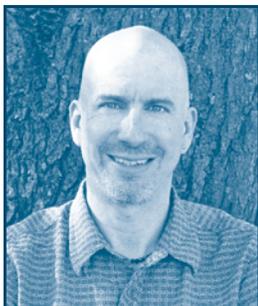


# Geography Connection

University of Utah Department of Geography

Volume 10 ❖ Spring 2009

## Letter from the Chair



Dr. Harvey Miller



Think like a geographer

As I write this year's Chair's column, we are experiencing one of the most severe economic crises in a generation due to the collapse of a speculative real estate bubble. We are also hearing of new studies with evidence of accelerating, and possibly irreversible, global climate

change. It is enough to make one want to throw their hands in the air and give up!

As a geographer, I see connections between people's willingness to rush into a bubble and behave unsustainably. These are two manifestations of short-sighted behavior: the former over the short-run, the latter over the long-run. But also, as a geographer, I see lessons from my own scholarly practice, as well as the work of the fine scholars around me, that point the way forward to sustainable and responsible behavior. So, despite all this bad news, I see the potential for solutions.

At its essence, the ancient discipline of geography is about the Earth as home to humanity. This simple declaration has some profound implications. Geographers understand that humans shape environments, and vice-versa, but not beyond fundamental limits. Geographers also recognize the connectivity of things and events, and how individual actions reverberate through the overall system and feedback to oneself.

The 2008 Great Real Estate Bubble is only the latest of a series of economic collapses that have plagued global commerce. An often-discussed example is the tulip bubble in Holland in the 1630s: at its height, a "futures" contract for a single bulb surpassed the price of a townhouse in Amsterdam, and was ten times the annual salary of a skilled worker. These prices collapsed suddenly and dramatically in early 1637, leading to financial ruin for many. Other bubbles include South Sea bubble in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, railway mania in the UK in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the global dot-com bubble at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I am not trying to downplay the current crises: it is unprecedented. Nor am I saying that bubbles are inevitable. These are artificial situations: they are created by people who have unrealistic expectations about the future.

I worry more about global climate change. The careful work of my colleagues in the department as well as the speakers in our colloquium series tell me that global warming is real and it is happening now. I find myself thinking of geographer Jared Diamond's intriguing speculation – what did they think on Easter Island as they cut down the last tree? Couldn't they see what would happen? We should be asking ourselves similar questions – what are we thinking? Can't we see what is happening *now*?

I recently read *Plan B 2.0: Rescuing a Planet under Stress and a Civilization in Trouble* by Lester Brown of the Earth Policy Institute. What impressed me most about the book is not the seriousness of our current situation, but the tractability of our

problems. The technologies exist, and while the price tag is steep, it is not unrealistic. Brown asks: do we have the political will to move forward? I would broaden that: can we make more sensitive, more *connected*, decisions in all realms, from daily life to strategic policy, planning and investments? We can't just ask our politicians to lead us; we must lead in all of our choices.

We tend to treat too many activities as competitive. Competition can be good, even fun; but there are many situations where cooperation is better. Thinking about my area of research and teaching, our transportation systems have been set up to encourage competition. As author Tom Vanderbilt points out, the "traffic world" where we jockey for position and velocity is often at odds with the "social world" where we communicate, negotiate and compromise. This leads to an environment that encourages competition despite the fact that cooperation would be better for society overall. But it is not just a matter of communication and negotiation. People also need to see the connections between their actions and the broader system, as well as vice versa.

What does it take to make more sensitive decisions? A key ingredient is a form of insight that computer scientist David Gerlinter calls *top-sight*: seeing the big picture. Top-sight is more than just a bird's-eye view: it means seeing interconnections of parts, as well as the links between oneself and the whole. Top-sight is a quality of great leaders and participants in well-functioning communities. As a form of insight, top-sight can be pursued vigorously but only obtained gradually. The increasing complexity of the world also makes top-sight more difficult to achieve. But geographers have a central role to play in helping civilization obtain top-sight. Holistic, integrative thinking is the kernel of geographic thought, and also a central component of the way we geographers communicate using maps and GIS. Geography is the ultimate top-sight discipline.

There is no question that the problems we currently face are very hard. Social change can also be very difficult: social inertia can seem overwhelming. But the good news is that social change, when it occurs, can occur very fast. A "tipping point" is just that – change occurs, completely and quickly. Geographers can lead the way.



