New Tenure-Track Faculty, Dr. Victor Gutiérrez

This spring we welcomed Dr. Victor Hugo Gutiérrez-Velez, a new Assistant Professor joining our faculty. His research areas include sustainability science, remote sensing, and environmental change. In the fall, he will be teaching Remote Sensing at the graduate and undergraduate levels. He has a Master’s degree in Geography from Clark University, a Ph.D. in Ecology, Evolution, and Environmental Biology from Columbia University and most recently participated in a post-doctoral fellowship from the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

Dr. Gutiérrez-Velez is interested in promoting resilient and sustainable interactions between people and nature. In his research, he develops remote sensing methods and products to characterize human transformations of landscapes. He combines these products and other spatial information with spatio-temporal statistical models to understand the relative and synergistic effects of landscape transformations and climate variability on environmental changes.

Dr. Gutiérrez-Velez’s current research includes the characterization of commodity cropland expansion and the influence of agricultural conversion and other land cover changes and climate variability on fire susceptibility and water integrity in Colombia and Peru. He is also interested in understanding the influence of current and projected agricultural investments, people’s urban-rural mobility and climate on land cover changes and socio-ecological vulnerability and resilience in post-conflict regions.

Greetings from the Chair

Dear Alumni,

Greetings from the Department of Geography and Urban Studies! It has been an exciting semester as we welcome new members of our department, including Dr. Victor Hugo Gutiérrez-Velez, and say farewell and congratulations to our most recent graduates.

This newsletter highlights some of the accomplishments of our faculty, students, and alumni in the realms of research, teaching, service, and careers. We are a vibrant community with many activities such as GIS Day, lectures such as the Benjamin H. Kohl Social Justice Lecture, and career days for our undergraduates.

It was great to see some of you at our alumni panels and alumni happy hour in February. We would welcome more involvement from our alumni in departmental events and would like to facilitate alumni networking. Please contact me if you have any suggestions or questions. I’d love to hear from you.

Enjoy your summer!

Sincerely,

Melissa R. Gilbert
Professor and Chair
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On November 18th, Temple University participated in GIS Day, part of an international celebration of Geographic Information Systems and how it can make a difference in our society. The event was cosponsored by the Department of Geography and Urban Studies, the Spatial Analytics Lab at Temple, and the Temple University Libraries. It had been many years since Temple had hosted GIS Day, and this was a great opportunity to reintroduce this celebration of mapping technology and users.

GIS Day at Temple was an all-day event, culminating with a keynote address by John Duchneskie, the Assistant Managing Editor/Design and Graphics at The Philadelphia Inquirer. Dr. Kolson Schlosser, a member of the GUS faculty, started off the day with a presentation on Story Maps in the classroom, showcasing student projects from his Digital Mapping course. The afternoon included two rounds of “lightning talks,” where academics and professionals who use GIS were invited to give a seven-minute presentation on a topic of their choosing. Presenters included Dr. Hamil Pearsall, Dr. Jeremy Mennis, Dr. Lee Hachadoorian and Dr. Ryan Burns from the GUS faculty, MA student Bob McDermott, and GUS alumni Steven Spindler, Sarah Cordivano, and Kevin Frech. Additional presenters included speakers from Temple’s Computer and Information Sciences, Public Health, and Criminal Justice Departments as well as the Montgomery County Planning Commission and Azavea.

The keynote speaker John Duchneskie of The Philadelphia Inquirer initially became interested in mapping in 2001 with the release of the 2000 decennial Census data. No one at the newspaper knew how to make maps that would show the changes and trends from the last decade. Without GIS, he would have had to calculate and color manually the hundreds of tracts in the greater Philadelphia region.

In his address, Duchneskie focused on the ways that media outlets have had to change their content to adapt to technological changes and make information accessible on smaller and smaller screens. He showed several examples of times that the media has to produce maps and infographics quickly with limited data, such as the immediate aftermath of the bombing in Paris this past fall, or working to make information more accessible to the public, like maps outlining the open and closed zone during the Pope’s visit to Philadelphia in October. For Duchneskie, the goal of visuals is to put numbers into context and make data relatable to the public.

Duchneskie focused particularly on the times when the map has changed or steered the conversation. As a reporter, he is always looking for the outliers. Sometimes those outliers can redirect the conversation in a new and surprising direction.

GIS Day was a great success, with a large turnout throughout the day. Much credit is due to GUS faculty Dr. Kevin Henry who planned and coordinated the event.

We hope you can join us this year for GIS Day on Wednesday, November 16th, 2016. We will be sharing more information about the event during the Fall semester.

Alumna Sarah Cordivano gives a lightning talk at GIS Day 2015.
Colleen Hammelman, PhD, received a post-doctorate position at the Culinaria Research Center at the University of Toronto, researching urban sustainability planning and urban agriculture projects implemented by low-income immigrant communities.

