

SPRING 2026 ISSUE

Spartan Geographer



Department of Geography,
Environment, and Spatial Sciences
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

For Alumni & Friends

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We remain a top-five Geography department among major American research universities. Our balance across areas is impressive: our scholars publish at a high rate, our work is cited highly, and we bring in substantial funding to support our research. You'll see many updates in this newsletter about the important work our faculty and students are doing here in Michigan and across the world to advance knowledge and transform lives!

— Ashton Shortridge, Chair

ON THE COVER

Ph.D. student, Rachel Lau, collecting substrate elevation and vegetation data at an area of wetlands on White Lake in Whitehall, Michigan, with assistance from Francisca Nunez Ferreira, a research scientist working with Dr. Ethan Theuerkauf's MSU Coastal Processes and Geomorphology Lab. Read more about Rachel's research and experiences as a graduate student on p. 28.

Photo: Francisca Nunez Ferreira



LETTER FROM CHAIR

Ashton Shortridge



Dear Spartan Geographers,

Welcome to our 2026 newsletter! You will find it full of stories set across the world and right here in East Lansing. It's been a very productive year for the MSU Geography family, and I am sure you will enjoy reading about the goings on of our alumni, students, staff, and faculty. Diane Huhn, our communications specialist, has once again done outstanding work to pull the newsletter together: I am deeply appreciative of all she does to get the word out.

While 2025 was a challenging year for the academic sector generally, the department is doing pretty well. Our undergraduate program is an area of priority, and in 2024, we rolled out revised majors and minors intended to make Geography more attractive to students, along with a marketing and communications plan to engage with them. These efforts appear to be working: our majors' numbers are up about 15 percent. I'm also pleased with the growth in our new minor programs; we have over 80 students in our Earth Observation and Geospatial Analytics minor, and 16 in our just-launched Climate Studies minor. We currently have 326 students majoring or minoring in Geography.

We are awarding more fellowship funding for our undergraduate students than ever before, thanks to the generous spirit of our supporters. The de Blij Scholars program, which provides financial support to select Geography majors each semester they are here, is a critical part of our plan to attract more majors. Please consider donating to this program, from which all dollars earned go to deserving undergraduates.

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This is the fifth time that I've sat down to write the welcome article, and it will be the last for a while at least: my term as Chairperson ends this August. Looking back over what I've written in the past four years reminds me of

how much we've accomplished together: transitioning to in-person classes in the wake of the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, growing our undergraduate de Blij Scholars program, rolling out new professional certificate programs, becoming a force in MSU's annual homecoming parade, reaching new students by teaching Big Ideas in Geography (ISS 205), and opening joint education programs overseas. I've learned and grown personally and professionally as Chair, and I think I've helped to move the department forward through some challenging times. I am also ready to pass the baton and look forward to spending more time in the classroom and conducting research.

A couple of key staff have retired in the past year: Tamsyn Mihalus, who has been a financial administrator for Geography and RS&GIS for many decades, and Joni Burns, our Graduate Program Coordinator since 2019. They have been core players in vital roles for our department, and they will be missed. Please join me in wishing them both the best in their next life chapters!

The world is an amazing place, and our department remains an exciting meeting point for those who seek out and dispense knowledge about the intersection of the human and environmental realms. Thank you for your engagement, interest, and support for MSU Geography!

Go Green and Go Geography!



Ashton Shorridge, Chair



Dr. Shorridge visiting Nanjing in December 2025. The trip included a trek to the Sun Yat Sen Mausoleum with some students in our joint masters program. Pictured are Xia Hui (left), Ashton Shorridge (center), and Hailong Wang (right). Photo: Ashton Shorridge



Graduate students Phyllis Ang e Mwin Gyang (left) and Brennan Pascal Standel (right) take a break to show a little love to the places they call home during a fun and engaging day at the 2025 Annual Meeting of the American Association of Geographers held in Detroit, Michigan from March 24-28, 2025.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Geography Trivia

1. How many bridges cross the Red Cedar River on MSU's campus between Harrison and Hagadorn roads?
2. Which Great Lake does Lake County, Michigan border?
3. How many states have a land border with Michigan?
4. The closest Big Ten university to MSU is our friends in Ann Arbor. What's the second closest?
5. Which Big Ten University has the westernmost campus in the conference?
6. What's the biggest country completely within Europe?
7. MSU Geography has a joint masters program with Nanjing Agricultural University in China. What great river is the city of Nanjing located on?

Visit p. 53 to check your answers!



Emilio Moran at the opening session of the SPEC-FAPESP Project results presentation for participants, held at the Federal University of Rondônia (UNIR) in Porto Velho, Rondônia state, in the Brazilian Amazon. Photo: Sarah Morais

FACULTY FOCUS

Emilio Moran

JOHN A. HANNAH
DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR

This past year, my research group has been working on the synthesis of our work for the past ten years in the Brazilian Amazon, evaluating the social and environmental impacts of hydropower. This work was funded by the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP) in two continuing grants. For the first five years, 2013-2018, we evaluated the impacts of the construction of the Belo Monte hydropower dam on the Xingu River, the world's third-largest at the time. In the next five years, from 2019-2025, we expanded the geographical scope to include two other hydropower dams on the Madeira River, the largest affluent on the Amazon. We added a substantial fisheries component in this second phase since this is the most important activity of local people, and the one that in the past had led to the greatest impacts due to species decline and biodiversity losses. We switched to working on the post-construction impacts and what impacts remain long after hydropower dams are built.

In 2025, we returned to the Amazon and had meetings in both the Madeira River (at Porto Velho) and the Xingu River (at Altamira) to give the results of our research back to the local communities. We asked them whether we had captured the impacts and what else might be done to address the problems that were identified. We invited local communities, and many showed up and engaged with us in workshops to define priorities for policy changes. Towards the end of the year, we held another meeting, this time at the University of São Paulo, hosted by one of our partners, Professor Evandro Moretto, to share the results with the academic community. It was also an excellent opportunity to review the research papers we want to write in the final year of the project. We consider ourselves very fortunate to have had sustained support for ten years for a project at this scale involving as many as five universities.

A related but quite different project is funded by both the National Science Foundation and the C.S. Mott Foundation and involves bringing electricity to isolated communities in the Amazon—communities which are unlikely to be reached by the national grid because they are small and too far away to be reached by the national grid's transmission lines. This project began in 2022 and was renewed in 2024 for another two years. This has been a very challenging project, but also one that is very satisfying. To bring electricity to communities that have been largely in the dark is very rewarding — to be able to deliver enough energy for them to connect to the internet

and to improve access of local teachers to educational materials, and for households to have a way of preserving food through refrigeration is something we take for granted but that they had never had. So far, we have benefited 6 communities and 437 families with enough solar energy for household use and community activities/buildings. Some of these communities are as far as 20 hours by boat from the nearest town. The project was recognized by MSU with the Award for Best Project on International Community Engagement in 2024. A documentary film created during the project has been recognized and shown at two film festivals. [*The Forgotten: Sustainable Clean Energy for the Brazilian Amazon*](#) is now publicly available for viewing.

Looking ahead, we plan to connect at least 3 other communities and continue to monitor the ones that already have energy systems, combining photovoltaic cells and, in two cases, a hybrid system with a hydrokinetic turbine that draws energy 24 hours a day from the nearby stream and feeds it into a battery array. As a solution for off-grid communities, this has huge potential, and we are working with energy providers to add this type of approach to their arsenal of how to address the needs of isolated communities, both in the Amazon and even back here in the USA.



Top left: (Left to right) Giselle Neuls, Rachel Mourao, Emilio Moran, Maria Claudia Lopez and Rafael Lembi at the 2024 MSU Outreach and Engagement Awards Ceremony. Photo: Sarah Morais

Top right: Emilio Moran at the SPEC-FAPESP Project results presentation for participants, held at the Federal University of Pará (UFPA) in Altamira, Pará state, in the Brazilian Amazon. Photo: Sarah Morais

Bottom left: Research team with participants of the SPEC-FAPESP Project at the results presentation, held at the Federal University of Pará (UFPA) in Altamira, Pará state, in the Brazilian Amazon. Photo: Sarah Morais

Page right: Members of an isolated Amazonian community wave to a drone after completing the installation of a solar panel array to provide electricity to their community.



Research team at the SPEC-FAPESP Project closing event, held at the University of São Paulo (USP). From left to right: Caroline Arantes, Manuella Reale, event participant, Alcinei Araujo, Sílvia Mandai, Jocilene Barros, Janaina Welle, Renata Utsunomiya, Guilherme Prado, Gabriela Careiro, event participant, Carolina Doria, Evandro Mateus Moretto, Marta Grisotti, Igor Cavallini Johansen, Miquéias Calvi, Maria Claudia Lopez, Emilio Moran, Evandro Albiach, and Gustavo Arcoverde. Photo: SPEC-FAPESP Project Archives



Emilio Moran at the opening session of the SPEC-FAPESP Project closing event, held at the University of São Paulo (USP). Joining him are Paulo Artaxo, Tércio Ambrizzi, Evandro Mateus Moretto, and Igor Cavallini Johansen. Photo: Manuella Reale





FACULTY FOCUS

Igor Vojnovic

PROFESSOR

After a number of years of teaching Education Abroad in Sydney, I am now preparing for my 7th Arts, Culture, and Urban Sustainability in Rome program during summer 2026. The program focuses on urban design, form, and function of cities throughout history, and through the lens of sustainability. There is something special about Education Abroad programs, including simply how the experiential component enhances the classroom experience and results in a heightened level of student engagement with the course content. The benefit of having Rome as the classroom! Years after a program is completed, students will email me to tell me how important the month in Rome was to their undergraduate MSU experience. It is also amazing to think that Geography's Emeritus Professor Assefa Mehretu ran the Rome program for 28 years!



Our Geography Chair Ashton Shortridge and his wife Anastasia visit the Arts, Culture, and Urban Sustainability in Rome program. Photo: Ashton Shortridge

In addition to teaching courses in Rome and at MSU during the academic year, I continue to focus my research on several different urban streams, including gentrification, sustainability, urban public health, and urbanization. I am also very lucky to be working with two outstanding Ph.D. students, both of whom came into our Ph.D. program with prestigious MSU awards. Sahel Izadi received the Academic Achievement Graduate Assistantship, and Angelique Willis was a recipient of the University Distinguished Fellowship.

In 2025, I was also deeply honored to be the recipient of the Scott Cummings Distinguished Editorial Service Award by the Urban Affairs Association (UAA). I served for 5 years as Associate Editor, 5 years as Senior Associate Editor, and 6 years as Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Urban Affairs*. I was only the second recipient of this award, with the first going to Scott Cummings himself. In 2025, the UAA also placed me on its Distinguished Service Honor Roll. It continues to be exciting to teach and research about cities!



Students exploring Rome neighborhoods, with ancient monumental structures found throughout the city.



Some of the Arts, Culture and Urban Sustainability students visiting the Colosseum, Rome.



FACULTY FOCUS

Sharon Zhong

PROFESSOR

Over the past several years, my research has focused on understanding atmospheric processes in complex environments, particularly those associated with wildland fires and the polar regions. While much of this work unfolds quietly and incrementally, it has been highly collaborative and intellectually rewarding.

A major emphasis of my group's recent work is wildfire–atmosphere interactions and smoke dispersion. Using data collected through a Department of Defense Strategic Environmental Research and Development Program (SERDP) project, we have continued detailed analysis and modeling of observations from a series of prescribed fire experiments conducted in collaboration with colleagues from the U.S. Forest Service and several universities. These carefully planned burns provided a rare opportunity to observe how heat, turbulence, and smoke evolve in and above active fires. Working with my research associate, Joey Seitz, and assistant professor Dr. Mike Kiefer (who has since transitioned to the private sector), we have combined these observations with numerical modeling to improve understanding of fire behavior and smoke transport. This research is increasingly relevant as prescribed burning plays a pivotal role in land and fuel management.

I also remain actively engaged in research on atmospheric variability in the Arctic and Antarctic, in collaboration with scientists at the Polar Research Institute in Shanghai and the Finnish Meteorological Institute in Helsinki. One recent study, published in *Communications Earth & Environment* (part of the Nature Portfolio), examined an unexpected recent



Photo: Sebastian Hoch

slowdown in Arctic summer sea ice loss. By combining observations with numerical modeling, we demonstrated how variability in North Pacific sea surface temperatures can influence large-scale atmospheric circulation patterns that extend into the Arctic, affecting regional winds, temperatures, and sea ice conditions.