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# Faculty Affairs



Top Row: Mitchell Power, Dennis Wei, Tom Kontuly, Ikubo Yamada, Genevieve Atwood, George Hepner. Bottom Row: Tom Cova, Larry Coats, Phil Dennison, Kathleen Nicoll, Andrea Brunelle, Rick Forster, Harvey Miller, (Missing: Tom Painter, Elizabeth Dudley-Murphy, and Arthur "Spike" Hampson)

**Genevieve Atwood** (Adjunct Assistant Professor) is interested in physical geography and processes that shape the earth's surface. Her career has been focused around the interface of earth science and public policy. She is the founder and Chief Education Officer for the Earth Science Foundation. Since 1990 she has been the president and geologist of Atwood and Mabey, Inc.

**Andrea Brunelle** (Assistant Professor) is the director of the Red Lab. Andrea is interested in climate/vegetation/disturbance history, applying paleoecological data to issues of land management, bark beetles, and fire. She recently received EPA SCERP funding to look at vegetation/climate/fire history from desert wetlands.

**Larry Coats'** (Adjunct Assistant Professor) research interests include paleoecology, paleontology, and climate change. He is currently working on the late Holocene distribution of Adélie penguins along the Victoria Land Coast of Antarctica. He recently received a new grant to continue this work and is returning to Antarctica in December of 2009 for fieldwork. Larry was an author on the new publication "50,000 years of vegetation and climate history on the Colorado Plateau, Utah and Arizona, USA" published late last fall in *Quaternary Research*.

**Tom Cova's** (Associate Professor) research interests include hazards, transportation, and GIScience. Tom has an ongoing NSF-funded project with a faculty member from the Psychology Department to research all aspects of the decision-making process of whether to evacuate or shelter-in-place in a wildfire. Tom, along with the Geography Department helped host "GIScience 2008" in Park City in September. He also presented a poster at the 2008 Pacific Fire Conference in San Diego in November on results of interviewing wildfire incident commanders regarding the most important factors in deciding the appropriate protective action in a wildfire.

**Phil Dennison's** (Assistant Professor) research interests include remote sensing, vegetation, and wildfire. He has recently received a grant for mapping of defoliation of tamarisk by a recently introduced beetle. Phil has been busy in 2008 giving eight conference talks, including a state-of-the-science talk on remote sensing of fuel properties at a NASA workshop on wildfire.

**Rick Forster's** (Associate Professor) research interests include remote sensing of snow and ice and has recently received two NASA grants; "Alaska Glacier Velocities: Implications for Large-Scale Glacier Thinning/Recession" and "Geodetic Imaging of Glacio-Seismic Processes in Southern Alaska." Rick has presented at two conferences this year: International Geoscience and Remote Sensing Symposium in Boston and AGU in San Francisco.

**Spike Hampson** (Professor Lecturer) interests include skiing and boating, and he is currently on a solo boat trip from Wyoming to Buenos Aires. Spike has also authored multiple books. ([www.spikehampson.com](http://www.spikehampson.com))

**George Hepner's** (Professor) research interests include land use/capability using remote sensing and GIS, and terrorism. George has continued funding from the US Bureau of Land Management for a project on phenological modeling of grazing lands, and also continues as U of U Director of the Southwest Consortium for Environmental Research and Policy (SCERP) supported by the US EPA. George spent the 2008 summer at Yonsei University in South Korea teaching a course on terrorism. He also serves on the National Academy of Sciences, Mapping Sciences Committee.

**Tom Kontuly's** (Professor) research interests include immigration to the United States and Utah, relationships between immigration and urban regional development, and spatial residential segregation. Tom recently presented at the 2008 AAG meeting with Tiit Tammaru. He also presented a paper with Thomas Maloney at the 33<sup>rd</sup> annual conference program of the Social Science History Association.

**Harvey Miller's** (Professor and Chair) research interests include Geographic Information Systems for Transportation (GIS-T), time geography, geographic information science, and spatial analysis. Harvey has been busy over the last year: he gave the keynote address at the 8th International Conference on Data Mining (ICDM) in Pisa, Italy in December, presented the 8th Annual Reta A. Hayes Lecture in the College of Geosciences at Texas A&M University in November, and was an invited lecturer at a NATO Advanced Research Workshop on Transportation Security Against Terrorism conference in Ankara, Turkey in May 2008. He also presented at the AAG in Boston in April 2008 and the Transportation Research Board

continued from page 2

in Washington DC in January 2009. Harvey is also Co-Chair of the Committee on Geographic Information Science and Applications, Transportation Research Board, US National Research Council.

