



DEPARTMENT OF
GEOGRAPHY
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, COLLEGE PARK

December 6, 2006

Dear Alumni:

This semester seems to have gone by with greater speed than usual. I started the semester with some trepidation as Acting Chair but it has been an extremely rewarding and positive experience. I have gained new and sometimes surprising insights into the campus system and the senior management and an appreciation of what a Chair actually does on a daily basis. I have a much greater appreciation for the Department Office Staff, who keep the trains running and help the Chair address a myriad of problems and questions on a routine basis. As Chair, one views the Faculty in a rather different light and with three of our senior faculty on sabbatical this semester, the work load has been higher than normal. It has been good to see everyone stepping up to the challenge with a strong sense of community, which I see as being one of the characteristics of our Department.

Our Faculty retreat last year was a landmark event in reshaping our curriculum and we are now implementing the plans that emerged with consensus. The Department Honors Program and our Study Abroad Program are gathering momentum and the GTU/Geography Club is taking on a new lease of life. The atmosphere in the Department is vibrant and there is a lot going on. By all standards we are a small and effective department but I can see how much more could be done for our students and the community with additional faculty and resources, a sentiment that has been shared frequently with the Dean. To this end we are proceeding with our search for a new Full Professor in Human Geography who can complement our current faculty and share our enthusiasm for the discipline. With the widespread recognition of the need to address the complex problems and opportunities facing our society and our environment at local to global scales, geography as a discipline is experiencing a renaissance and our Department is playing an active part in this movement. As an indication, at this time we have 4 members of our faculty on various committees of the National Academy of Sciences, helping to plan the research and development agendas for the nation. Overall I am glad to report that the Department continues to be very successful in its teaching and research programs. We are extremely proud of the much deserved recognition several of our faculty have received this past year.

- We are especially proud to announce that Ruth DeFries was elected as a member of the National Academy of Sciences, "one of the highest honors in American science and engineering."
- John Townshend was the recipient of the prestigious 2005 William T. Pecora Award for outstanding leadership in advancing global land remote sensing. This award is sponsored jointly by the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).
- Samuel Goward was the 2006 recipient of the John Wesley Powell Award from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) for having made significant contributions to the advancement of the USGS mission. This award is regarded as the highest honor that the USGS bestows on non-USGS employees.

John Townshend was invited to give the first lecture of the 2006 Smithsonian Space Lecture Series on March 14, 2006. The title of his talk was: "Where have all the Forests Gone? Monitoring the Earth's Vegetation with Remote Sensing." It is an indication of the importance of Geography's role in this area, and John Townshend's reputation, that his talk was used to start off this importance series.

We are very excited about the hiring of Dr. In-Young Yeo, who joined the department this fall. Dr. Yeo received her PhD in Geographic Information Science from the University of Wisconsin – Madison in 2005. Dr. Yeo's research interests are in understanding the human-environmental interactions and characterizing their spatial dynamics.

Our PhD students have continued to be tremendously successful. I am very pleased to announce that we hooded five doctoral candidates during the Spring 2006 commencement and will be hooding three more in Fall 2006. Another

four students plan to complete their defenses this fall, but will miss the deadline for fall graduation and officially graduate in Spring 2007. Currently, we have eight NASA graduate fellowships in the department, three of which started Fall 2006. In total we have had 14 NASA fellowships over the last five years. We are extremely proud of this record and feel it is indicative of the caliber of our PhD students.

We are developing a Masters of Professional Study in Geospatial Information Sciences that we anticipate will be approved in time for Fall 2007. We spoke with many alumni while developing the program and are confident that their suggestions have strengthened the program. We feel there is a critical need for such a program and are very excited about the expertise we will be able to share. Our undergraduate program continues to develop with the hiring of Ronald Luna as undergraduate advisor. Among his tasks is the development and implementation of the Learning Outcomes Assessment now required by the University and the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. Under review and support by the faculty, improvements in the curriculum continue to be made.

The Geography of Puerto Rico course developed by alumnus Joe Trocino and Martha Geores was a huge success last summer and will be offered again in summer 2007. Due to the success of this course, they have also developed a short-term winter course in January 2007 studying the Geography of the Southern Caribbean, aboard the three-masted Yankee Clipper! We greatly appreciated alumnus Joe Trocino's contribution of time and energy in helping develop these courses. Our alumni, and soon-to-be alumni, continue to take a critical role in making our Career Day a success by attending and talking with geography majors about specific employment opportunities and opportunities in general available with a geography degree. This fall we had an open house, immediately after the career day, for new and potential undergraduate majors. The open house was an opportunity for them to meet faculty and ask questions about the program.

Our externally funded grants for fiscal year 2006 were \$8.7 million, higher than the levels established over the last few years of between \$5 and \$6 million per year. This is a tribute to the tremendous talent and very hard work of our faculty and graduate students. Several recently awarded projects include "A Surface Reflectance Standard Product from LDCM and Supporting Activities," Eric Vermote and Chris Justice; "Remote Monitoring of Changes in Forest Functional Types after Disturbance from Fire in the North American Boreal Region: Implications for Interpreting the Effects of Satellite-observed Changes in Vegetation Greenness on the Terrestrial Carbon Budget," Eric Kasischke; and "Model Inversion Of Multiple-Sensor Data For Forest Biophysical Parameters Retrieval," Guoqing Sun.

Several of you have given generously to our Young Researchers Fund in the past. As the fund grows, I hope we are able to support a wider range of activities including field-work. To-date we have been able to support a PhD researcher's field work in Jamaica and graduate students' travel to the annual AAG and AGU meetings to give presentations. The direct involvement of young researchers with the phenomena they are studying is of the highest importance. We continue to be very grateful for the support we receive from our alumni, both financial and in time, energy, and experience. If you are able to contribute to our Young Researchers Fund or to make contributions in other ways we will be very grateful. All support from alumni is appreciated and if we can do anything to improve relations with our alumni, please let us know. As always, we want to hear news from our alumni and I encourage you to send your news either to me or to the compiler of the newsletter, Bob Crossgrove (crossgro@glue.umd.edu).

One upcoming event we are looking forward to is the Annual AAG Meeting in San Francisco on April 17-21, 2007. Again, we will have several faculty and students making presentations and participating on panels. We hope that you can attend too. We will again have a booth set up and an alumni-sponsored reception. We have found the reception to be a wonderful place to meet up with our alumni and stay in touch.

Sincerely yours,



Christopher Justice
Professor and Acting Chair of Geography