In addition to more than two dozen peer-reviewed journal articles, I recently had the pleasure of collaborating with my colleague, Dr. Julie Winkler, on a chapter for the *Encyclopedia of Atmospheric Sciences* focused on the Great Plains Low-Level Jet. Writing this chapter provided an opportunity to step back and reflect on how scientific understanding of this prominent wind system

has evolved, and why it remains important for weather, ecosystems, and human activities across the Great Plains.

In the classroom, the rapid emergence of tools such as ChatGPT has introduced both challenges and opportunities. In response, I have incorporated more hands-on activities and experiential learning into my introductory courses, encouraging students to observe the atmosphere directly and engage more deeply with data and real-world problems. I find myself learning alongside my students, making this an especially engaging and energizing time to teach.



Prescribed fire in the New Jersey Pine Barrens conducted as part of the Joint Fire Science Program (JFSP). Photo: Warren Heilman



FACULTY FOCUS

Leo Zulu

PROFESSOR

This past year, I shifted primarily into leadership as Director of Michigan State University's African Studies Center (ASC), and it has been both humbling and galvanizing. I now devote most of my time to stewarding a Center with a six-decade legacy of scholarship, language training, and partnership across the African continent and its diasporas. Every week, I'm reminded why this work matters: the curiosity of our students, the commitment of our faculty and staff, and the enduring support of alumni and friends who believe in MSU's global engagement.

ASC remains a catalyst, connecting disciplines, building partnerships on and off campus, and creating spaces where African perspectives and long-lasting engagement inform how we teach, research, and serve. I often say our role is to "bring Michigan to Africa and Africa to Michigan," and that ethos guides our programming, mentorship, and collaborations. Like many centers nationwide, we faced the cancellation of core federal funding the past year. I see this not as a retreat but as a reset. We are streamlining core services to faculty and students, strengthening collaborative initiatives, and broadening our funding base to sustain excellence and innovate with purpose. We're moving forward, focused, resilient, and confident that our best work is ahead.

While leading ASC anchors my calendar, teaching remains a source of joy and purpose. I continue to teach a mid-level course on the geography of Africa and mentor graduate students. Each spring and summer, I prepare students for our long-running, seven-week Education Abroad program in Malawi, where they intern with NGOs, engage with community partners, and reflect critically on development practice. I marvel at the transformative power of experiential global learning and love seeing students from any major return with deeper insight, humility, and skills that translate far beyond the classroom.



My research remains rooted in environmental sustainability and governance, climate change adaptation, land-cover change, food security, clean energy transitions, and sustainable livelihoods, mainly in southern Africa.

I continued exciting research exploring the use of earth observation data-derived aggregate indicators to assess whether climate adaptation actions are producing measurable results at the landscape scale. As countries worldwide evaluate progress on adaptation, this kind of independent monitoring is increasingly vital. Our work in Malawi shows how remote sensing tools can track key climate-sensitive changes, with strong potential for expansion across Sub-Saharan Africa to support national adaptation planning.

Clean cooking energy is an often-overlooked factor in sustainability, health, and economic mobility. In Sub Saharan Africa, about 960

million people still rely on biomass fuels for cooking, leading to severe indoor air pollution and over 500,000 premature deaths each year. My research on ultra-efficient biomass cookstoves shows strong acceptance and clear benefits: lower household energy costs, reduced deforestation, better indoor air quality, lower carbon emissions, and shorter cooking times. I am now focusing on sustainable biomass supply and value chains, and new marketing and affordability strategies to expand access, as well as exploring the use of biomass briquettes as an alternative to firewood for curing tobacco, Malawi's top export.

I look forward to another exciting year guiding the ASC forward while continuing my teaching and some focused research.

I have also been advancing work that uses satellite-derived data to evaluate whether climate adaptation efforts are actually delivering results. As countries around the world take stock of their progress on adaptation, this type of independent, scalable monitoring is becoming essential. Our collaborative research, centered in Malawi, demonstrates how remote sensing indicators can help track changes in land use, vegetation health, water availability, and other climate-sensitive systems. This approach has strong potential for wider application across Sub Saharan Africa and can support governments as they implement and monitor their national adaptation plans and other climate commitments.



Top: Dr. Leo Zulu (far right) and MSU students (left to right) Jordan, Ishu, Regan, and a local guide on a pre-international field excursion at Lake Malawi National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in summer 2025 in Malawi, southern Africa. Lake Malawi is the third largest freshwater lake in Africa and eight largest.

Center: Dr. Leo Zulu (far right), MSU students, and officials from the Center for Environmental Policy & Advocacy (CEPA) in Lilongwe, Malawi. One of the students, Jordan Wesson (third from right), completed a six week internship with CEPA in May–July 2025 as part of the Education Abroad program that Dr. Zulu has led since 2011: NGOs and Development—Internships in Malawi.

Bottom: Dr. Zulu with collaborators Dr. Allison Lassiter (University of Pennsylvania) and Dr. Sosten Chiotha (LEAD SEA, Zomba, Malawi) during a visit to Lake Chilwa to assess adaptation practices to climate change around this shallow freshwater lake, which is experiencing increased drying and more frequent flooding, with significant impacts on local livelihoods, agricultural productivity, and biodiversity.

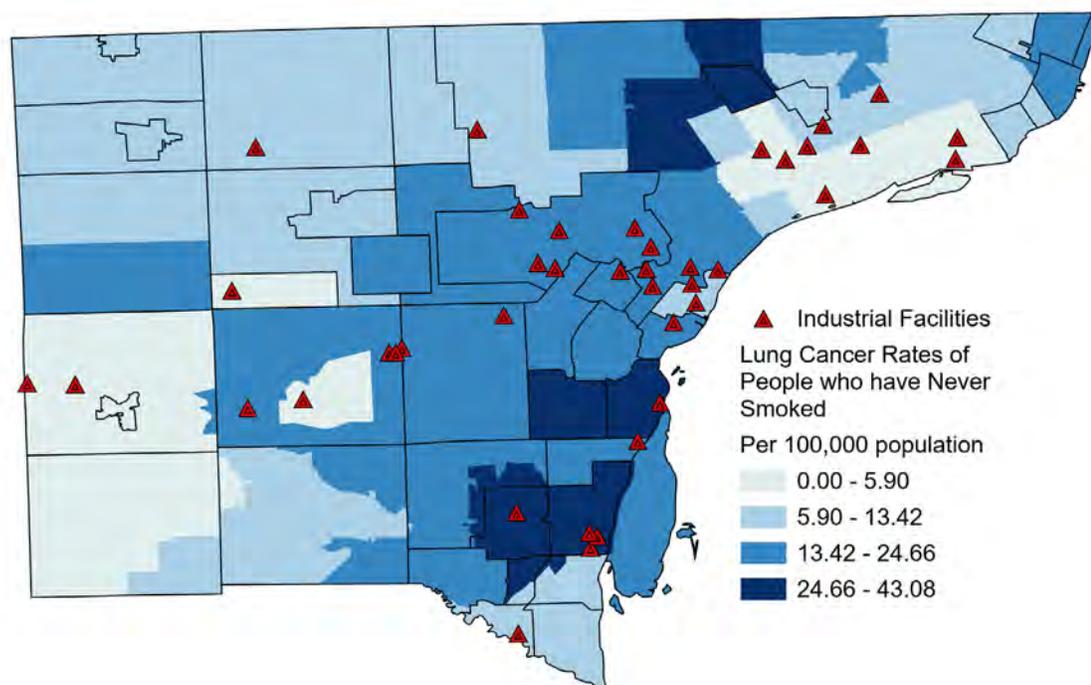


FACULTY FOCUS

Sue Grady

PROFESSOR

Hello Everyone – we have had a real winter this year in Michigan! It was also a busy year publishing research on lung cancer, specifically “Identifying and Reducing Lung Cancer Disparities in Wayne County” a Henry Ford Health + Michigan State University Health Sciences funded project. This last year our team learned more about the effect of air pollutants on lung cancer among people who never smoked, which was very important. We also learned that the time between exposure to certain air pollutants and lung cancer development was shorter than what was previously known. This work entitled *Lung Cancer Clusters and Air Pollution Exposure in Wayne County, Michigan: An Autoregressive Distributed Lag Model* won a first-place award in the Cancer Epidemiology, Prevention and Control Section at Henry Ford Health. The geographic perspective that we are bringing to study the spatial patterns and underlying processes of lung cancer is critically important. Myself and my students in health and medical geography are proud of the training we are promoting in the Department of Geography, Environment, and Spatial Sciences and we thank you for your continued support. Wishing you well from the Global Health and Medical Geography Lab!



European Funds and Agricultural Change in Romania

ELIZABETH MACK AND GEOFFREY HENEGBRY



Professor Liz Mack and group of students from Ovidius University enjoying a field of sunflowers in bloom. Photo: Elizabeth Mack

Summer 2025 wrapped up three years of fieldwork in Romania for a project entitled “Institutional Forcings on Agricultural Landscapes in Post-Socialist Europe: Diachronic Hotspot Analysis of CAP Influences on Agricultural Land Use in Romania 2002-2024,” funded by NASA’s Land Cover/Land Use Change program. Upon entry to the European Union in 2007, Romania was subject to the regulations and incentives of the Common Agricultural Policy, analogous to the U.S. Farm Bill. With collaborators from Ovidius University of Constanța (OUC), our research explores the patterns and processes of agricultural land cover change. The project originated during OUC professor Igor Sîrodoev’s Fulbright Fellowship at MSU from December 2021 to June 2022. Since Romania is a large country (92K sq mi or 238K sq km), the three field campaigns were focused on different agricultural regions.

In year one, we collected data from the eight southern counties along the Danube. Year two focused on four counties in the west, bordering Ukraine, Hungary, and Serbia. In 2025, we concentrated on the eastern counties bordering Moldova. We deployed two groups during each field season.

Elizabeth Mack co-led a group of students from Ovidius collecting household survey data about agricultural practices, perceptions, and experiences. These students were mostly Geography majors (Geography is a very popular major in Romania!). These field campaigns offered

them the opportunity to interact with local people and learn about the landscapes and agricultural practices across their country.

The field crop survey team was led by Geoff Henebry, professor in the Department of Geography, Environment, and Spatial Sciences and the Center for Global Change and Earth Observations (CGCEO). They drove along field boundaries, capturing geotagged photos and crop information to later link with remote sensing time series. They succeeded (mostly) in not getting stuck in muddy fields. In this project’s no-cost extension year, we are working on a series of articles to report our findings.



Igor Sirodoev, Geoff Henebry, and Monika Tomaszewska enjoying a field of lavender in bloom. Photo: Geoffrey Henebry

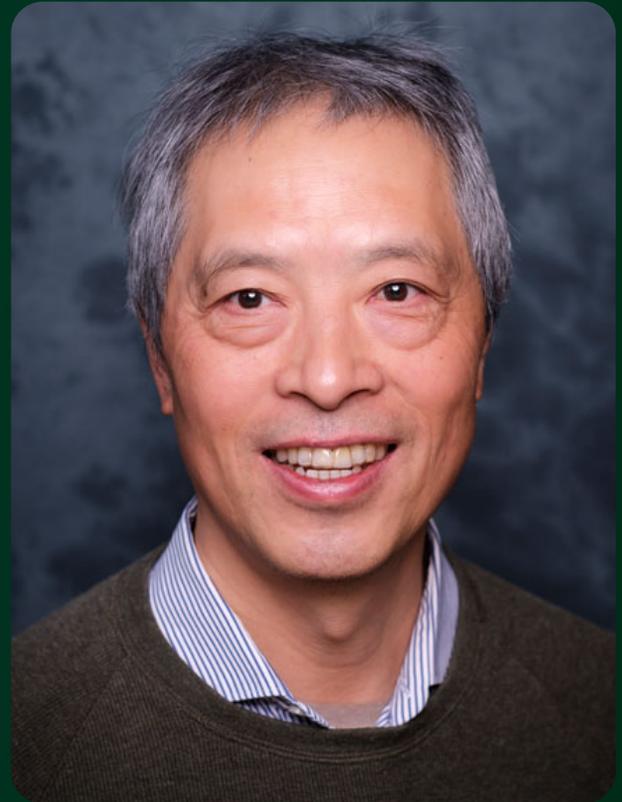
Jiquan Chen named University Distinguished Professor

The Department of Geography, Environment, and Spatial Sciences congratulates Dr. Jiquan Chen on being named a University Distinguished Professor in recognition of his outstanding achievements in teaching, research, and public service. The recognition is among the highest honors that can be bestowed on a faculty member by the university. Those selected for the title have been recognized nationally and internationally for their exceptional teaching, outstanding record of public service, and scholarly and creative achievements.