**Elizabeth Dudley-Murphy's** (Adjunct Associate Professor) research interests include analyzing vegetation in urban settings through remote sensing with a focus on hyperspectral imagery. She has been included on a few colleague's research proposals for the past year. Most of these were for assessing area for geothermal anomalies using ASTER imagery.

**Kathleen Nicoll's** (Assistant Professor) research interests include records of environmental change and geomorphology of arid lands and their associated archeological sites. She continues to work in Turkey, Southern Africa, and the United States Great Basin and has been working on several state funded projects mainly through the department of Antiquities/State History Office. Kathleen has recently presented at the Cutting Edge NSF workshop (July 2008), at the Geologic Society of America (October 2008), and will be attending AAG in the spring.

**Thomas Painter** (Assistant Professor) is the director of the Snow Optics Laboratory (SOL). His research interests include remote sensing, field and imaging spectroscopy, radiative transfer, cryosphere-climate interaction, cryosphere-hydrology interactions, and desert-mountain regional processes. Tom has recently been awarded a 5-year grant from NASA entitled 'Astrobiology of Icy Worlds: Habitability, Survivability, and Detectability' along with scientists from the Jet Propulsion Laboratory and other institutions.

**Vincent Salomonson** (Research Professor) has research interests in applications of remote sensing with emphasis on applying observations from spaceborne sensors for studying hydrological processes, and snow cover dynamics on local, regional, continental, and global scales. He is semi-retired from working 37 years in NASA's Earth Sciences Directorate at the Goddard Space Flight Center.

**Dennis Wei's** (Professor) research interests include economic and urban geography, especially in China. He has been working on the effects of globalization on industrial and urban development in China funded by the NSF. He has recently been assigned as an honorary/adjunct professor at Henan University, Nanjing Normal University, and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. He was also recently nominated for AAF specialty group service awards.

### Emeritus Faculty

Donald R. Currey (Deceased)	Albert L. Fisher
James W. King	Chung-Myun Lee
Roger M. McCoy	Merrill K. Ridd
Leroy H. Wullstein	

**Ikuho Yamada's** (Assistant Professor) research interests include spatial statistics, GIScience, and health geography. She has recently received funding from two grants as a co-investigator: the National Institute of Health Exploratory/Developmental Research Grant: "Neighborhood Characteristics and Body Mass Index: Selection or Causation?" and National Poverty Center and Economic Research Service: "Alternative Measures of Food Environments in Poor and Non-Poor Neighborhoods".

## New Faculty



Assistant Professor  
Mitchell Power

We would like to welcome Assistant Professor Mitchell Power as the newest addition to the Biggest Little Geography Department in the World. The department shares Mitchell with the Utah Museum of Natural History where he is the Garrett Herbarium Curator.

Mitchell is from Falmouth, Maine. He earned his Ph.D.

in Geography from the University of Oregon in 2006. Mitchell's research interests include biogeography, vegetation history, global patterns, and controls of fire activity since the last glacial maximum. He also promotes the value of Herbaria and its collections to the public and researchers through his position at the Museum of Natural History. Mitchell will be teaching Vegetation and Climate Change-- a new course being offered spring of 2009.

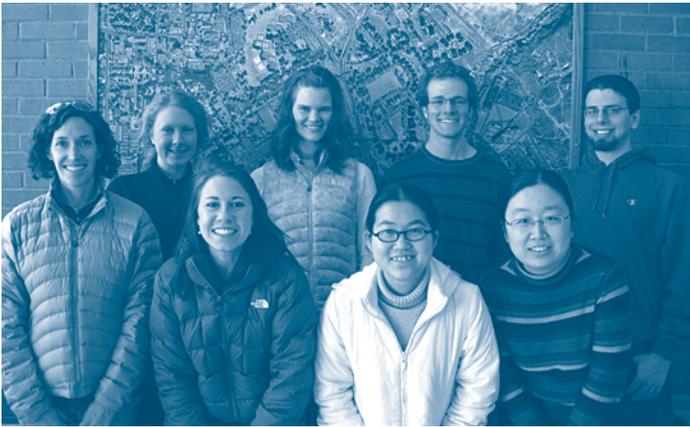
Mitchell was recently featured in an article in the Salt Lake Tribune describing his research on global wildfire patterns over time. Mitchell and the GPWG lab is part of an international effort to coordinate and analyze lake-bed data gathered around the world to establish a global history of wildfire. Results suggest that the amount of biomass consumed in wildfires globally dropped off precipitously after 1870 despite the rise in global temperatures widely believed to be a consequence of industrialization. A paper on this research project appears in the October 1st issue of *Nature Geosciences*.

