



Equinox

CSUF | Geography & the Environment

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

ANNUAL NEWSLETTER FALL 2025

Note from the Chair

I hope this newsletter finds you in good spirits! The newsletter's reboot has had a bumpy beginning, as it was absent throughout 2024 while I worked on a new format. However, the Department of Geography and our students continue to thrive, as you'll see in this issue. Dr. Drayse and I took 16 students on a study abroad to the Arctic, we welcomed back Dr. Peggy Smith from retirement, and many students garnered

local and regional awards. Don't miss the Spring 2025 All Points conference after the success of Spring 2024's. We are also excited to congratulate the class of 2025!



Inside This Issue

Page 2: All Points of the Compass 2025

Page 3 & 4: Faculty Spotlight | Dr. Peggy Smith

Page 5: Student Spotlight | Heather Roberts

Page 6: Spring 2025 Graduates

Page 7: Awards and Donors

Geography students hosted All Points of the Compass on March 14th, 2025, a one-day symposium featuring research and presentations by undergraduate students, graduate students, alumni, and faculty.

Presentations and posters showcased the impressive diversity of research conducted by CSUF geographers. Presentations were made on topics including: the burn severity of the Thomas fire, the San Diego creek watershed, Laguna Beach's Jane Walk, and the geographic origin of talented baseball players. Student posters presented research ranging from the Darién Gap to Deforestation in Indonesia. Panel sessions hosted by current students and alumni were also popular events.



The events Keynote Speaker was our very own Dr. DeLyser. Dr. DeLyser's topic was "Ghosts of Summers Past: How That 'Dead End' college Job Might Lead You to Your Future". Dr. DeLyser discussed the unforeseen impact of her college job at Bodie State Park on her future career, PhD, and Research. The talk featured many great photos of Dr. DeLyser and Bodie as well as several humorous moments about her work. Ultimately, DeLyser's talk was an inspiration to many of our students and left everyone wanting more. Dr. DeLyser has since retired and joined the ranks of our emeritus faculty. However, she will remain active with the department and continue with her research.



Photos: Above, guests and students enjoy the reception after the conference in the GIS Lab. Left, Dr. DeLyser presenting on her experience at Bodie State Park.

Dr. Peggy Smith

It seems as if most everything connects with geography. It's breadth encompasses all our history and beyond. This is what drew me to it many years ago and still does the same today. Geography is one of the few studies that uses both sides of the brain to understand all that it contains. I had been a double major of art and math before switching to geography and found that I can bring both of those concentrations into my courses. I still frequently use both areas of study while teaching.

I am often asked about being a geography professor. I talk to people about the requirements, but more than that, I talk to them about what makes a successful geography course. I make sure they know that every classroom is a replica of the world with different ethnicities, ages, genders, experiences, and frames of reference. With diversity as a key component, I bring in various types of projects that keep students interested and engaged. Letting them have choices in projects assures that I get better work turned in.

I begin every course with a "flight" over Orange County and the Los Angeles Basin. I am a pilot, and over the years, I have pieced together a slide show while soaring above the Southland. It is a fabulous way to show spatial layouts of cities, residential and industrial areas, and even some agricultural relics. The physical landforms are easy to point out, and even environmental hazards like fires, landslides, and coastal erosion are clearly seen. In fact, the Five Spatial Themes come to life when you are looking from above. Even the students in the back of the classroom lean around others to see their professor climb into and fly her own plane. I encourage future teachers to bring their passions into the classroom to create some unique ways to teach.

Art and music are universal, pull students together while at the same time, celebrating their differences, and are so geographic. Student assignment include making a soundtrack for their own life. Narrowing it down to only 15 songs that tell their story is a fun challenge for them. They write a paragraph about each song and why it is significant to them. Then they connect the influences of their favorite musicians to the rest of the world.

Continued on next page



Dr. Smith enjoys flying over Southern California in her spare time

Dr. Smith cont.

One summer, I read an interesting book on slave quilts. So, I made a replica and used it to explain that not all maps look like maps. I explain the meaning of each block and show how they demonstrate the physical landscapes, the night sky, and even how to crawl like a bear or walk like a drunk across certain areas. Communicating through handmade quilts, the pathways to freedom, enabled my students to appreciate different types of maps and their significance. Then I would have students write about their own family migration stories. They were to interview someone in their family and then make them a tribute plate. This was a collage of photos, medals, pins, keys, recipes, notes, etc, glued to a ceramic plate and then sealed with a clear coat. I received their family's migration story. Once they present their plate to the class, I encourage them to share it with their family.