Dr. Chen is a native of Shanxi in Northern China. He received his undergraduate education in grassland ecology from Inner Mongolia University, an M.S. in forest ecology from the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and a Ph.D. in ecosystem Analysis from the University of Washington. His postdoc training was in stream ecology and ecosystem management. He was a Bullard Fellow at Harvard University and was on the faculty at Michigan Tech University (1993-2001) and the University of Toledo (2001-2014).

His research and academic instruction programs focus on ecosystem processes and their interactive feedbacks to the biophysical and human forcing, including community ecology to 3-D canopy structure, forest fragmentation, edge effects, riparian zone, conservation biology, landscape ecology, micrometeorology, and biophysics. His current research lies in the coupled effects of global climate change and human activities on terrestrial ecosystems, global change ecology, bioenergy, carbon/water fluxes, and biophysical modeling.

Dr. Chen is a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and a fellow of the Ecological Society of America (ESA). He is also the editor-in-chief for Ecological Processes



(Springer Nature) and has a book series on Ecosystem Science and Applications (HEP & MSU Press). He is the founder and the chief scientist of the US-China Carbon Consortium (USCCC). He enjoys Thai Chi practice and Buddhist meditation. He is also a member of the Ecology, Evolutionary Biology, and Behavior (EEBB) Graduate Program and the Environmental Science & Policy Program (ESPP).

Dr. Chen was awarded a 2025 American Association of Geographers (AAG) Distinguished Scholarship Award in recognition of his transformative impact on geography and environmental science. He was also awarded the Scientific Achievement Award by the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) in 2024 in recognition of his advancement of science and his promotion of international cooperation in all fields



Provost Laura Lee McIntyre, Ph.D. confers the title of University Distinguished Professor on Dr. Jiquan Chen to recognize distinguished achievement in teaching, research, and public service, during a reception on November 20, 2025.

of research related to forestry. The Scientific Achievement Award is the highest honor bestowed by IUFRO every five years and is presented for research results published in scientific journals, proceedings of scientific meetings or books, or appropriate patents or other relevant evidence that demonstrates the importance of the scientific or technical achievement to the advancement of regional or world forestry or forest research.

A reception to honor Dr. Chen and other newly designated University Distinguished Professors was held on November 20, 2025.



[Watch a video produced by the Michigan State University Office of the Provost highlighting Dr. Chen's achievement's in teaching, research, and public service.](#)

HONORS & AWARDS



David Roy makes list of Most Highly Cited Researchers for seventh recurring year

Professor David Roy, professor in the Department of Geography, Environment and Spatial Sciences and director of the Center for Global Change and Earth Observations, was one of eight researchers and professors from Michigan State University who have been recognized in the “2025 Highly Cited Researchers” list, a ranking organized annually by Clarivate Analytics. The global list recognizes scientists who have offered expertise and significantly influenced their respective fields of research. The list aims to recognize contemporary researchers with “significant and broad influence,” who are among the authors of papers that are in the top 1% in their field by number of citations and are further selected as exemplifying excellence and integrity in their work. This year’s list, announced recognized 6,868 individuals. Of the world’s population of scientists and social scientists, highly cited researchers are one in 1,000. Professor Roy has been recognized in the Geosciences category each year since 2019.



Igor Vojnovic receives the 2025 Scott Cummings Distinguished Editorial Service Award

Professor Igor Vojnovic was selected as a recipient of the 2025 Scott Cummings Distinguished Editorial Service Award by the Urban Affairs Association (UAA). This award was established in April 2021 to highlight the significant contributions made by individuals in service to UAA’s publications. The Award Committee recommended Dr. Vojnovic in recognition of his service as the editor of the *Journal of Urban Affairs* (JUA), noting that Dr. Vojnovic has enabled the journal to thrive and grow, both in terms of issues per year and in terms of the interdisciplinary and global perspective of urban affairs. This has been achieved through, among other things, the establishment of a new editorial board and an increase in the number of associate editors. He also helped advance the next generation of scholars using the Publishing Fellows Program hosted by the JUA Scholar Development Editors. As a result, the impact factor has risen dramatically, and JUA has become a destination for urban scholarship.



Jeff Wilson earns spot on 2025 list of Michigan Notable Books

Through its engaging illustrations and stories of seven families struggling against mortgage foreclosures, Jeff Wilson earned a spot on the 2025 Michigan Notable Books list with his recent book, *We Live Here: Detroit Eviction Defense and the Battle for Housing Justice*. Each year, the list features 20 books published during the previous calendar year that are about the Great Lakes, set in Michigan or the Great Lakes, or written by a Michigan author. Selections include a variety of genres, both fiction and nonfiction, that appeal to many audiences and explore topics and issues close to the hearts of Michigan residents. The books and authors were honored at the annual Night for Notables reception on Saturday, April 26, 2025, at the Library of Michigan.



Madison Moore earns fellowship at MD Anderson Cancer Center

Madison Moore, a recent M.S. graduate, was awarded the Cancer Prevention Research Training Program (CP RTP) summer fellowship at the MD Anderson Cancer Center. She was one of the few graduate students in the program, as well as the only Geography student. The CP RTP offers competitive fellowships designed for undergraduate students, graduate students, health professional students, and postdoctoral trainees, providing them with unparalleled opportunities to advance their careers in cancer prevention research. Fellows gain in-depth knowledge and practical experience through a structured curriculum and direct mentorship from leading investigators. For her project, Madison investigated the association between perceived neighborhood safety and healthy lifestyle behaviors in order to develop interventions that prevent cancer at the neighborhood level.



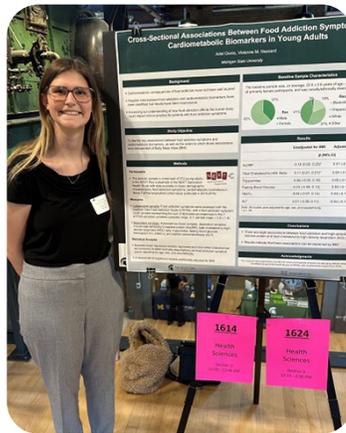
Yuean Qiu awarded 2025 NASA FINESST Graduate Fellowship

Yuean Qiu was awarded a prestigious Future Investigators in NASA Earth and Space Science and Technology (FINESST) Fellowship award. Qiu is a Ph.D. student advised by Professor David Roy. Each year, NASA accepts proposals for graduate student-designed research projects that contribute to NASA science, technology, and exploration goals. Qiu's proposal, *A Global Digital Twin for Forecasting Future Fire*, was one of 54 proposals selected from 539 submitted. His project is designed to enhance the accuracy of forecasting future fire occurrences, which is crucial for developing effective fire management and land-use policies, creating better physical models, and improving scientific understanding. The award includes nearly \$150,000 in total funding and got underway in November 2025.



Shahel Izadi wins S.C. Lee Paper Competition and earns Meyer Travel Grant

Shahel Izadi was the first-place winner of the S.C. Lee Paper Competition, held annually by the MSU Asian Studies Center. In honor of the late Professor Shao-Chang Lee, an advocate of U.S.-East Asia relations, the S.C. Lee Endowment sponsors students with outstanding accomplishments in Asian studies by awarding scholarships and paper prizes. Izadi was also awarded a Claffey Meyer International Travel Grant from the MSU Graduate School. This award provides financial assistance to domestic students who intend to travel to developing countries for the purpose of providing technical assistance, participating in research, or engaging in service. The intent is for students to work towards discovering and implementing solutions in response to urgent human needs and to encourage careers in international development teaching, research and practice.



Ariel Ooms earns GTU Rechlin Scholarship

Undergraduate geography major Ariel Ooms received the Rechlin Scholarship from Gamma Theta Upsilon (GTU), the international honor society in the discipline of Geography. The Rechlin Scholarship is awarded to a junior or senior with either career or graduate school aspirations. The amount awarded is \$1000. Ooms planned to use the scholarship to contribute to tuition costs to help her focus more on her geography courses and current research projects to give her more experience and bolster her graduate school applications. Dr. Alice T.M. Rechlin Perkins served GTU in many capacities, spanning from 1973 through 1988 and served the Association of American Geographers, the American Geographical Society, and the National Council for Geographic Education in leadership positions.



Eleanor Pugh named Boren Scholar

Eleanor Pugh earned a Boren Scholarship to study abroad in Kazakhstan. The Boren Awards program funds the intensive study of language and culture abroad for U.S. undergraduate and graduate students. Scholars have the option to either apply for a Regional Flagship Language Initiative or select/design their own study program. Pugh is an Honors College second-year student majoring in international relations in James Madison College, Russian in the College of Arts and Letters, and geography in the College of Social Science, with minors in Russian and Eurasian studies, Muslim studies, and economics. Pugh is also a part of the Social Science Scholars Program.

2025 GEO-GTU AWARDS



Kyle Evered, William Romanyk, Mehmet Eroğlu, Stephen Pryzbylinski, and Ryan Shadbolt

James Potchen Awards in Geography for Graduate and Undergraduate Students (Undergraduate and Graduate Student of the Year) William Romanyk and Mehmet Eroğlu

The E. James Potchen Award was established in 2008 by Harm de Blij to fund yearly cash awards for one outstanding graduate and one undergraduate student who has demonstrated exceptional leadership and service to the Department of Geography, Environment, and Spatial Sciences. The students will have shown remarkable professionalism and leadership skills in activities within both the department and the campus community. The recipients for 2025 were William Romanyk (Undergraduate Student of the Year) and Mehmet Eroğlu (Graduate Student of the Year).



William Romanyk and Ryan Shadbolt

College of Social Science Outstanding Senior in Geography William Romanyk

The Department of Geography, Environment, and Spatial Sciences at Michigan State University proudly announces that William Romanyk was named the 2025 MSU College of Social Science Outstanding Senior in Geography.

Marjorie and Lawrence Sommers Geography Graduate Fellowship for International Research & Travel **Sahel Izadi and Vincent Ogweno**

The Marjorie and Lawrence Sommers Geography Graduate Fellowship is awarded annually to Master's or Ph.D. students to support international research and travel within the next 12 months. Congratulations to our 2025 recipients, Sahel Izadi and Vincent Ogweno.



Nathan Moore, Vincent Ogweno, Sahel Izadi, and Ryan Shadbolt

Michael A. Graff Dissertation Completion Award **Katie Brown**

Graduate students at the Ph.D. level in Geography who have successfully defended their proposals are eligible to apply for this award. The award is meant to provide financial support towards completion of their dissertation research. Congratulations to our 2025 recipient, Katie Brown.



Katie Brown and Amber Pearson

Owen Gregg Endowment for Global Climate Change Research **Yuean Qiu**

The Owen Gregg Endowment was established in 2012 to support global climate change science research in the MSU Department of Geography. Undergraduate majors or graduate students in Geography pursuing studies that make significant progress toward understanding climate change, its causes, and impacts are eligible to apply. Congratulations to our 2025 recipient, Yuean Qiu.



David Roy and Yuean Qiu

Jay R. Harman Undergraduate Scholarship in Geography **Ariel Ooms**

Jay R. Harman spent his entire career on the faculty of the Department of Geography at MSU and was strongly committed to field instruction and organized field trips to a wide variety of environments. Undergraduate students with a degree program in Geography with minimum cumulative credits of 56, and a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 are eligible to apply. Congratulations to our 2025 recipient, Ariel Ooms.



Ariel Ooms and Erin Bunting



Ariel Ooms and Ryan Shadbolt

2024 de Blij Scholar Ariel Ooms

Instituted in 2013 by Harm de Blij and supported by other major donors, the de Blij Scholars awards scholarships to promising first-year students who choose to major in Geography at Michigan State University. Congratulations to our 2024 de Blij Scholar, Ariel Ooms. We also congratulate our 2025 de Blij Scholars Ainsley Bielman, Leea Hawkins, and Taylor Lee who will be honored at our 2026 Geography Awards and Graduation Celebration.