### Auxiliary and Associate Instructors

We would like to thank our auxiliary and associate instructors for all the hard work they do for our department.

R. Clayton Brough	Ingrid Weinbauer	David Wilkins
Ralph Patterson	Val John Halford	Jason Berry
Tom Hale	Pam Perlich	

# New Graduate Students



*Top Row: Annie Bryant, McKenzie Skiles, Ian Housman, Josh Groeneveld. Bottom Row: Jennifer Watt, Vachel Carter, Hao Huang, Yuan Zhang*

**Ann Bryant (Ph.D.)** received an MA in Geography from Appalachian State University. She is a research assistant for Thomas Painter. She is from Scio, NY and enjoys outdoor recreation and playing music.

**Vachel Carter (M.S.)** received a BS in Geography from the University of Utah. She works with Andrea Brunelle in the RED Lab as a graduate assistant. She is originally from Utah and enjoys hiking, camping, climbing, and snowboarding.

**Josh Groeneveld (M.S.)** received his BS in Geography from Western Michigan. He is a teaching assistant serving as the SAC chair. He is interested in Transportation Geography and works with Harvey Miller. He is from Muskegon, MI

and enjoys reading, photography, and watching football, hockey, and basketball.

**Ian Housman (M.S.)** received his BA in Geography from Western Virginia University. He is a research assistant for George Hepner. Ian is originally from Pennsylvania and enjoys skiing, cycling, and traveling.

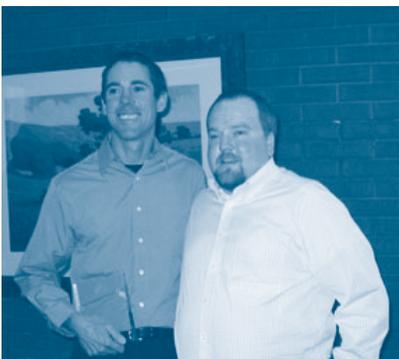
**Hao Huang (Ph.D.)** is doing a research assistantship with Dennis Wei. She received her masters in Urban Planning from the University of Buffalo, SUNY. She is from China and enjoys music, hiking, table tennis, and badminton.

**McKenzie Skiles (M.S.)** received a BS in Geography, a BS in Environmental Studies, and a GIS certificate from the University of Utah. She is currently a TA for geo-excursions, the newsletter editor, and works with Thomas Painter. She is from Anchorage, AK and enjoys skiing, running, cycling, and climbing.

**Jennifer Watt (Ph.D.)** received her MS in Environmental Science and Policy from Northern Arizona University. She is working with Andrea Brunelle in the RED Lab as a research assistant and as a TA instructor teaching GEOG 1000. She enjoys the outdoors and spending time with her husband and son.

**Yuan Zhang (Ph.D.)** received her MS from the Institute of Remote Sensing Applications, at the Chinese Academy of Sciences. She is a research assistant to George Hepner. She is from Taian, Shangdong Province, China and enjoys travel, badminton, and delicious food.

# Geography Department News



*Tim Edgar and student nominator Scott Peterson*

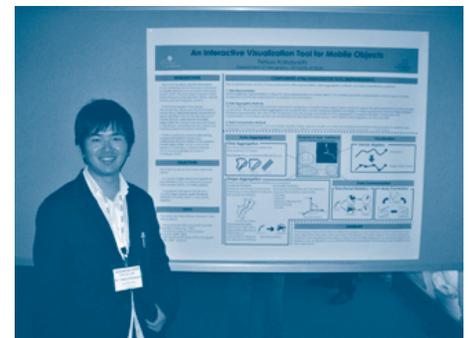
Geography graduate student **Tim Edgar** is a recipient of the 2008 Associated Students of the University

of Utah (ASUU) Student Choice Teaching Award. This is a unique, student-driven award for outstanding instructors at the University of Utah. Students nominate instructors and select the winners.

