

PANTHER GEOGRAPHY

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Spring greetings from the UWM Department of Geography! As I write, we're approaching the beginning of a very welcome spring break.

Back in December, a few of us gathered at Harry's to celebrate the holidays, just as a new coronavirus strain was making its appearance. The Omicron variant did not force our classes to move entirely online again, but it did usher in a stricter mask policy. Now, as case counts have declined, the UW System has removed its mask mandate, and after spring break we'll be shifting again to a "mask-recommended" campus. The twists and turns in the pandemic saga have been stressful and challenging for all of us, but our faculty, staff, and students have navigated the changing circumstances with grace and resilience. We haven't yet had a chance in 2022 as a department to gather in person, but as the weather warms up, we're hopeful that we'll be able to find occasions for more outdoor get-togethers. We're also looking forward to upcoming events, including GIS Day and the spring Harold and Florence Mayer Lecturer, Kris Olds (Professor of Geography, University of Wisconsin-Madison).

Despite the challenging conditions, UWM geographers are continuing to do great things. One of the highlights of the spring so far has been the announcement that Associate Professor Anne Bonds has received the [2022 E. Willard and Ruby S. Miller Award](#) from the American Association of Geographers, which "recognizes members of the Association who have made truly outstanding contributions to the geographic field due to their special competence in teaching or research." This well-deserved recognition places Anne in truly distinguished company! Meanwhile, Professor Rina Ghose, along with colleagues Peter Brunzelle (Continuing Education) and John Mantsch (Medical College of Wisconsin), received a \$600,000 grant from the [Foundation for Opioid Response Efforts \(FORE\)](#) for their project, "Precision Epidemiology and the Opioid Crisis: Using Next-Generation Geospatial Analyses to Guide Community-Level Responses in Diverse and Segregated Metropolitan Regions." In addition, PhD student Jana Gedymin has received the [2021 Damon Anderson Memorial Scholarship](#) from the Wisconsin Land Information Association. Although this spring's American Association of Geographers Annual Meeting moved entirely online – meaning that none of us got to return to New York City! – several graduate students and faculty members presented research and participated as organizers and panelists.

Although we're continuing to see contraction and adjustment at UWM, there have been some hopeful signs, including a possible uptick in admission this fall. We received an exceptionally high number of excellent graduate student applicants this year, and we look forward to welcoming some new students to campus this fall. As always, we're thrilled whenever we hear news about the great things our alums are doing, and we remain proud of your achievements and grateful for your support!

All best wishes,



Ryan Holifield
Chair, Department of Geography



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College of Letters & Science

DEPARTMENT NEWS

NSF grant to advance environmental and STEM learning in Milwaukee

By Dulmini Jayawardana

We are pleased to share the news that faculty members in the Department of Geography are leading a team that received a grant from the Advancing Informal Science Learning program of the National Science Foundation (NSF) to support WaterMarks, a collaborative art/science/community engagement project based in Milwaukee. Associate Professor Ryan Holifield serves as the principal investigator for the project, and Associate Professor Woonsup Choi is a co-principal investigator. This four-year, \$2.8 million grant was awarded in September 2021, and it aims to advance environmental and STEM learning through art and community engagement and increase awareness in Milwaukeeans about the role water plays in the city and their lives.

Watermarks: An Atlas of Water for the City of Milwaukee is a public art initiative of “City as a Living Laboratory” (CALL), a non-profit based in New York. It was founded by New York-based artist Mary Miss, who is also a co-principal investigator, and it is designed to help Milwaukeeans better understand and explore their connections to social and natural environments through public art. The project also promotes stewardship of Milwaukee’s water resources. One unique feature of the WaterMarks program is a network of physical “Watermarkers,” each of which consists of a single solar-powered illuminated letter, mounted on an aluminum pole. These letters, which are selected by teams of neighborhood residents, will pulse in case of heavy rain to inform residents that they should limit water usage to avoid sewage overflows to Milwaukee River and Lake Michigan. The markers will also be Wi-Fi hotspots enabling people to connect to local water stories and exhibits digitally. There are several markers in the city already, and the first one is the marker at Acosta Middle School on 5th and Washington, with the letter “A”. The marker is also accompanied by artwork created by local artists with Acosta Middle School students. WaterMarks aims to create markers and art projects like this in neighborhoods across the city. Their vision is that these neighborhood-scale markers will serve as an atlas of Milwaukee’s water story, creating a city-scale project.



Letter “A” at Acosta

The NSF grant will support WaterMarks in its mission to increase environmental awareness and informal science learning through collaborations among scientists, artists, and residents on various activities like neighborhood walks, workshops, and public art installations. Further, markers will be installed in six diverse neighborhoods throughout Milwaukee during the NSF grant period. The grant will be devoted primarily to Milwaukee’s predominantly African American near North Side and the predominantly Latinx/Hispanic near South Side, who face the brunt of environmental and social issues, such as water contamination and inequities in access to safety, food, transit, green space, and the city’s greatest amenity, Lake Michigan.