Alan Arbogast and David Pruder

Dr. Harold A. "Duke" Winters Memorial Fellowship in Environmental Geography David Pruder

The Dr. Harold A. "Duke" Winters Memorial Fellowship is awarded to an outstanding student at the Junior level, majoring in Environmental Geography. Dr. Winters was a leader in physical geography and geomorphology, with a special interest in the depositional landforms associated with continental glaciation. Environmental Geography majors at the Junior level with a minimum GPA of 3.0 are eligible. Congratulations to our 2025 Duke Winters recipient, David Pruder.



Ariel Ooms, Harry Fuess, Riley Burns, Tessie Braga-Henebry, William Romanyk, Ryan Shadbolt, Ashton Shorridge, Kylie Hunter, David Pruder, and Yaseem West.

2025 Gamma Theta Upsilon Initiates

Congratulations to our 2025 Gamma Theta Upsilon members: Riley Burns, Harry Fuess, Kylie Hunter, Ariel Ooms, David Pruder, and Yaseem West. Gamma Theta Upsilon (GTU) is an international honor society in geography. Gamma Theta Upsilon was founded in 1928 and became a national organization in 1931. Members of GTU have met academic requirements and share a background and interest in geography. GTU chapter activities support geography knowledge and awareness.



Mehmet Eroglu, Madison Moore, Leo Baldiga, Katie Brown, and Ashton Shorridge

Graduate Research Presentation Competition

Congratulations to the winners of the 2025 Graduate Research Presentation Competition organized by the The Geography Graduate Group (Triple G).

First Place: Mehmet Eroglu

Second Place: Madison Moore

Third Place: Leo Baldiga and Katie Brown



You are cordially invited to the:
2026 Annual Awards & Graduation Celebration

May 1, 2026 | 9:00 - 10:30 AM
Ag Hall Atrium (aka Morrill Hall)
446 W. Circle Dr., East Lansing, MI 48824
Join us for a light breakfast before the ceremony. RSVP requested.

GRADUATE NEWS



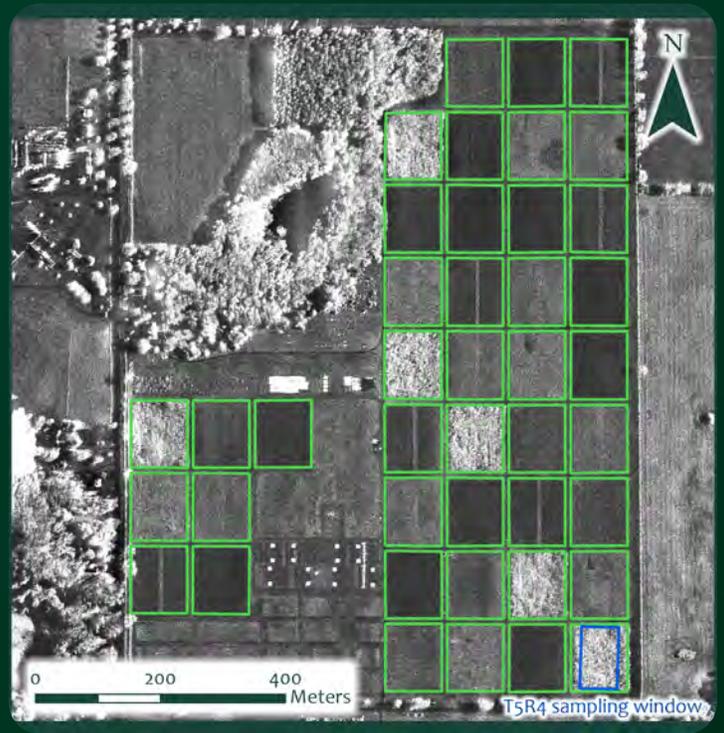
ABEER ALANAZI

Can geography determine energy sovereignty? My Ph.D. research explores how a nation's capacity to control energy systems, spanning resources, economics, politics, culture, and technology, is influenced by spatial factors during renewable transitions. This research is conducted under the supervision of my advisor, Dr. Nathan Moore.

My interdisciplinary study, which bridges geography, energy policy, and sustainability studies, focuses on Saudi Arabia as a case study. I examine how geographic conditions either facilitate or impede energy sovereignty objectives. Through advanced geospatial analysis, employing tools such as ArcGIS Pro, Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis, R statistical software, and Power BI, I assess whether location-specific factors bolster or obstruct autonomous control over energy systems. The analysis incorporates satellite data on solar radiation, terrain characteristics, frequency of sandstorms, proximity to infrastructure, and strategic export positioning.

By situating Saudi Arabia within the context of global energy sovereignty patterns, this research elucidates how regulatory frameworks, energy accessibility, and investment interact with geographic potential to either enhance or diminish sovereignty. This approach offers methodological frameworks for comprehending energy sovereignty transitions in petroleum-dependent economies as they navigate shifts from reliance on fossil fuels to renewable systems.





DILLON HALLER

Growing up in Central Missouri, I saw how former agricultural land – like that in my own backyard – had grown thick with eastern red-cedar, a native species. Novel vegetation assemblages like these cedar thickets on former agricultural lands result from land management practices, such as fire suppression. I'm focusing my thesis research, which I expect to complete this April, on investigating how I can use remote sensing and machine learning to reliably detect differences in land cover based on whether a piece of land has been in recent agricultural use. This approach could help address challenges in mapping land cover on an annual basis and improve our understanding of land cover dynamics.

As a research assistant, I spent much of the past year working with very high-spatial resolution radar image series to track crop phenologies and to explore how lacunarity, a concept from the world of fractal geometry, might detect leaf-out in woody vegetation. I made regular visits to MSU's Kellogg Biological Station over the spring and summer of 2025 to make field observations to support the research. I had the opportunity to present this research at the American Geophysical Union (AGU) Annual Meeting in New Orleans in December.





RACHEL LAU

I am a second-year Ph.D. student in the Coastal Processes and Geomorphology Lab here in the GEO Department. My research focuses on understanding

how sediment dynamics and landscape characteristics shape wetland vegetation across the Great Lakes. These wetlands are incredibly important ecosystems, especially for the services they provide, such as carbon storage. By figuring out how and why they change over time, we can better understand how these ecosystems function and how resilient they may be in the future.

Studying the Great Lakes has been especially interesting to me because I grew up in the tropical city-state of Singapore, where the environment is entirely different. Moving to Michigan has been a big transition, particularly adjusting to the cold winters, but it has also been exciting to experience life in a place so different from home! So far, living and conducting research here has definitely deepened my appreciation for the uniqueness and importance of the Great Lakes in this region.

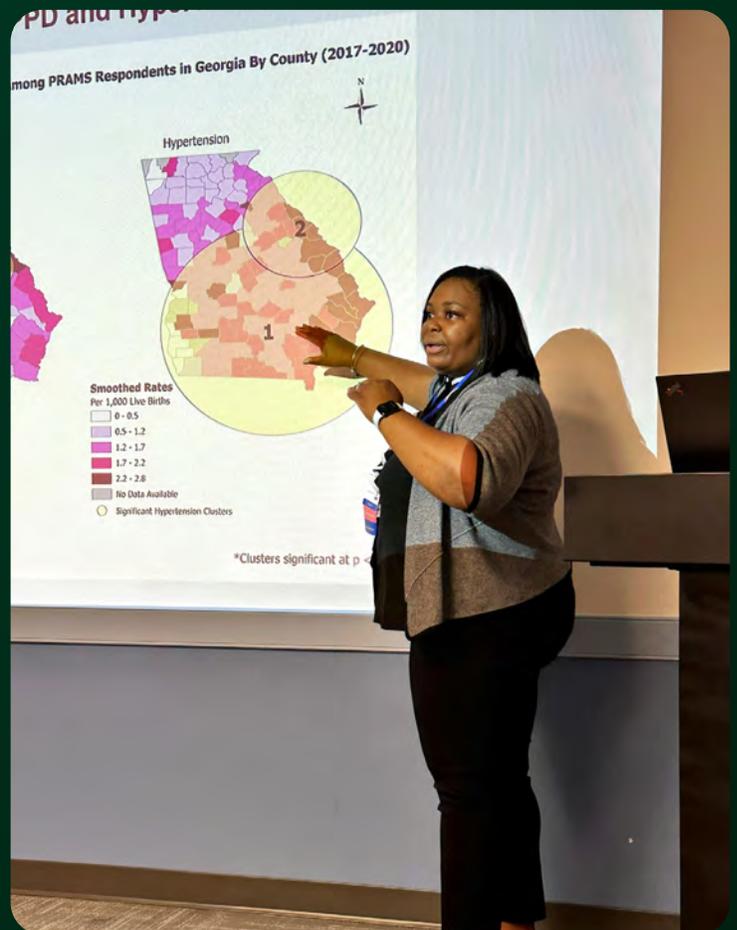
A lot of my work involves remote sensing. With rapidly improving satellite imagery and processing techniques, we can now study environmental change at scales that were not possible before. Keeping up with these tools is a constant learning process. But despite all the technology, field data is still essential – and honestly, it's one of the most enjoyable parts of the research. Fieldwork usually means drone flights, collecting sediment cores, and surveying elevations with GPS systems. Summer and early fall are the best seasons for it, and the work has taken me to places across Michigan that I never would have visited otherwise. This past summer and fall were especially productive and rewarding. I was able to gather important preliminary datasets, take some beautiful photos, and spent long days outdoors with supportive lab mates who make the hard work fun. I'm already looking forward to warmer weather and getting back out into the field again this coming spring!



I am in my second year of the Dual Ph.D. program in Geography and Environmental Science & Policy at Michigan State University, advised by Igor Vojnovic (Chair), Sue Grady, Ashton Shortridge, and Courtney Carignan. Over the past year, my research has focused on drinking-water quality and public health in Detroit, using GIS and spatial epidemiology to examine how chemical contaminants and infrastructure inequities shape urban neighborhood risk and health patterns in minoritized communities.

In March 2025, I received the Water Resources Specialty Group Best Research Award at the American Association of Geographers Annual Meeting, which reinforced my commitment to water-focused scholarship. In summer 2025, I was selected as a fellow in the Yale Environmental Fellows Program, an experience that strengthened my approach to community-centered research and applied impact. That same summer, I served as a research advisor for the Summer Research Opportunities Program (SROP), mentoring students as they refined research questions, worked through data, and shared their findings through research papers and short presentations. In August 2025, I was accepted into the National Science Foundation WaterCube NRT Fellows program, which expanded my interdisciplinary training and collaborations across water science, geography, public health, and policy. In December 2025, I was honored to receive the Alliances for Graduate Education and the Professoriate (AGEP) Scholar Award, providing meaningful support for my research and professional development.

More recently, I was grateful to receive the 2026 Community Engagement Award, which reflects the values that guide my work: scholarship that stays connected to communities and the questions they are living with. I am also honored to have been invited to return as a second-year fellow with the Yale Environmental Fellows Program and to serve as the Lead Research Advisor for SROP in summer 2026.



CLUBS & COMMITTEES

GEOGRAPHY GRADUATE GROUP (TRIPLE-G)

BY: LEO BALDIGA

The Geography Graduate Group, or Triple-G, is a student organization that represents the interests of graduate students, who serve important roles in the geography department as instructors and research assistants as they work towards their degrees.

Graduate students also play a vital role in department and university governance. In 2025, Triple G members have served on diverse committees across the university, including the Council of Graduate Students (COGS), the Graduate Employees Union (GEU), Supporting Women in Geography (SWIG), the Dean's Student Advisory Council (DSAC), the Asian Studies Center Advisory Board, the Environmental Science and Public Policy Student Leadership Council (ESPP-SLC), and the department's Space Force Committee. Our members have also served on hiring committees and regularly attend faculty meetings to relay pertinent information about changes to the graduate program to the rest of the graduate students.

With the support of our Graduate Program Director, Dr. Elizabeth Mack, we have initiated regular meetings to strengthen communication between faculty and the graduate community. We also frequently work with members of the department's Graduate Relations Committee to organize professional development events on a range of topics that prepare students for the job market ahead of graduation.