PhD candidate **Tetsuo Kobayashi** won the Best Poster Presentation Award at the GIScience 2008 conference in Park City, Utah. GIScience is the premier event for the international GIScience community, and Tetsuo competed against established scholars as well as other students. Tetsuo joins a long line of U-geography students

who have won awards at national and international meetings in recent years.

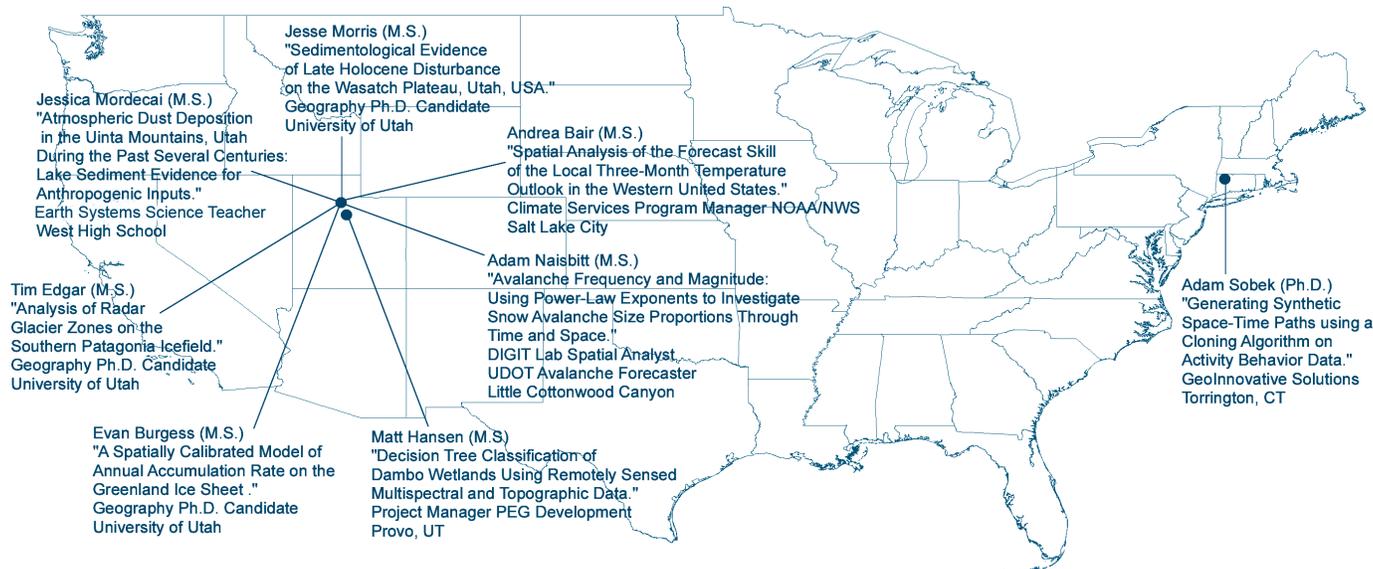
For additional news visit <http://www.geog.utah.edu>



*Tetsuo Kobayashi with the award winning poster*

Find us on the web ! [www.geog.utah.edu](http://www.geog.utah.edu)

# Recent U-Geography Graduates



## Donald R. Currey Scholarship Update

We would like to thank everyone who has donated to the Donald R. Currey Graduate Research Scholarship. In addition, we would like to extend a special thank you to Stanley R. and Carole L. Currey for their sizeable donations and help to set up this scholarship in the memory of Donald R. Currey. We have organized a departmental scholarship committee comprised of physical geography faculty and hope to begin awarding one scholarship per year during the 2009-2010 academic year. Donations received for the Donald R. Currey Graduate Research Scholarship to date total \$33,788.

## Scholarship Awards 2008-2009

Department of Geography-  
Continuing Student Awards  
Ryan Bares  
Shaun Heward  
Arik Parker  
Elysia Retzlaff  
CSBS Advisory Board Scholarship  
Thomas Zumbado  
Don and Sue Lewon Scholarship  
Joshua Groeneveld  
Duane Poslusny  
Eugene K. Andreasen Scholarship  
Steven Ohlson  
Vido E. and Patricia A. Henriques Scholarship  
Ryan Swan  
NASA ESSF Fellowship  
Elias Deeb

## Gifts to the Department 2008

We wish to thank the following individuals for their generous donations!

