

T.A. of the Month - Kevin Spigel

Kevin Spigel is a Ph.D. student in geography and has been a T.A. for Geog 127, Physical Systems of the Environment, for eight semesters. He is also the graduate student liaison for the undergraduate Geography Club.

Where are you from?

My home town is Portville, New York. Tiny, tiny town.

When did you realize you wanted to be a geographer?

First semester of sophomore year, taking a class that was similar to Geography 127. I was a premed major, but that wouldn't have gotten me outside at all.

What sort of geography do you study?

I'm a physical geographer by trade. My special interests are geomorphology and hydrology – hill-slope processes, erosion. I'm trying to quantify erosion over the last 10,000 years.

Where would you like to do research?

It's got to be mountains. Mountains in the West or mountains in the Northeast. I've never been outside of the U.S. or Canada, so I can't speak for any other country.

Any special talents not related to geography?

I'm getting pretty addicted to home brewing. I think I'm a pretty good cook; at least, people tell me so.

What's your favorite place on campus?

Can't argue with the terrace.

Is that because of the geography or the beer?

Both! Well, I like Picnic Point, too. We've had some good bonfires out there.

What strange things have students done to try to get better grades from you?

Aside from whining ... they've realized they've become concerned about their grades after the fourth exam, way too late.

What advice do you have for undergrads in geography?

Utilize all the resources available to you. In other words, the T.A.'s, the library, your professors. All too often, you're just a body in the lecture or the lab.

How about getting into grad school?

Do some background work. Have an idea of what you would like to do, and call people. Get a better sense of the department and the campus. Talk to other grad students.

Finally, I have to ask: What's a big mistake you've made?

Underestimating the amount of sediment that can wash down hill slopes for one given rain storm.

Kevin, fortunately, survived that incident. You might see him if you take Geog 127 or come to Geography Club meetings.

Written by Jason Stitt

Geographic reflections from Texas:

A student talks about her experiences helping migrant farm workers in San Juan

"Everything is bigger in Texas." We saw this phrase on every t-shirt, souvenir mug and sign in Texas as we drove through this massive landscape. Every mile looked the same as we drove down the highway to San Juan, Texas, a city situated on the southernmost tip of Texas, hugging the Mexican border.

After 30 hours in a van, our journey began in this dry, yet fertile region of the United States where farming and migrant workers were abundant. This was our "Alternative Break," or "service vacation," but in the end, the trip turned into a learning experience I will never forget.

Geographically, southern Texas is a very arid climate region, but it houses a great expanse of agricultural fields that produce massive amounts of food every year. While on our break, we were fortunate enough to work with an organization called LUPE, a union dedicated to migrant farmers in the region. We found ourselves trekking through clay soils, talking with laborers, canvassing neighborhoods, meeting legal and illegal workers, and building homes for those in the direst circumstances. I found I was learning valuable lessons about immigration, farming, and

community organizing that I, surprisingly, was able to connect with geography.

When I took Cultural Geography 101, I remember the ideas of "interconnectedness," "globalization and trade agreements," and "crossing borders culturally and politically," as some of the main points that stood out from the class. While in Texas, I experienced these ideas first hand, except from the other point of view, that of the migrant farmer, the day laborer, and the families that were coping with the effects of NAFTA, large company farm owners, and new immigration proposals sent out by our current administration.

For some, "geography" is only associated with the physical, but after my trip to south Texas, the most significant lessons I learned were my first hand experiences with how our world is changing into a geographic interchange of culture, ideas, policies and people.



Whether these ideas are good or bad, I feel this is what makes geography a truly unique and exciting field to explore.

"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I – I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference." – Robert Frost

By Lauren Hauser

MADISON GEOGRAPHIC

The Official Newsletter of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Geography Club • February 2004

Where in the world is ...



Find this place ... win a FREE COW T-SHIRT!

Welcome to the first photo contest of this semester! Above is a picture taken somewhere in, around or near Science Hall. The first **undergrad** to correctly identify the location will win a free short-sleeved Wisconsin Geography cow t-shirt (winner will have the choice of size and color). Winner will be notified by email. Good luck!

HOW TO PLAY:

Find where the picture was taken

Email your answer to uwgeogclub@yahoo.com

Win a free short-sleeved cow t-shirt!

Contest not open to graduate students, faculty or staff.

The Geography Club starts Spring semester off with running start!

Welcome back for a new semester, everyone. Here's what happened at our Jan. 26 meeting: First, we'd like to send a special hello to all the new people who attended our meeting. We're very excited to have you involved.

We've started planning our activities for the Spring semester. Here are some of the projects we're considering:

Service Projects

Since geographers look to their surroundings for information and inspiration, we should also give our time and energy to making those surroundings better. The Club is considering local service projects such as habitat maintenance at the Arboretum or through the Nature Conservancy, or possibly painting globes for local elementary schools.

Local Field Trips and Speakers

A major focus of the group was on the need for increased exposure to the professional world of geography. We discussed possible tours that we'd like to take: the Cartographic and Publishing Program office of the USGS, the Wisconsin DNR, the geography map library, and a mini GIS day at Sun Prairie. The Club also showed interest in bringing in some local professional geographers to talk about available jobs, especially in areas not related to GIS or physical geography disciplines. There was also interest in speakers from AAG and WLLA.

Social Events

Another hot topic was social events. All the members felt that the Club needed to get out of the Student Lounge and get to know each other in other ways. Ideas ranged from small events like bowling at Union South or ice skating at Tenney Park to an end-of-semester trip to the Dells/Devil's Lake.

UPCOMING GEOGRAPHY CLUB NEWS AND EVENTS

Our next meeting is Monday, February 9th, at 6:00 in the Student Lounge in Science Hall.

We'll be planning our events for the Spring semester, so be sure to bring your calendars and let your voice be heard! We'll also be ordering t-shirts and other Wisconsin Geography paraphernalia.

Our meetings are open to all interested undergrads. Please feel free to attend.