Community and social events are a very important aspect of maintaining a vibrant and inclusive academic environment. As such, Triple G members are active on the department's Community Building Committee, frequently planning movie nights, monthly coffee hours, potlucks, and social outings to help us all connect and unwind. Additionally, the community building committee engages in community service, having hosted several food preparation nights to donate to Haven House, a local foundation that supports homeless families with hot meals and temporary shelter.

We thank the GEO community for all your support and look forward to another great year! GO GREEN!

▼ *Members and friends of Triple-G enjoying a break from their studies with a day on the sledding hill.*



GEOGRAPHY CLUB

BY: ARIEL OOMS

Over the course of the past year, the MSU Geography Club has gathered over thirty new members who attend the club's regular biweekly meetings on Tuesday evenings in the Geography Building. At these general meetings, the club has held trivia competitions where teams raced to fill out blank maps of continents the quickest, answer questions in Jeopardy and Family Feud style games, and pinpoint exactly where they were in the world while playing Geoguessr.

The club has held several craft nights, including making maps out of salt dough and painting pumpkins. Several members headed to Uncle John's Cider Mill to enjoy the fall season and find their way out of a corn maze.

Over the past two semesters, Geo Club has collaborated with several other Michigan State University Clubs. In March, the Urban & Regional Planning Student Association (URPSA) hosted a city planning event where each team competed to build the best city that was effective at solving the assigned challenges. In October, Geo Club members teamed up with Forestry Club students to complete a geocaching course in Toumey Woodlot near South Campus. The MSU Quiz Bowl team joined Geo Club for our night of Geopardy!, a geography-themed version of the game show.

Supporting Women in Geography (SWIG) and MSU Weather Club have also joined Geo Club in decorating for and walking in the MSU Homecoming Parade in October. Alongside SWIG and Weather Club, a successful food drive was held during Geography Awareness Week in November, during which over 150 items were collected and donated to the Greater Lansing Food Bank.

During that same week, the famous MSU Rock in the middle of campus was painted by Geo Club members to celebrate the week. Geography Awareness Week was capped off by a successful fundraising event hosted by Blaze Pizza that helped the club raise money to support the club's activities in the coming years. The upcoming semester and year have even more in store, including guest speakers, nature walks, and more collaborative events with other organizations on campus. It has been a great year for the club, and we are looking forward to what comes next!

Top: The Rock at Michigan State University, painted by Geography Club members to celebrate Geography Awareness Week from November 17-21, 2025.

Middle: Geography Club visits Uncle John's Cider Mill. (Left to right) Tyler Wilson, Juan Ayala, Harry Fuess, Ty Walliser, Tristan Jones, Ariel Ooms, Simon Oszust, Ryan Nix, Ryan Petrosky, Michael Barry

Bottom: Geography Club joins the Department of Geography, Environment, and Spatial Sciences in the MSU Homecoming Parade. (Left to right) Theresa Braga-Henebry, Michael Barry, Juan Ayala, and Tristan Jones.



WEATHER CLUB

BY: HARRY FUESS



▲ *Founding Members of Weather Club. Left to right: Isabelle Ernest (Treasurer), Kiera Haver (Vice-President), and Harry Fuess (President).*

This past semester was terrific as an introductory semester for the MSU Weather Club. We were officially founded this past August, with our first meeting coming a mere 5 days later.

After our introductory meeting, we introduced a series of weather-related competitions that club members could participate in. The first was the WxChallenge, a weather forecasting competition hosted by the University of Oklahoma, where participants try to predict temperature, wind speed, and precipitation, with closer predictions earning more points. Our second competition was something that we created, a precipitation draft, where participants “draft” cities (Top 150 US cities + 1 wildcard), with total precipitation being totaled over the course of the academic year. We plan to continue with this competition into the Spring, with the ultimate winner receiving a prize.

Our preparation for, and participation in the homecoming parade provided us with a fantastic opportunity to come together to design a poster and walk with the rest of the Department of Geography and its clubs.

We hosted a guest speaker in our most attended meeting of the semester, bringing Katie Nickolaou, a meteorologist here in Lansing at WLNS, to speak about her job, the discipline of meteorology, and provide advice for anyone wanting to get involved in broadcast meteorology or related careers. The rest of our fall semester schedule revolved around seasonal events, including our hurricane jeopardy meeting at the end of hurricane season, our scary weather stories meeting for Halloween, and our frozen study session to end the year.

Collaboration was another highlight this past year. We partnered on joint events with groups including Geography Club and SWIG (Supporting Women in Geography), creating opportunities to meet new people, share ideas, and strengthen our common geography connection. We were proud to support a food drive during Geography awareness week, collecting non-perishable items to donate to the Greater Lansing Food Bank. We view this as our most important event of the year and want to commit to service and keep giving back to the community in which we live.

We’re excited to keep representing the Department of Geography well and continuing to create a community for anyone interested in the weather in the coming semester and beyond!

▼ *Weather Club’s Homecoming Parade Poster. Left to right: Evan Stowell, Isabelle Ernest, Riley Burns, Harry Fuess, Patrick Spring, Michael Barry.*



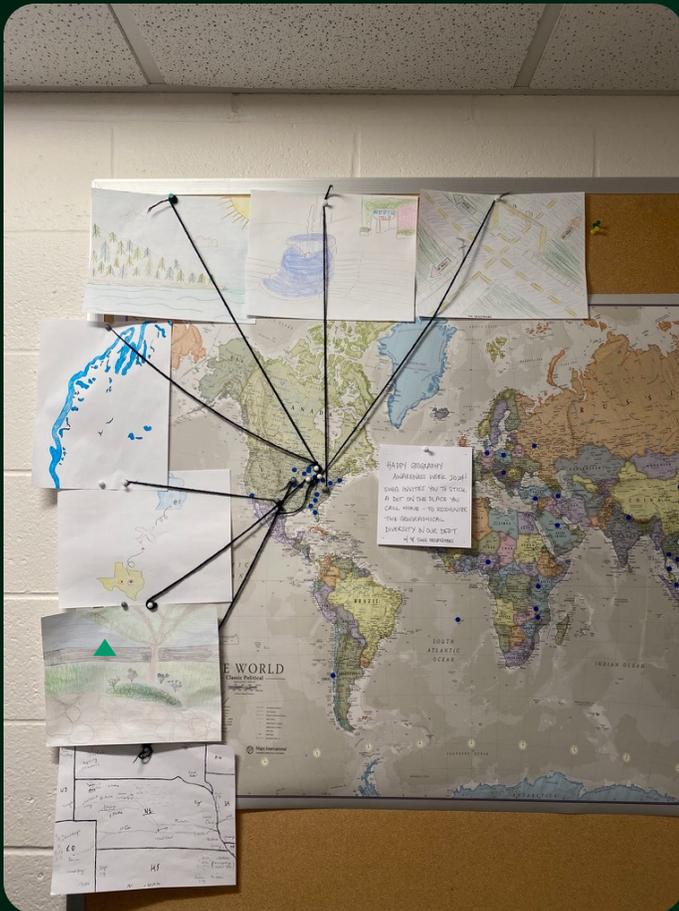
SUPPORTING WOMEN IN GEOGRAPHY (SWIG) BY: ARIEL OOMS

The Supporting Women in Geography (SWIG) Club at Michigan State University is a student organization dedicated to creating space for female geographers to meet, socialize, and learn from each other. Everyone who wants to support women in geography is welcome to attend the monthly meetings held on Monday evenings in the Geography Building. This is the first year that SWIG leadership has been transferred from graduate students in the Department of Geography, Environment, and Spatial Sciences to undergraduate students.

In the fall semester, SWIG held its first few meetings under new leadership, including a craft night where club members created maps representing a personal memory or location and then connected their own drawings to the rest of the members. The club has also held study sessions for students to come together and study as a group, offering a place to seek support, take a break with like-minded students, or focus on personal work with other geographers around to provide feedback.

Alongside the MSU Geography Club and the MSU Weather Club, SWIG hosted a week-long food drive during Geography Awareness Week. By the end of the week, over 150 items had been collected and donated to the Greater Lansing Food Bank to help those in need around the holiday season.

During the Spring Semester, SWIG will collaborate with the MSU Geography Club to create club decorations and attract new members in the Geography Building. SWIG will also be hosting craft nights, trivia competitions centered on women in geography, and inviting guest speakers to come in and discuss their experiences as women in the geography field. Everyone is welcome to attend, no matter your gender or field, to learn more about geography and how women are playing a role in the discipline. We have enjoyed being a support space for women in geography and are excited to keep bringing that energy in the upcoming year!



▲ Personal maps created during SWIG's November meeting representing where people are from or the places that mean the most to them.



▲ Cherly Showalter and Ryan Petrosky share the poster they decorated for the display case in the Geography Building.

COMMENCEMENT

CELEBRATING OUR 2025 GRADUATES

Graduate Degrees Conferred

Christopher Baish, Ph.D., (Dr. Randall Schaetzl), “Controls on the formation and properties of textural pedofeatures in northern temperate forest soils: A case study in Michigan (USA).”

Madison Moore, M.S., (Dr. Ashton Shortridge), “The association between the neighborhood retail food environment, individual characteristics, and changes in indicators of diet pre- and post- COVID-19 lockdown in a predominantly low-income, predominantly Black sample of Detroiters.”

Apichaya Thaneerat, M.S.-B, (Dr. David P. Roy), non-thesis master’s

Vasily Tolmanov, Ph.D., (Dr. Frederick Nelson), “Visible and hidden changes in the active layer above permafrost, Northern Alaska, 1996-2024.”

Undergraduate Commencement

SPRING & SUMMER GRADUATES:

Andrew Barker | BS Economic Geography

Madlyn Borton | Minor in Earth Observation & Geospatial Analysis

Emily Caguiat | Minor in Earth Observation & Geospatial Analysis

Parker Dennings | BA Human Geography + Minor in Geographic Information Science

Anthony Deschaine | BS Geographic Information Science

Victoria Dixon | Minor in Earth Observation & Geospatial Analysis

Edward Eichenhorn | Minor in Geography

Josh Elvy | Minor in Earth Observation & Geospatial Analysis

Rob Gurzick | BS Environmental Geography

Jazlyn Hagenbuch | Minor in Geographic Information Science



Welcome to our newest Spartan Geography Alumni!

Kylie Hunter | BS Environmental Geography +
Minor in Earth Observation & Geospatial Analysis

Lucas Kutty | Minor in Earth Observation &
Geospatial Analysis

Ben La Vine | BS Geographic Information Science

Jack Mannor | BS Geographic Information Science

Audrey Molnar | BS Geographic Information
Science

Corbin Paules | BS Geographic Information
Science

William Romanyk | BS Geographic Information
Science

Tyler Rybak | Minor in Geographic Information
Science

Julianna Vetula | BS Geography + Minor in Earth
Observation & Geospatial Analysis

Dominic Vento | BS Environmental Geography

Layni Wyns | BS Environmental Geography

Carter Zalusky | BS Environmental Geography

FALL GRADUATES:

Dakota Ballard | Minor in Earth Observation &
Geospatial Analysis

Joseph Bontrager | Minor in Earth Observation &
Geospatial Analysis

Theresa Braga-Henebry | BS Environmental
Geography + Minor in Earth Observation &
Geospatial Analysis

Caitlin Cherry | Minor in Earth Observation &
Geospatial Analysis

Reese Ciampa | BS Geographic Information
Science

Edward Dean | Minor in Earth Observation &
Geospatial Analysis

Emily Eickholt | Minor in Earth Observation &
Geospatial Analysis

Don Henrikson | Minor in Earth Observation &
Geospatial Analysis

Elizabeth Longcore | Minor in Earth
Observation & Geospatial Analysis

Trenten Maleport | Minor in Earth Observation
& Geospatial Analysis

Joseph Owczarek | Minor in Earth Observation
& Geospatial Analysis

Henri Radosevich | BS Environmental
Geography and BS Geographic Information
Science

Jagar Rokosz | BS Geographic Information
Science

Abigail Snelling | Minor in Earth Observation &
Geospatial Analysis

Natalie Swartz | BA Human Geography

Evan Thawngmung | Minor in Geographic
Information Science

Jack Tomer | Minor in Earth Observation &
Geospatial Analysis

Morgan Wilber | Minor in Earth Observation &
Geospatial Analysis

Allison Wise | Minor in Earth Observation &
Geospatial Analysis

ONGEO-PROFESSIONAL:

Exciting Growth and Opportunities with onGEO's Professional Certificate Programs

By Dr. Yi Shi

We're excited to share several updates and highlights from onGEO's professional certificate programs as we continue to grow and evolve. Our flagship **Professional GIS Certificate** maintained strong enrollment throughout 2025, reflecting continued interest in geospatial education. At the same time, the **Professional Geospatial Data Analytics & Visualization (GDAV) Certificate** experienced steady growth, with many GIS certificate alumni returning to expand their skill sets through GDAV.