MA Alum Bob McDermott is a Financial Policy Analyst with the City of Philadelphia. Bob was a member of the research team behind the newly-passed soda tax.

GUS alumni Jacob Bouffard and Carlos Bonilla received summer fellowships with Azavea. Carlos will be participating in the Summer of Maps fellowship, working with the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia and The Food Trust.

GUS alum Zhenya Nalywayko will be attending the University of Pennsylvania to pursue a Master’s in City and Regional Planning. GUS alum Anthony Bernadzikowski will be staying at Temple to pursue his M.Ed in social science education.

Environmental Studies alumni Hyea-Jin Kim and Brianna Shillington will return as youth mentors in the building Information Technology Skills (biTS) program.

GUS faculty Dr. Kolson Schlosser received a 2016 Innovative Teaching with Technology Award. This award is sponsored by the Temple University Teaching, Learning and Technology round table and is given to a member of the faculty who has made significant contributions toward integrating technology into teaching and learning.

GUS alum Mianna Charles was a founding member of Evolve Creative Academy, an organization whose mission is “to nourish a conscious and positive environment for children to explore their highest potential through a fun, simple memorable & cutting-edge learning approach.” Mianna uses GIS and documentary photography as tools in storytelling for social progress.

Pictured Above: Yuan Huang, Bianca Santos, Mike Moody, Jen Hombach and Sam Konstantinos joined us for a young alumni panel in April.

Joel Kirkland Cornell
Dec. 21, 1987– April 15, 2016

The Department of Geography and Urban Studies at Temple University is greatly saddened by the sudden death of our student and friend, Joel Kirkland Cornell. Joel died on April 15 in Philadelphia of natural causes.

Joel was a graduate of the Woodlynde School, Howard University and was scheduled to graduate with a master’s degree in geography and urban studies at Temple University in May. He received his degree posthumously.

We were fortunate to have Joel in our department. Everyone who crossed paths with Joel felt like they had made a friend. He was smart, funny, kind, generous, and had a passion for social justice and the joys of life. We knew that he would make a mark on his community and the world after he left the department. We join his family and friends in mourning his passing.

Ritwika Biswas awarded 2015-2016 Harris Webber Fellowship

Each year, the Department of Geography and Urban Studies grants a fellowship to a PhD student pursuing urban research that requires fieldwork, and/or has policy implication. The fellowship is made possible by the generosity of Temple alumnus Harris Webber (CLA, ’65). He is the founder of Harris Webber Ltd, a company involved in the planning, architecture, development and management of retirement communities and health care facilities. This endowed Fellowship expresses Mr. Webber’s commitment to the importance of preparing researchers to understand and shape livable, sustainable, socially productive and more equitable metropolitan communities of the future. That commitment marks his entire professional career as a community planner in many different settings. In 2015-2016, the fellowship was awarded to Ritwika Biswas. Her research will examine the factors that restrict or enhance Indian women’s access to urban spaces and their mobility and therefore their ability to exercise their rights of full citizenship.
Shortly after Dr. Allison Hayes-Conroy received a National Science Foundation Faculty Early Career Development Grant for her work on the body from a geographical perspective, she joined forces with other GUS faculty Kevin Henry, Hamil Pearsall and Michele Masucci, and reached across disciplines to faculty in biology and education to pursue a National Research Foundation trainee (NRT) grant, also centered on the body.

Hayes-Conroy received the award to pursue a new model of graduate education that centers the body as a link between the social and life sciences. One component of the grant involves graduate students collaborating on an interactive exhibit with the Franklin Institute. In a course titled Bio-Social Partnerships, students were expected to develop an interactive final project examining where biology and society meet.

Undergraduate students also had the opportunity to participate in this course as well. One group of Environmental Studies majors developed a board game designed to teach about vaccination rates and the principle of herd immunity. Herd immunity occurs when most people are vaccinated against a disease and therefore the entire population is protected. Children were shown a board with 100 blue pieces, representing 100 people and rolled die to determine how many of their 100 people were not immunized against measles, which they switched to red pieces. They then placed one yellow piece, representing a person carrying measles, on the board and witnessed the repercussions, as the disease spread among the unvaccinated red pieces. The children playing the game saw how, by getting shots, they can help protect someone who cannot get vaccinated due to age or illness from a very contagious disease.

PhD students Sarah Heck, Rebecca Croog, and Felipe Muñoz are currently prototyping this game and others at the Franklin Institute. The response among children at the Franklin Institute has been very positive.

Have you herd? An Intro to Herd Immunity

Environmental Studies students participate in the annual Philly Science Carnival at Penn’s Landing.