Joseph V. Borgione	Brian Haslam	William Brent &
Gary E. Christenson	Hal R. Johnson	Eugenia Louisa
George & Caryn L. Clark	Chung-Myun Lee	Richins
Albert G. Copley	John H. Lowry, Jr	Newell K. & LaVon
Zhaodong Feng	William D. McCoy	I. Roberts
Melvin J. Haman		Albert G. Voegeli
		Tamara Wambeam
		David Handwerker

**Geography needs your support!**

Form provided on back of newsletter for your convenience.

## New Geography Courses

*Fall 2008*  
Intro to Geographic Data  
Mountain Environments and Cultures  
Utah's Energy Landscape  
*Spring 2009*  
Vegetation and Climate  
Geography of China and Asia  
*Spring 2010*  
Biotic Invasions



# DIGIT Lab Update

## *DIGIT Staff:*

*Director: Phoebe McNeally, PhD, Spatial Analyst/Cartographer: William A Naisbitt, GIS Analyst: Abigail Guess, GIS Analyst: Tom Springsteen, Staff: Melissa Warner*

The DIGIT Lab has experienced major changes this past year. Adam Sobek served as DIGIT Lab Director from October, 2003 to June, 2008. Adam finished his M.S. in geography at the University of Utah spring, 2004 and then decided to pursue a Ph.D. in geography. While working full-time as DIGIT Director, Adam balanced his job, school, and time with his family, and finished his Ph.D. in geography at the University of Utah in early summer 2008. After much deliberation, Adam and his wife, Amy, decided it was time to sell their house, pack up their four children, and move to Connecticut to be closer to family and to start his own business. Adam resigned as DIGIT Lab Director at the end of June, 2008. Shortly after Adam moved to Connecticut, he successfully launched his own business, GeoInnovative Solutions located in Torrington, Connecticut. Adam, Amy and kids are doing great and enjoy being closer to family. Adam was an outstanding DIGIT Lab director and an asset to the department. Congratulations, Adam-- we wish you the best!

In July, 2008, Phoebe McNeally was appointed the new DIGIT Lab Director. Phoebe completed an M.S. in geography in fall 2000 and a Ph.D. in geography in spring 2008 at the University of Utah. While a graduate student here at the U, Phoebe received teaching assistantships in geography

and graduate assistantships in DIGIT, and served a short stint as interim DIGIT Director during 2001-2002. Phoebe was excited to accept the position of DIGIT Lab Director so she could stay here in Utah. Phoebe is doing a great job.

The Digitally Integrated Geographic Information Technology Laboratory (DIGIT Lab) was established in 1987 as an auxiliary facility to the Geography Department. The Lab's mission is to creatively integrate spatial information into existing research and/or technology and provide students with real world GIS experience. Currently, DIGIT works with over twenty departments campus wide, incorporating GIS and with expertise in spatial science and technology into their research to enhance research outcomes. Clients of the DIGIT Lab include Biology, Physics, Epidemiology, Pediatrics, Political Science, and the Natural History Museum, just to name a few.

In addition, they have been actively involved in industry outside the University. In particular, geography students are testing and validating feature extraction software for the Utah Automated Geographic Reference Center and providing enterprise wide systems for the National Park Service's National Historic Trails division. The staff is actively involved in the simulation industry building spatial databases for military training applications for Rockwell Collins, Inc. The lab is just about to embark on an exciting service analysis project with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs western region.

## GPWG Lab

The Global Paleofire Working Group (GPWG) Lab is headed by new assistant professor Mitchell Power and currently serves two main functions. It is headquarters for the Global Paleofire Working Group. The lab is working on a Global Charcoal Database - a tool for exploring regional-to-continental scale patterns in fire history. The GPWG lab is also engaged in

charcoal analysis of lake sediments from Yellowstone National Park and from the Beni Basin in Bolivia. Both these analyses are to develop fire histories from those regions and contribute these data to the global charcoal database.

## Alumni Spotlight

### **Andrew Vondrak**

Andrew received his BS in Geography in 1998 from the University of Utah. From 1998-2001 he was a GIS Specialist for Stokes County, NC. From 2001-2007 he was a GIS Operations Administrator for Piedmont Natural Gas in Charlotte, NC. He is currently the GIS manager for Piedmont Natural Gas. He also serves as an officer of the Carolina Chapter of the Geospatial Information and Technology Association (GITA).