In 2025, we also began launching new versions of our GIS certificate courses, redesigned based on MSU's accredited undergraduate curriculum. One exciting milestone was the debut of the revamped Cartography course during the second fall session of 2025, which was very well received by students.

Looking Ahead to 2026

We carried this momentum into 2026 with the introduction of the new **Introduction to Geospatial Technology and Geographic Information Systems** courses during the first spring session. With expanding marketing efforts and growing interest across multiple sectors, we anticipate continued strong enrollment for both the GIS and GDAV certificates in 2026.

In addition, we are actively planning two new certificate programs: a **Remote Sensing/Drone Certificate** and a **GeoAI Certificate**. The Remote Sensing/Drone Certificate will be built on a combination of new remote sensing and drone-focused courses alongside existing offerings, while the GeoAI Certificate will feature newly developed GeoAI courses as core requirements.

Whether learners are looking to enhance their technical expertise, transition into a new career, or stay competitive in a rapidly evolving geospatial landscape, onGEO's professional certificate programs continue to offer flexible, relevant, and impactful pathways to success.

UNDERGRADUATE COURSES UPDATE:

Expanding & Improving in OnGEO
By Juliegh Bookout

Updating GEO 204: World Regional Geography

OnGEO has been busy expanding and refreshing our online curriculum to meet rising student demand and to keep our course offerings engaging, relevant, and accessible. One of the biggest developments this year was the overhaul of GEO 204, which shifted from a primarily text-based format into a fully online lecture-based course. In collaboration with the Department's Dr. Jeff Wilson, I created new video content that connects regional geography with timely global issues.

For example, the North Africa/Southwest Asia unit now includes a lecture on Iran's history leading up to and immediately following the Iranian Revolution, which helps students better understand current events, including recent protests and geopolitical challenges. The lesson also incorporates the graphic novel *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi, giving students another way to explore themes of culture, identity, and state power.

Another lecture sure to be a student favorite focuses on the rise of manga and Japanese video games and how these forms of media reflect social norms, values, and beliefs in Japanese culture. As part of the unit on East Asia, this topic is engaging and captures students' attention. You might even say that "It's over 9000!" More importantly, it provides an accessible way to examine the relationship between cultural expression and geography. (For those unfamiliar, "It's over 9000!" is a now-iconic mistranslation spoken by Vegeta while remarking on Goku's power level in the anime series *Dragon Ball Z*.)

The new GEO204 launched in Spring 2026 with 175 students enrolled.

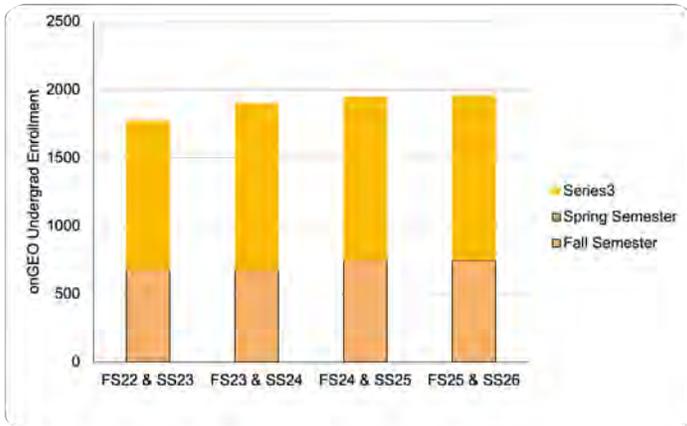
Launching ISS 205: Big Ideas in the Social Sciences

In 2025, OnGEO also developed and launched ISS 205: Big Ideas in the Social Sciences, a new online lecture-based course created in collaboration with Dr. Nathan Moore. This class covers global trade, climate change, urbanization, and other foundational concepts that help students make sense of complex global systems.

ISS 205 was created with MSU's Spartan Early Start program in mind, to be offered during the second summer session. The program gives incoming freshmen and transfer students flexible access to 100- and 200-level courses before their first semester.

For the Department, offering ISS 205 also provides an opportunity to introduce students to the discipline of geography early in their academic careers and capture the interest of students who may not have considered geography as a major. Not only was the first offering a success, but the course can also serve as a model for how we might continue attracting students and supporting early-start initiatives in the future.

The new ISS 205 launched in Summer 2026 with 48 students enrolled.



Increasing Demand for Online Courses

Finally, demand for online undergraduate courses has continued to rise, particularly during the fall and spring semesters. In previous years, the Department primarily addressed waitlists by opening additional seats during the first week of the semester. However, interest has grown enough that the Department has increased the maximum enrollment across some of our most popular offerings rather than adding capacity at the start of the semester.

Since 2024, enrollment in GEO 330: The Geography of Canada has more than doubled, going from 76 enrolled in Spring 2024 to 182 in Spring 2026. While already large-enrollment courses, like World Regional Geography and The Geography of the United States, have also attracted more students.

This shift reflects how students are choosing to balance their schedules and the value they place on flexible online learning options. As enrollment patterns continue to change, the Department's focus remains on maintaining quality while meeting student needs; we are hopeful that we can remain adaptable and in a position to meet student demand.

Revamping our Geospatial Technology Courses

By Beth Weisenborn



By the end of 2025, Dr. Erin Bunting and I had integrated the fully online and in-person versions of the Department's 200- and 300-level geospatial technology courses. Even though reimagining Introduction to Geographic Information (GEO 221 and GEO 221 Lab), Remote Sensing of the Environment (GEO 324), GIS (GEO 325), and Cartographic Design & Production (GEO 326) required over a year of collaboration, many weeks of experimentation and troubleshooting, and 70+ hours of recorded micro-lectures, we found the process exciting and fulfilling.

In addition to aligning topics covered within geospatial technology courses, we intentionally designed the courses for multiple modes of delivery and increased learner accessibility. This included incorporating more real-world case studies that feature the work of faculty, staff, and alumni, and ensuring the hands-on (lab) components mesh effectively with the lessons. We also focused on making connections between the content covered and related GEO Majors, Minors, and subsequent courses.

Looking back over the year, we were pleased to read the student and Instructor reviews we received about our newly reimagined courses. With this feedback as encouragement, we have begun our plans to reimagine both Advanced Remote Sensing (GEO 424) and Geospatial Technology (GEO 802) in 2026.

By: Phil Wernette



Our NEW WingtraOne Gen II VTOL in the field at KBS.

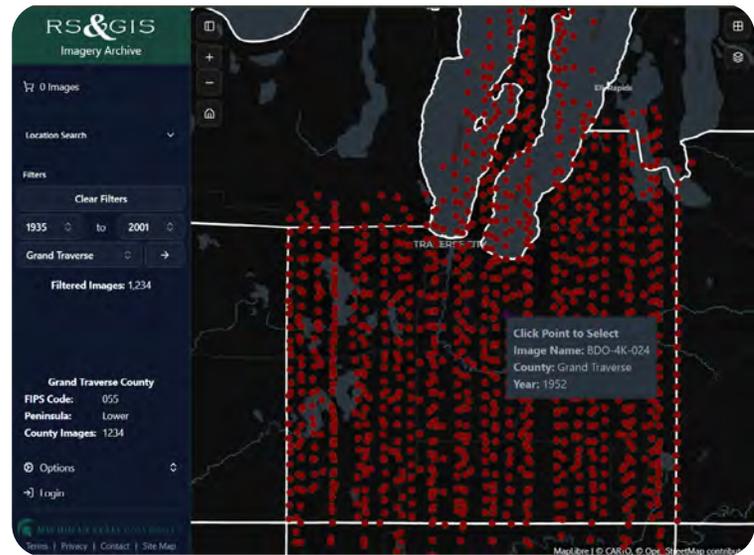
2025 was an exciting and eventful year at RS&GIS. In his first year as director, Dr. Phil Wernette helped expand our staff to support new and exciting projects, develop an internal capacity for GeoAI and machine learning, acquire new drones compliant with new U.S. Federal regulations, cultivate public-private partnerships, and develop new connections and collaborations with U.S. and Canadian partners for Great Lakes mapping.

We are excited to welcome Cameron Schultz to the team as a full-time developer. Cameron has worked for RS&GIS as a student and then a temp since spring 2022 but now joins us as a full-time team member. He has already helped RS&GIS develop an internal capacity for machine learning development, which we're excited to integrate into existing and future projects.

New U.S. Federal regulations restricting the use of the most common commercially available drone brands (e.g., DJI, Autel) took effect in late December 2025, but

RS&GIS has been strategically planning for this since the beginning of January 2025. By December, we acquired three new National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)-compliant drones: a Flyby Robotics F-11, an Inspired Flight 1200A, and a WingtraOne Gen II. These are only the beginning of an entirely new drone and sensor fleet ready for the fast-paced changes happening in technology and drone policy. Our aim is to help MSU researchers and staff continue to utilize drones in their work while also complying with rules and regulations. Keeping MSU on the cutting edge of research is vital to MSU's core as a pioneer land-grant institution.

Drone data collection has been a cornerstone of RS&GIS over the years, and 2025 was no different. Our pilots operated on projects across the state in support of a wide range of initiatives. We look forward to ensuring continued support for researchers and staff for years to come.



Above: Our Historic Aerial Image Archive has a completely new look. All available images are shown in a new open source mapping application at archive.rsgis.msu.edu.

Left: Collaborating with Flyby Robotics to integrate new sensors into our NEW F-11.

In 2025, RS&GIS received support to completely redevelop the RS&GIS Historic Aerial Imagery Archive at MSU. We are excited to announce that the new system is now active! The new system enables users to view all available imagery by location in a new web map, select images of interest, and preview them before purchasing full-resolution images through a new online cart. Use by MSU students, staff, and faculty is free for MSU activities. Visit our website for more information on how you can access this growing wealth of data.

RS&GIS began a new partnership with RMS Titanic, Inc. (RSMT) and the Center for Maritime & Underwater Resource Management (CMURM) to analyze new data and engage users worldwide, including new millimeter-scale scans of the seabed and the Titanic wreck site. The new system in development by RS&GIS will revolutionize how users engage with artifacts.

New collaborations with the U.S. Geological Survey and NOAA were initiated in 2025, enabling RS&GIS to become an active partner in a large effort to map the Great Lakes at high resolution. RS&GIS is already providing valuable geospatial analytics and data to support field efforts. This multi-million dollar coordinated project will provide new data, information, and insights to support responsible environmental management and ensure economic prosperity for the Great Lakes.

2026 is already shaping up to be a pivotal year for RS&GIS in many ways, and we're excited for what comes next! We will continue to strive to have a positive impact on people and the environment.

OnGEO offers Professional Certificates in Geographic Information Systems and Geospatial Data Analytics & Visualization

Two professional certificates

Michigan State University's **Department of Geography, Environment, and Spatial Sciences** offers two fully online, non-credit professional certificates in the exciting fields of **Geographic Information Systems (GIS)** and **Geospatial Data Analytics & Visualization (GDAV)**.

Be part of the growing industry

Geospatial technology is a growing industry. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics:

- ▶ People with geospatial skills have excellent job prospects
- ▶ The number of GIS, cartography, and photogrammetry jobs is projected to grow 6% between 2023 and 2033
- ▶ Geospatial professionals earn 1.5 to 2 times the U.S. median annual income

Expand your career options

Our **Geographic Information Systems (GIS)** and **Geospatial Data Analytics & Visualization (GDAV)** certificates develop your geographic awareness and geospatial technology skills, and expand career opportunities. Topics include geographic information; global positioning systems; graphic and map design; aerial image interpretation; geospatial analysis, ethics, and trends; geovisualizations; data analytics; spatial statistics; Python; ArcPy; and open-source geoprocessing.

