Geography, PSU) to obtain data for deepened historical understanding of landscape stewardship challenges facing Tuscany, one of the world's great cultural landscapes. The research proposal will engage students in the compilation and examination of the role of thematic land-use maps for communicating concepts of sustainable forestry and agriculture for public education. The research will fund faculty and students at two universities to continue annual data collection for the establishment of a Tuscan landscape stewardship museum of traditional and contemporary farm and forest management practices. The research project will interpret Tuscany's environmental land-use history by focusing on thirteen sites analyzed by researchers at the Università di Firenze, with a principal focus on Spannocchia, an agricultural estate and organic farm in Central Tuscany that sponsors environmental programs.

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