

Department of Geography and Planning celebrating 50 years on campus

By Dr. Patrick Lawrence

Although geography classes had been taught at UT in the College of Arts and Sciences since its formation in 1909 — and in later years in various programs by part-time instructors, including within a combined geology and geography department — in September 1963 a stand-alone Department of Geography was established with one full-time geography faculty member, Dr. Byron Emery. The arrival of Dr. William Carlson as the new UT president in 1958 had set the stage for the formation of the department due to his interests and experiences with the discipline.

Courses and majors would increase during the 1960s with the addition of Dr. Donald Lewis and a greater focus on economic geography led by Dr. Lawrence (Larry) Hoffman. In fall 1970, the Ohio Board of Regents (OBOR) approved the master of arts degree in geography to be offered by the department. By 1973, the department grew to seven full-time faculty members as Drs. Basil Collins, Eugene Franckowiak, Robert Basile and William Muraco also were teaching courses in a variety of areas with special focus on human, economic and urban geography.

Into the 1980s, those “eternal seven” faculty members would advance the department with the growth of the bachelor’s and master’s programs, with several also engaged in University

administrative roles and community engagement — a trend that would continue within the department. The master’s program has continued to be a strength of the department and highly ranked nationally with as many as 40 students enrolled at one time, and graduating classes reaching 10 some years. Various department and program reviews would result in expanding to a Department of Geography and Planning and adding specializations in the fields of Geographic Information Systems (GIS), remote sensing, transportation and the environment.

Growth in majors and students in geography courses continued into the late 1990s when the department became a member of the American Collegiate Schools of Planning. In 1996, the department was one of three geography graduate programs invited to participate in a major national study on global change in local places undertaken by the Association of American Geographers. By the late 1990s, retirements allowed a number of new members to join the department with an expansion to 10 full-time faculty, adding expertise and courses in environmental geography, cultural geography, urban planning and housing, remote sensing, and weather/climate.

Due to a growing interest and expertise in GIS and related research areas, the department established a lab in the Lake

Erie Center in 1998, followed by the creation of the Geographic Information Science and Applied Geographics (GISAG) facility in 2003. Since its formation, the GISAG has secured almost \$19 million in external research grant funding to geography faculty and researchers from other UT departments and colleges, and involving the work of dozens of graduate students supported by federal, state and local agencies, including the National Science Foundation, U.S. Department of Agriculture, NASA, U.S. Geological Survey, National Resources Conservation Service, Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, Ohio Department of Transportation, U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, city of Toledo and many others. The GISAG also has developed as an important regional warehouse for geospatial data shared with a number of community partners and agencies.

Recent years have seen continued expansion of the department with the introduction of the PhD program in Spatially Integrated Social Sciences approved by OBOR in 2009. This program is housed and administered by the Department of Geography and Planning and represents a multidisciplinary effort involving the departments of Political Science and Public Administration, Economics, and Sociology and Anthropology — all within the College of Languages, Literature and Social Sciences. By fall 2013, the program has grown to 18 students with anticipation of graduation of the first class this academic year.

2010 marked a significant milestone for the department with a move from the fourth floor of University Hall, which had been its home for many years, to newly renovated and expanded offices, labs and classrooms on the third floor of Snyder Memorial Building. The department has continued to deliver quality courses and programs to majors and students taking both geography and planning



while offering opportunities for internships, undergraduate and graduate research, community engagement and outreach via classroom experiences and student projects.

Throughout its history, the department also has been engaged in numerous campus planning efforts — as highlighted by the often-repeated story of how geography students mapped the footpaths of students crossing Centennial Mall one winter to design the current walkways — and has worked extensively on local community planning for Toledo, Lucas County and various area townships. Graduates have taken careers in a range of fields and with many local agencies, including TMACOG, Toledo Port Authority, city of Toledo, TARTA and regional planning offices. A number of graduates also have continued onto advanced degrees leading to faculty positions at distinguished universities. Current faculty have received numerous major grants and awards, such as recognition from UT for teaching, research and service; have been active in various administrative roles at the University and college levels; and taken leadership responsibilities with regional, national and international professional organizations, including the Association of American Geographers, National Science Foundation, International Geographic Union and Regional Science Association.

Presently, more than 60 undergraduate and graduate majors and hundreds of UT students are served by the 10 full-time faculty and three support staff in the Department of Geography and Planning. With the continued interest and growth in international issues, geospatial technologies such as remote sensing and GPS, demand for urban and regional planning, and need for an improved global view, the future for the department and its programs remains strong and positive for another 50 years!



This photo shows students working on a class project in the former geography map lab in University Hall circa the early 1980s.

continued on p. 11

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Department of Geography

continued from p.9

Special events planned during the 2013-14 academic year to celebrate the department's 50th anniversary include:

- Selected dates — special colloquium series featuring distinguished alumni;
- Friday and Saturday, Oct. 25-26 — hosting the 2013 Joint Annual Meeting of East Lakes Division, Association of American Geographers and Canadian Association of Geographers, Ontario Division;
- Thursday, Nov. 7 — 50th Anniversary Alumni Reception;
- Friday, Dec. 6 — Department Holiday Party; and
- Tuesday through Thursday, April 8-10 — Special panel sessions at the 2014 Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers in Tampa, Fla.

For more information on these events, email patrick.lawrence@utoledo.edu.

Lawrence is professor and chair of the Department of Geography and Planning.

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