GIS Certificate courses

- ▶ Introduction to Geospatial Technology (IGT)
- ▶ Geographic Information Systems (GIS)
- ▶ Remote Sensing (RS)
- ▶ Cartography (CART)

GDAV Certificate courses

- ▶ Cartography (CART)
- ▶ Geovisualization (GTIM)
- ▶ Python & ArcPy Geoprocessing (PAPG)
- ▶ Spatial Statistics (SPST)

Need to earn academic credit?

We also offer undergraduate (for credit) versions of our certificate courses to all Michigan State University students and Lifelong Learners. Let us know if you would like to take the courses for credit – we can help you plan your path.

Where do I start?

Getting registered is simple. Classes begin every 7 weeks year-round. Check out the start dates on our website and connect with us.

Get started today! Visit our website

>> <http://professional.ongeo.msu.edu>

Contact info

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Address: Department of Geography, Environment,
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We hope you find this newsletter informative and interesting. One way you can help keep it that way is to send us news about yourself. Share news about your career, family, or other things with your fellow alumni. Send an email to geo@msu.edu or a letter and we will insert it into the next issue of the newsletter. Thanks for helping make the newsletter even better.



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Launch of *Today in Geography* podcast

The Department of Geography, Environment, and Spatial Sciences is excited to announce the launch a new podcast titled *Today in Geography* during the fall of 2025. The podcast is hosted by Dr. Nathan Moore, an associate professor in the department, and is produced as part of our ongoing commitment to advancing public understanding of geography and its relevance to contemporary issues.

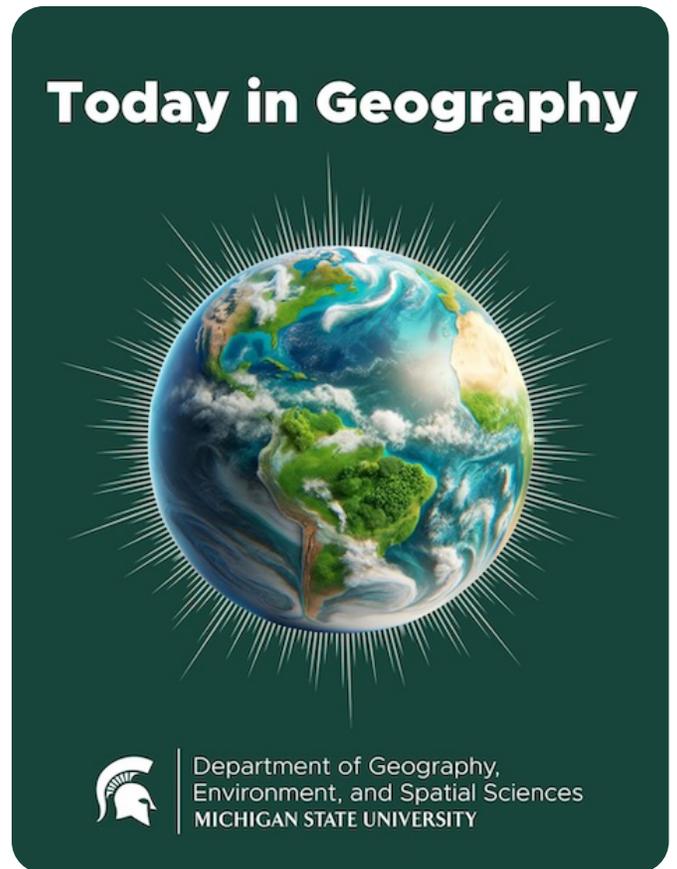
The series showcases conversations about geographic themes and spotlights events, ideas, and milestones that have helped define the discipline.

Each episode features an interview with a member of the department's community, including faculty, students, alumni, and collaborators, who share insights into their current research, scholarly interests, and contributions to the discipline. Following the interview, each episode concludes with a segment dedicated to exploring an event, commemoration, or celebration that has shaped or continues to influence the field of geography.

These spotlights include observances such as Geography Awareness Week, Native American Heritage Month, Earth Day, as well as historical milestones such as the anniversary of the launch of ArcGIS, the the wreck of the *Edmund Fitzgerald*, and even the failed launch of the first Orbiting Carbon Observatory.

By pairing contemporary research with historical and cultural reflections, *Today in Geography* seeks to promote deeper engagement with geography as a dynamic and interdisciplinary field. The podcast invites listeners to consider how geographic perspectives and spatial science inform our understanding of the environment, society, and the interconnected systems that shape the modern world.

Season 1 of *Today in Geography* is now available through the Department of Geography,



Environment, and Spatial Sciences website and on major podcast platforms, including Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and YouTube. Season 2 is currently in progress.

For updates and additional information, please visit geo.msu.edu or contact the department at geo@msu.edu. We hope you tune in often and tell your friends to tune in too!!

Alumni Advisory Board Update

After a slow couple of years, the MSU GEO Alumni Advisory Board is picking things up again in 2026! This constituent aims to connect with alumni, students and faculty to expose and create opportunities in various careers and fields. Our diverse mix of professionals connects to a large network spanning public and private sectors and a variety of disciplines that leverage geospatial technology.

You can find 'MSU Geo Alumni & Friends' on Facebook and Instagram. We'd love for you to reach out and connect! Keep your eyes open for announcements on upcoming 2026 events!

Inquiries can be directed to the board chair, Brandon Lambrix at: lambrixb2@michigan.gov.



Submit Your Alumni Career Spotlight

Help the Department of Geography, Environment, and Spatial Sciences promote the discipline of Geography! By completing a brief questionnaire about your experiences at MSU and your current and past professional activities, you can make a difference in helping current and prospective students explore the vast number of career paths available to them with a degree in Geography. See the sample Alumni Career Spotlight below and use the link to connect with us so we can share your knowledge, experience and advice with Undergraduate students at MSU!



Department of Geography,
Environment, and Spatial Sciences
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY



I design and maintain GIS applications and solutions. I leverage my spatial data analysis and programming expertise to create and develop global mapping and environmental interface applications. These are custom tools for solving real-world problems and optimizing decisions for business, government, and organizations. I have honed my skills in GIS development, and today, I consider myself a professional in the field.



EZEQUIEL MUSSAMBE
GIS Developer & Analyst

Hydrosimulatics
Haslett, Michigan

B.S. in GIS and Cartography, Class of '19

www.linkedin.com/in/ezequiel-mussambe-089b51127

ALUMNI CAREER SPOTLIGHT:
Spartan Geographers in Action

[Click here to complete a brief MSU GEO Alumni Career Spotlight Questionnaire!](#)

IN MEMORIAM

John Crossman

Colonel John Stuart Crossman, U.S. Army Retired, husband, father and grandfather died peacefully on October 2, 2025, in Olympia, Washington after a long journey into the quiet darkness of dementia.

Born October 19, 1942, in Oakland, California to Colonel Raymond Stuart Crossman, U.S. Army Retired and Barbara Ann (Bleecker) Crossman, John was a lifelong member of the military community as both an army brat and an officer. After graduating from the University of Michigan with a degree in Geology in 1964, he commissioned in the U.S. Army as an engineer and aviator, quickly earning the Airborne Ranger distinction. He flew combat missions in Vietnam as a helicopter pilot and was awarded the Bronze Star when his Huey was brought down by enemy fire. He landed the bird safely with the support of his well-trained crew and secured the area from enemy attack before enjoying his lunch while waiting for search & rescue to arrive. He went on to earn his master's degree in Geography from Michigan State University in 1970 where he met Catherine Clara Farley when she borrowed his mapping pens in a Cartography class and the rest, as they say, is history. He spent much of his time on active duty in Defense Mapping; John was Google Maps long before it existed. After a twenty-six-year army career, John and his wife retired to Steilacoom, Washington where he went on to a post-army career with a civil engineering firm followed by many years of retirement enjoying his renewed dedication to the shooting community.

Throughout his adult life, John was a nationally and internationally ranked rifle shooter. He coached many teams, clubs, camps, clinics and high school students throughout the United States and Europe. Over the years, the walls of the house filled up with pins, medals, ribbons, plaques



and trophies that represented his passion and singular commitment to the sport of competitive shooting. He also maintained membership in the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association and continued flying after retirement purely out of love for the bird. There were three things Dad just loved: the shooting community, flying helicopters and Michigan football. The only thing he loved more was his wife.

John and Catherine Crossman were married June 19, 1971, in Albion, Michigan. John is survived by his wife of 54 years, Catherine Crossman, his four children Sarah Elizabeth (Steve), Karen Lynn (James), Stephanie Cordelia, Daniel Stuart (Maja), and nine grandchildren: Evangeline, Sam, Clara, Diego, Lucy, Dutch, Virginia, Cohen and Yonaton. He is also survived by his sister, Susan Brown, of Oxford, Michigan and many nieces, nephews and friends. He was interred with full military honors at Tahoma National Cemetery in Kent, Washington on October 28, 2025.



ALUMNI NEWS



Colin (right) and his coworker (left) accepting a Special Achievement in GIS Award from Jack Dangermond (center) at the 2025 ESRI User Conference.

COLIN CUNNINGHAM, B.S. 2020

As a GIS Analyst for the City of North Las Vegas (CNLV), I work closely with my team to provide consistent, reliable GIS support and solutions to multiple city departments. As part of the Public Works Department, most of my day-to-day work involves mapping plansets and maintaining our city-wide webmap for our water, sewer and storm systems. However, as the sole GIS team for the city, I also work closely with our Planning Department to map Zoning, Land Use, Active Tentative Parcels, and Marijuana Business Licensing developments within our jurisdiction. At CNLV, we have 4-day workweeks, which allows me to spend time on weekends volunteering with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) at Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area. There, I help with canyon trash cleanups, working the information desk, and help lead interpretive public hikes with BLM Rangers. Working for unionized local government is very rewarding and my time spent at the Geography Department at MSU absolutely set me on this path to success, and for this, I am very thankful.

Harry Elliott Colestock III B.S. 1966; M.A. 1972



Graduated with BS in 1966 and added a year towards MA degree through 1967 before the Air Force requested my presence linked to my 4 years of ROTC. Spent 24 years with the Air Force in various places (Crete, USAF Academy

as an Assistant Professor of Geography after completing my M.A. degree at MSU in 1972, Taiwan, Pentagon and White House as an Intelligence Officer on Africa and the Middle East, South Korea, Germany during the fall of the Berlin Wall, and at stateside assignments ending with a busy year with US Transportation Command during the Desert Storm operation in the Middle East. After military retirement, I ended up working 18 years at the Department of Emergency Management for the Commonwealth of Virginia. This included several different positions involving planning for, responding to, and recovering from emergency and disaster events in Virginia.

My current “position” is to participate on local government committees on floodplain management and emergency management. This involves a lifetime of experiences applied to decisions on preparing for climate change and sea level rise.

While much of my academic experience focused on Africa and were critical to earlier parts of my career, I would say coursework on the physical environment have been most helpful in my current position.

I have been a “birder” for the last 10 years of my life. We joke about what was our “spark bird” — the one that got us into birding. The great spark about Geography is that you get to see everything in the world in a spatial way. I have experienced things in places that I will never forget and that have helped me develop a unique way of considering a wide variety of solutions to issues.

**AVA NAFISEH GOODARZI, PH.D. 2020
(FORMERLY NAFISEH HAGHTALAB)**

Since graduating from MSU Geography, my career has taken me from academia to applied conservation science. I began as an Assistant Professor of Geography at Kennesaw State University, where I taught courses in physical geography and environmental systems while developing my research program. Following my passion for applied research with real-world impact, I pursued a postdoctoral fellowship with the USDA Forest Service, focusing on ecosystem resilience in response to extreme events. My work examined how forest ecosystems in Puerto Rico responded to and recovered from catastrophic hurricanes, analyzing disturbance regimes and recovery trajectories across tropical landscapes.

This past year, I joined The Nature Conservancy as an Ecosystem Resilience Scientist, where I continue to bridge research and practice. My current work examines how ecosystems across different biomes respond to climate variability and extreme events, integrating land-atmosphere interactions with conservation planning. I collaborate with academic partners to evaluate nature-based solutions — from urban green infrastructure to forest regrowth dynamics — that strengthen landscape resilience under changing climate conditions. Throughout this journey, the spatial analysis, systems thinking, and landscape ecology skills from MSU Geography have been foundational to connecting conservation science with actionable strategies for protecting lands and waters in an era of increasing environmental change.