The NSF grant has different components, including research, evaluation, and convening a community-university working group (called CULab). Holifield and Choi jointly oversee the research team, which also includes Jessica Meuninck-Ganger (Peck School of Arts), Deidre Peroff, Social Science Outreach Specialist with the University of Wisconsin-Sea Grant, and Dulmini Jayawardana, a PhD student from Geography, who acts as the graduate research assistant. The research team will focus on one of the main programming activities: neighborhood walks led by artists and scientists, in which walk participants engage and learn about their neighborhoods and various challenges they are facing by participating in hands-on activities. The research team will explore how people learn differently about their environment through these engagements with visual art and artistic practices. The research and evaluation teams’ findings will inform the creation of an “adaptable model implementation guide” that will present the methodology of WaterMarks to create a sustainable infrastructure for informal science learning and environmental stewardship that other cities and contexts could also adopt.

DEPARTMENT NEWS CONTINUED

Mapping Racism and Resistance in Milwaukee County Project

By Dr. Anne Bonds

Restrictive covenants - clauses restricting how owners and renters can use a property as outlined in a real estate deed or contract - are both ubiquitous in real estate and legally enforceable. Covenants in residential property can relate to a range of details, including the appearance and style of housing (e.g., limitations on building height) and limitations on the kinds of activities that can take place on a property (e.g., raising livestock). During the early part of the twentieth century, racially restrictive deed covenants prevented people who were not white from owning or even occupying property throughout urban and suburban areas. They were key mechanisms for promoting and maintaining the racial segregation of cities and neighborhoods. While race restrictive covenants often included language targeting a range of racial and ethnic groups – anyone not classified as “Caucasian,” a socially constructed term with shifting historical definitions - they especially targeted Black people during the first Great Migration (1910-1940), when millions of Black people moved to cities in the Northeast, Midwest, and West to seek new opportunities and to escape the racist violence that permeated the Jim Crow South.

The use of racially restrictive covenants involved the mutual cooperation of a range of parties: from real estate agents and realty organizations, private individuals buying or selling property, banks and lending institutions, and municipal, state, and federal governments that both validated and enforced their existence. It wasn’t until the 1948 decision in the U.S. Supreme Court case of *Shelley v Kraemer* that racial covenants were found to be unenforceable. Yet even after the 1948 ruling, racially restrictive covenants continued to be included in real estate deeds, symbolizing the endurance of racism in housing markets and continued efforts to limit people of color’s access to decent housing in desirable neighborhoods. It wasn’t until the 1968 Fair Housing Act that racial covenants were made illegal. Today, 54 years after the Fair Housing Act and 74 years after *Shelley v Kraemer*, racially restrictive covenants remain embedded in deed contracts, though illegal, as evidence of the pervasive racism that structured housing markets and urban development during the twentieth century.

With funding from a UWM Discovery and Innovation Grant and the support and methodology developed by our colleagues at [Mapping Prejudice](#), Dr. Derek Handley (UWM English) and I have launched a project called Mapping Racism and Resistance in Milwaukee County. Our project will not only map all the racially restrictive covenants in Milwaukee County, but also resistance to them. Our goal is not only to better understand the geography and temporality of racial covenants and how they worked together with other segregationist policies, but also how Black residents challenged and organized against them between 1910 and 1960. We hope to shed light on Milwaukee’s unique Civil Rights movement by documenting what was taking place in the decades before the historic Open Housing marches in the 1960s. This archival research has been underway since August of 2021.

Our innovative methodology involves acquiring digital access to all deed images in Milwaukee between 1910 and 1960 (1.7 million image files) – a years-long endeavor that we’ve only just achieved – converting image files to text with optical character recognition (OCR), using Python scripts to flag deeds with racial covenants, and uploading flagged deeds to the crowdsourcing platform Zooniverse for verification (in process now). Each racial covenant needs to be verified by at least 5 people to confirm the racial language of the covenant and then covenants will be geocoded and mapped. We will hold workshops throughout the community, in classrooms and with community groups, to support the development a collaborative map of covenants, in the process, teaching the wider community about racial covenants and their role in racially segregating Milwaukee County.

Those interested in learning more about the project can listen to our [Curious Campus interview](#) and those wishing to participate in community workshops verifying deeds should contact Anne Bonds (bonds@uwm.edu).



Anne Bonds and Derek Handley are working on a project, “Mapping Racism and Resistance in Milwaukee County,” that will produce a map for Milwaukee County that will show both the location of past deed covenants and the stories of resistance to restrictive housing so people could easier see the effects of covenants today. (UWM Photo/Troye Fox)

ALUMNI UPDATES

Chelsey Knuth (BA, 2018)

After completing my Urban Geography BA in 2018, I launched an Instagram account called “The Wisconsinista” that combined my passion for tourism with my knowledge of Wisconsin and its geography, both environmental and cultural.