### **Julie Rich**

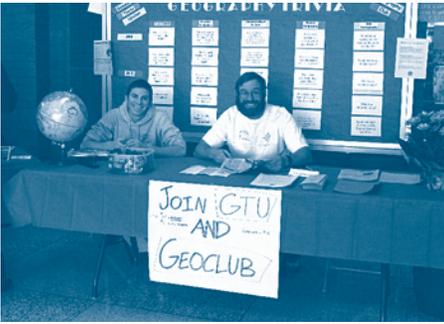
Julie received her M.S. in Geography from the University of Utah in 1991. Julie taught geography courses at Weber State University until spring 1998 then was accepted into a Ph.D. program at the University of Oxford where she spent four years

and completed her Ph.D. in the summer of 2002. She is presently an assistant professor at Weber teaching physical geography, climatology, arid studies and regional geography courses. Her areas of emphasis are Quaternary studies, climate change and optical dating.

### **Wayne Mills**

Wayne received his BS in Geography from the University of Utah in 1996. He started as an assistant planner for Salt Lake City Corporation and is currently a principal planner and the Board of Adjustment Administrator. Wayne is also the Program Manager for the Downtown Alliance, serves as the First Night Operations Director, and is the Project Coordinator for Envision Utah.

## S.A.C. News



Steve Ohlson, S.A.C. President, and Duane Poslusny, S.A.C. committee member.

The 2008 fall semester was very active for the Geography Club and GTU. The activities began with two climbing events up Big & Little Cottonwood Canyons. We sponsored two movie nights and an ethnic food night at Chanon Thai. We had excellent turnouts. We put together our own Geography basketball team, "Messin With Sasquatch". We did not win a single game, but we sure had a lot of fun.

So far this spring, we have participated in snowshoeing at the Mill D trailhead in Big Cottonwood Canyon. Activities planned for the remaining part of spring semester include, a climbing event at The Front Climbing Club co-hosted with Environmental Studies and Parks/Recreation/Tourism, a bowling night at the Union, and night skiing at the Brighton Ski Resort. Most exciting of all, we will be making salt dough maps with the first graders from the Adalante Partnership. Other

potential activities near the end of the semester are: a compass exercise or geocaching with a local scout troop, and another ethnic food night or movie night. It has been an excellent year!

## GIS Day/Geography Awareness Week

The Geography Department celebrated International Geography Awareness Week in November. Besides celebrating just GIS Day throughout the entire week, a great deal of attention was paid to the applications of geography in the everyday world. Panel discussions highlighted the diverse interests of the applicability of GIS and geography to a multitude of other disciplines. Information booths promoted many of our research labs, as well as a few area employers seeking geographers. Celebrations included an International Potluck and movie night.

We concluded the week with a special colloquium presentation by Mark Finco and Paul Maus, from the USDA Forest Service Remote Sensing Application Center. Their presentation focused on how the US Forest Service utilizes remote sensing, GIS, and other geospatial tools to better protect the forested lands in the nation.

All of our events were well attended, indicating how large an impact geography and GIS are having on our campus community. Many thanks to Suparna Das, McKenzie Skiles, Josh Groeneveld and Steve Ohlson who facilitated and organized the week. They did an outstanding job!



GIS Day Information Booths  
DIGIT Lab GIS Analyst Tom Springsteen discussing DIGIT Lab projects

### New Course Spotlights

GEOG 3370/5370 ENVST 3370 Utah's Energy Landscape  
Utah's Energy Landscape focuses on production and consumption of Utah's indigenous energy resources including coal, natural gas, hydro, petroleum, uranium, geothermal, wind, and solar. In addition to studying the resource itself, students obtain an understanding of primary energy generating technologies, their respective distribution systems, and the technical and economic potential and barriers.

GEOG 5275/6275 Vegetation and Climate Change  
Plants move. Long-term vegetation studies using plant fossil remains permit reconstruction of past vegetation communities. During the last 21,000 years nearly all plant species have "migrated" to new locations in response to changing environments. This course will focus on the history of plant movements and adaptation to climate change and disturbances since the last ice age.

### Costa Rica Study Abroad

The Environmental Studies program hosts an annual study abroad trip to Costa Rica every summer. This year the two courses being offered are in geography. The professors are our very own Spike Hampson teaching *Sharing Geographic Experience through Travel Commentary: Costa Rica*, and Elizabeth Dudley-Murphy teaching *Ecoregions and Ecotourism in Costa Rica*.



# Geography Connection

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