STUART PYPER, M.S. 1963

In 1957 when I graduated from high school in Roswell, New Mexico, I had printed under my yearbook picture that I wanted to “be a world traveler.” Geography was already on my mind. In College at Texas Christian University, I majored in education, history, and geography, which led me to Michigan State for a Master’s in Geography. I then enlisted as an officer in the United States Air Force where I was assigned to Air Intelligence and I ended up teaching air photo interpretation at their Air Intelligence school before serving a year in Viet Nam, still working in Air Photo Interpretation that started with classes at MSU.

When I got out of the Air Force, I returned to my civilian job of teaching middle school students both history and geography in the Denver area. My favorites were always the geography classes where I had my students explore their world in their studies. I then became a school principal for the rest of my working career.

In retirement I finally got to start doing my world travels and visited over 55 countries. During that same time, I was volunteering for an elementary school where I made weekly geography presentations for 13 years.

I am now enjoying my late 80s in a senior living community in Colorado where I still enjoy taking classes about our world and talking about my many experiences as I tell of my travels. MSU Geography has been a very large part of my life.



PHIL HATHAWAY, M.A. 1970

While in deeper retirement, there remains some 'earth-bound' activity in my daily affairs. Obstructions in the Shiawassee River are an attention magnet for this dam serial killer, as I am project manager for the removal of a former causeway.

Together with masses of woody debris, the 200-foot-wide structure constitutes a detrimental obstruction to fresh water fisheries, macroinvertebrate dynamics and safe watercraft passage. 'So long' to a dour river history relic. I serve on our water trail coalition and recently published a kayak guide with the assistance of a local MSU GIS graduate who can whip out a map in a few hours—renders my pen and ink cartography craftsmanship obsolete.

Finally, having fun Monday nights as a brew pub trivia night team member with this geographer attaining occasional folk hero status for knowing obscure earth questions, i.e., where is the world's highest point as measured from the center of the earth to a land-based peak? [Think about our oblate spheroid] Happy travels everyone!



WALLY ELTON, PH.D. 1970

Unlike my friend Phil Hathaway, I have no recent geography-related accomplishments to report. Since moving to Middlebury, VT, from Saratoga Springs in 2020, I have tried some new things. I joined the Middlebury Garden Club (for a while I was the only male member) and am now its Recording Secretary and Publicity Chairman. I also serve as a volunteer usher at our local theater. I do remain interested in geography and am pleased that the department at Middlebury College, where I once was a faculty member, seems to be doing well. About 2 years ago we purchased a seasonal place on Lake Dunmore, a glacial lake just several miles south of Middlebury, and now spend summers there. Having two homes does keep us busy! But common loons and bald eagles nest on the lake, so it is worth it. Both of us (Barbara and I) have helped the lake association raise funds to address water quality concerns. We have a small pontoon boat and a guide boat for rowing (plus a spare bedroom). I can be reached at Oldevermonter@gmail.com. Would love to hear from former geography colleagues of my era.



OWEN GREGG, B.A. 1964

We moved from Florida to Minnesota in May, 2024, and glad we did. After 24 years of “commuting” between Florida and Minnesota, we decided to reestablish ourselves permanently here in our lakeside home in Mound, MN. Enough of those long 1600-mile drives between the two locations — especially navigating through Atlanta, Chattanooga, and Nashville. Anyway, little did we expect our beautiful state and city to be overrun by ICE agents. We feel that our community is being unfairly targeted, and the two murders here in the last two weeks, totally inexcusable and tragic, to say the least. Our local news is overwhelmed.

Personally, our lives haven’t changed too much since last years’ report. I would like to suggest a good book: *The Sugar Rush* by my son Peter Gregg. He is very involved in the maple industry, publishing a monthly publication, *The Maple News*, a fun, and lighthearted take on the maple business.

Other than that, we’re toughing out a rather brutally cold winter so far. My best to the Geography Department, and especially to Dr. Arbogast, who I understand, is “retiring.” He was instrumental in my setting up the Owen Gregg Climate Change Endowment Fund and bringing CNN’s Bill Weir and “Chasing Ice” Director Jeff Orlowski, to campus to speak.



KEVIN MCKEEHAN, PH.D. 2022

I am a Senior Geospatial Solutions Developer with HNTB Corporation, one of the largest transportation engineering firms in the United States. At HNTB, I work with state departments of transportation (DOTs), transit agencies, and regional planning authorities to solve complex problems of hazard risk, travel behavior, and asset management through modeling, analytics, and data science, often leveraging AI/ML/DL technologies. For our transportation agency clients, I often model different climate hazards, such as flooding and wildfire, and determine how our complex, interrelated transportation networks are affected by these hazards, how travel behaviors change in response to these hazards, and the probability of extreme weather events and the risks to transportation infrastructure. I also perform travel demand forecasting using advanced models and platforms. For two consecutive years, I hosted panel sessions and presented on these topics and GeoAI (Geospatial Artificial Intelligence) at the AAG annual conferences in Honolulu and Detroit. Clients I have worked with include the California High Speed Rail Authority, Michigan DOT, Florida DOT, and the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority, where I was part of the award-winning MTA Climate Action Plan. I currently reside in the Cleveland area, where I was transferred in 2025, joining our growing geanalytics practice.





AVAMARIE MENDOZA, B.S. 2022

A quick update from alumni AvaMarie Mendoza, class of 2022!

After earning a degree in Environmental Geography and a minor in Cities: Environment, Design, and Society, I went on from culvert identification at MSU, to working with the National Geospatial Agency as a data analyst, and finally, to my present position as a data technician with GeoComm, where I create indoor maps that utilize vertical location elevation data to determine where a call is being made during a 911 emergency response!

It is a very fulfilling career, and I love being able to plant seeds about geography in young minds whenever I get the chance!

I also started my own 'New Buffalo Bee Committee' and hold meetings on pollinators and sustainable gardening practices locally. I plan to earn my GISP this year and continue my endeavors with the Women in GIS! I'm proud to be a part of the Geography Department legacy.



DEE JORDAN, DUAL PH.D. 2020

In 2025, Dee Jordan was appointed to the National Academies of Medicine inaugural Building Trust in Health Science Through Community Partnership and Lived Experience Action Collaborative. She also received a competitive grant from the Global Virus Network to launch a new research program in South Africa and delivered an invited lecture at the University of Global Health Equity, Rwanda. During her time in Rwanda, she enjoyed a recreational visit to Volcanoes National Park, including a gorilla trek to see the Susa family made famous by Dian Fossey.

DAVE KROMM, M.A. 1964; PH.D. 1967

In 2025 the major event for Dave Kromm and his wife Roberta was celebrating our 65th wedding anniversary. We were married September 17, 1960, and I then served two years as an Army Intelligence officer. My training in geography was an ideal fit in intelligence. We then moved to East Lansing from Maryland as I began my graduate studies at Michigan State University, where I earned my M.A. and Ph.D. My entire career was spent at a professor of geography at Kansas State University. My emphases were natural resources management and the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The photo shows my wife Bobbie and I having breakfast at a local restaurant in Manhattan, KS, after we were blessed and repeated our marriage vows at St. Thomas More Catholic Church.



JUDY OLSON, PROFESSOR EMERITA

Judy Olson, professor emerita, has kept busy in part as President of Friendship Force of Greater Lansing. It is one of about 300 clubs around the world that sponsor visits across cultures that include home stays. The most recent international club hosted by Greater Lansing was Perth, Australia. The club's most recent international visit was Switzerland, and Professor Olson traveled recently to Thailand with the Cedar Rapids/Iowa City Friendship Force club. Our hosts in Thailand treated us to an elephant rescue center visit as well as visits to sacred temples, a local school, and local markets. Friendship Force is one of the few organizations with a general clientele that include home stays and feature activities arranged by host club members.



GARY SCHNAKENBERG, PH.D. 2013 RETIRED ACADEMIC ADVISOR

Greetings from New Hampshire, Spartan Geographers! I treasure the memories of my time at MSU and cannot believe it has been six years since I worked in this wonderful Department. I have been very happy to see my talented successor Dr. Ryan Shadbolt carry on with passion and integrity.

Much of my time these days goes into the various aspects of caring for our three aging equines (one Standardbred horse, one draft, and one pony) and two large dogs. However, I have been able to continue using the discipline of geography in my life here in retirement (of course, paying attention to weather is critical with horses, and I miss chatting with Jeff Andresen!). I serve as Vice Chair of the Southern New Hampshire Regional Planning Commission, addressing a variety of issues like transportation and housing that are entirely geographic. I am on the volunteer Board of our Village Water Company. Less geographic but equally rewarding, I am President of the non-profit company that owns and maintains the beautiful Old Meeting House of Frankestown (worth a search!). I do find time to play music again as well. Best wishes to you all!



Contributions

THANK YOU

To all who contributed to the various Geography Department funds and scholarships. We are making continued efforts to increase our departmental contributions to enhance our programs and benefit students. Please consider donating to one of the funds listed below.

Please specify desired fund and make checks payable to Michigan State University.

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Geography Building
673 Auditorium Rd, Rm 116
East Lansing, MI 48824

You may make a credit card donation online at: geo.msu.edu/about/donate.html

E. James Potchen Awards in Geography for Graduate and Undergraduate Students

Established in 2008 by Harm de Blij to fund yearly cash awards for outstanding graduate and undergraduate students based on GPA, progress towards degrees, and other quality indicators such as fieldwork and research.

Geography at MSU Fund

Established in 2001 to promote the MSU Department of Geography, including related advertising, fundraising, travel, and similar expenses.

Geographic Field Experience Fund

Established in 2001 to fund student field experiences, including field trips, primary data collection, course-related field experience, transportation, and lodging expenses.

Geographic Literacy Fund

Established by Harm de Blij, this fund promotes the field of geography to students.

GTU/Geography Endowment Fund

Established in 1999 by Robert and Dorthy Thomas to fund geography-related student activities.

Harold A. “Duke” Winters Scholarship

To support graduate study in geography at MSU.

Ian Matley Memorial Fund

Established to bring guest speakers to campus to enrich the geographic education of students and faculty.

Jay R. Harman Undergraduate Scholarship in Geography

To support undergraduate study in geography at MSU.

Marjorie & Lawrence Sommers Geography Graduate Fellowship for International Research and Travel

A graduate fellowship to be awarded yearly for masters or Ph.D. students to support international research and travel.

Michael A. Graff Dissertation Completion Award

Established by Michael Graff to provide doctoral students with additional resources for travel, data collection, materials, supplies and equipment to complete research for dissertation projects.

Owen Gregg Endowment for Global Climate Change Research

Established in 2012 to support global climate change science research in the Department of Geography.

The de Blij Geography Scholars Endowment

Established in 2013 as a scholarship to be awarded to incoming freshmen who choose to major in geography.



ANSWERS

Geography Trivia

1. How many bridges cross the Red Cedar River on MSU's campus between Harrison and Hagadorn roads?

Answer: Not counting the bridges on Harrison and Hagadorn Roads, there are now eight bridges! Two separate bridges cross at Farm Lane.

2. Which Great Lake does Lake County, Michigan border?

Answer: None! It's an inland county, though with a lot of small lakes!

3. How many states have a land border with Michigan?

Answer: Three (Indiana, Ohio, and Wisconsin)

4. The closest Big Ten university to MSU is our friends in Ann Arbor. What's the second closest?

Answer: Northwestern University, 210 miles west of MSU. Ohio State and Purdue are also close.

5. Which Big Ten University has the westernmost campus in the conference?

Answer: The University of Oregon, at longitude -123.0757° . Washington is "just" -122.303200° , while UCLA and USC are much farther east, at -118° .

6. What's the biggest country completely within Europe?

Answer: Ukraine. France is second largest.

7. MSU Geography has a joint masters program with Nanjing Agricultural University in China. What great river is the city of Nanjing located on?

Answer: The Yangtze River. It's the third longest river in the world, and fifth largest by discharge volume.

Spartan Geographer

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GIVING INFORMATION

For more information on how to support students and programs at MSU Geography, Environment, and Spatial Sciences, please contact:

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OUR SCIENCE **TRANSFORMS THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE**
AND INSPIRES LEADERS