Through sharing travel guides, hikes, tips, and local attractions, I aim to inspire Wisconsinites to embrace travel at all scales and seek out adventure right in their own backyard. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic brought extra importance to this mission as international travel shut down around the world and staying near home became the norm.

In the nearly four years since its inception, more than 13,000 Wisconsinites and Midwesterners have become a part of this online community. Through conversation and content creation promoting the beauty of the Midwest, we are collectively manifesting a positive shift in the dialogue about this region within the mainstream tourism industry that so often labels it as “boring” and ignores its value as a vacation destination.

As word of this passion project has spread, so too have opportunities to discuss it on larger platforms. I have not only received sponsorships from Wisconsin-based businesses and Midwest tourism boards to help promote their products and destinations but have also made media appearances ranging from guest speaking on Discover Wisconsin’s “The Cabin” podcast to acting in a Kwik Trip commercial!

Through it all, the driving force of my mission and brand is my love for place, space, scale, and all things geography. I am so grateful for the opportunity I had to study this in-depth at UWM and for the passion my professors had for this state that helped to fuel my own.

If you would like to follow along on my adventures across Wisconsin, the Midwest, and beyond, you can do so on Instagram or on Facebook by searching @thewisconsinista.



Chelsey at the Milwaukee Centennial Rotary Arboretum

In Memoriam - Donald “Don” Rambadt (MA, 1968)



Donald “Don” Rambadt, UWM’s first Student Body President, passed away on March 7. Don enrolled at the Wisconsin State Teachers College (now the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee) in 1952 and earned his BS in Geography and Elementary Education from UWM in 1957. He returned to UWM and earned an MA in Geography and Secondary Education in 1968, and in 1976, he earned a Doctor of Education from Marquette University. Don served 30 years in the US Army, retiring as a Colonel in 1987. Though his military service was an integral and honorable part of his life, Don’s gift and passion was education. He was a much-loved teacher at Richard’s Junior High School in Whitefish Bay (1962-1975), and Whitefish Bay High School (1975-1989), where he also coached the rifle team. He also taught Geography at UWM, Parkside, and Waukesha before settling in at UW-Whitewater.

ALUMNI UPDATES CONTINUED

Xinyu Ye (MA, 2002)



I received my Master of Arts in Geography at UWM in 2002. My thesis was titled “Intra-provincial Inequality in China under Reform”, where I learned the analytical procedure and thoughts on integrating GIS and economic geography for spatial income inequality research. During my PhD study at the joint program between the University of California-Santa Barbara and San Diego State University, I expanded my thesis study in China to a methodological framework comparing the regional inequality dynamics between China and USA. This research received a prestigious National Science Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant: Comparative Space-Time Dynamics. My research agenda in regional socioeconomic inequality dynamics has been substantially transformed in the context of new data and big data. I examine spatial inequality through the perspective of human dynamics at the finer scale such as social media data and movement data, to catalyze knowledge and action on environment and sustainability challenges in the built environment. In addition, I develop and implement open-source computational and visual analytical tools integrating heterogeneous data and methods, benefiting a large user community.

I currently hold the Harold L. Adams Endowed Professorship in Urban Planning at Texas A&M University-College Station (TAMU). My research on urban and regional informatics reflects the need driven by rapid development of big data and computational algorithms integrated with the built environment. With a total google scholar citation of 7503 (as of March 10, 2022), I am the most junior faculty with an h-index of 44 or more among all urban planning faculty members in North America. I am among the very few scholars who have been recognized for research excellence by four disciplines respectively: 1) Regional Economics: National First-place Award of Research and Analysis by University Economic Development Association; 2) Geography: Faculty Research Excellence Award at Kent State University; 3) Computational Science: Outstanding Achievement in Research Award at New Jersey Institute of Technology; and 4) Urban Planning: American Association of Geographers (AAG) Regional Development and Planning Distinguished Scholar Award. Because of my innovative research on integrating geography, planning, and computational science, I was elected as the most junior Fellow in the history of AAG, and the second planning scholar after Dr. Amy Glasmeier from MIT.

As my AAG Fellow Citation mentions, “Dr. Ye has an outstanding publication record and numerous federal grants from agencies such as the U.S. National Science Foundation, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Energy, and the National Institute of Justice to promote human-centered urban informatics, especially the convergent research across disciplines towards urban sustainability and community resilience. His interdisciplinary research and positions held in geography, planning, and computational science provide him with unique insights into the functioning of complex systems such as cities. Dr. Ye has led four different AAG Specialty Groups and served on the AAG International Research and Scholarly Exchange Committee. He is committed to help students develop the knowledge and skills in spatial data science and data analytics that are needed to identify and address the problems of today’s world”.

I received my first degree in geography at UWM, and the professional training laid a strong foundation for my follow-up success in this discipline. I appreciate the graduate assistantship from UWM Geography, which made my student visa to the USA possible. I am always grateful that UWM changed my life and career.

SHARE YOUR UPDATES!

We’d love to hear about what you are doing since graduating from the geography program.

Send updates to Ryan Holifield at holifiel@uwm.edu





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