In National Parks, I teach the stories behind the creation of each park. Each one is unique and important to the history of this nation's greatest treasures. We discussed how the Park Rangers share these stories with visitors to try to deepen the love and appreciation for the park. What a great way to display the important role of these rangers than to have students act as one. I bring in a big load of artifacts – shovels, ropes, hats, clothes, boots, cooking utensils, clay pots, masks, baskets, etc. With them in small groups, they write the story for the park of their choice. They present the story, knowing the most believable story wins. My joy comes from watching students begin to understand the importance of the stories that surround our National Parks, especially the ones that are difficult to hear.

Living in Southern California, we can broach many cultural and geographical conversations. We have the chance to look at what life was like here before there was a border to cross. We study what land means to people and how eminent domain laws can alter generational territory. I like to use Chicano Park in San Diego and how the people of the community stood their ground and fought to create their park- the last bit of land they could hang on to. The story of Chicano Park is a story of resilience, resistance, and respect.

I also enjoy sharing another passion of mine: Traveling. I remind them that to be a geographer is to be a student of the world. I show them, through lived experience, that traveling is learning, and it never needs to stop. I share about being a destination lecturer on board cruise ships and traveling to places I never thought I would get to experience. I want to inspire students to explore a degree in Geography and encourage them to discover the world.

Dr. Smith retired from the department in spring of 2024, we are excited to have her back teaching part time this year.

Heather Roberts

Heather Roberts is completed her M.A. in Geography at CSUF in the spring of 2025. Her thesis explores the Hydrosocial History of the San Diego Creek Sub-Watershed in Orange County. Rooted in political and urban ecology, her research traces how infrastructure, environmental policy, and social forces have shaped this Southern California landscape, particularly through aquifer recharge, recycled water systems, and the transformation of the San Joaquin Marsh.

Heather earned her B.A. in Geography in 2023 and holds a certificate in GIS and Geospatial Technologies. She has presented her research at national and regional conferences, including the American Association of Geographers (AAG) in Hawaii and Detroit, the California Geographical Society (CGS) in Los Angeles and Redding, and the American Anthropological Association (AAA) in Tampa, Florida. In 2023, she received the Geosystems Award from CGS for her presentation, "Evidence of the Hydrosocial Cycle in Urban Environments."

At CSUF, Heather worked with the University's Office of Sustainability, contributing to the tri-annual AASHE/STARS report and coordinating outreach for Sustainability Month and Earth Month. She previously served as a Graduate Assistant to Professor Vanessa Engstrom. Heather was actively involved in campus leadership and served as both the Treasurer of the Geography Club and the Inter-Club Council Representative for the Anthropology Students Association.

Outside of her academic commitments, Heather enjoys nature photography, traveling, and finding peace through time spent outdoors. She especially values spending time with her husband, Sean, and their son, Austin and his fiancée, Sierra, whether out in nature or simply catching up together.



Heather graduated with her MA as part of the class of 2025 and enjoys spending her time outdoors in nature

Bachelor of Arts

Bryan Benavidez
Logan Brennen
Esme Campos
Mason Gessini
Persephone Diaz
Adrian Contreras
Nathan Low
Brendan Obermeyer

Jennifer Krapf
Joshua Reyes
George Juarez
Colin Sprague
Maximilliano Elam
Haley Courie
Lauren Heyden
Anna Shiebeck



Master of Arts

Jamie StClair
Heather Roberts
Richard Melgoza
Sarah Vongiseth

Awardees

Compass Cartography Competition

First Place:

Miranda Esteves

Honorable Mention:

Andrew Carias

Outstanding Students

Graduate:

Heather Roberts

Undergraduate:

Anna Schiebeck

Outstanding Service Awards

Sean Roberts, Haley Courie,
Anna Schiebeck, Cristin
Anderson, Heather Roberts



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Our Anonymous Donors

Thank you!

If you are interested in contributing to any of these awards in the future, or would like to contribute to a new award or scholarship fund, please contact Trevis Matheus tmatheus@fullerton.edu, phone # (657) 278-3685

Photo: Compass Cartography winners with Emeritus Ray Yong (middle).

CSUF Geography alumni: We would love to know what you've been up to! Send us an email to tmatheus@fullerton.edu

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Cover Image: Over the summer of 2025, Dr. Mark Drayse and Dr. Trevis Matheus led students on the "2025 Arctic Study Abroad Experience". Sixteen CSUF Geography students traveled to Stockholm, Sweden to study the changing Arctic. Students then traveled on to Svalbard, Norway to witness the changing Arctic in the field. CSUF students were joined by seven Swedish students from the Royal Institute of Technology. Students in the photo are on an electric catamaran boat standing in front of the Nordenskjöld Glacier after a recent calving event.