

# PANTHER GEOGRAPHY

## LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

As I write, the fall leaves appear to be at their peak here in Milwaukee, and although the pandemic continues to affect us, things have been feeling much closer to normal at UWM. Some meetings and classes have remained online, but we're now back in person for most instructional activities and events.

We have been grateful for this return to (mostly) normal as we have welcomed a new cohort of graduate students this fall. Our newest students hail from China, Iran, Nigeria, and the U.S., and it has been rewarding for all of us to get them acquainted with Milwaukee and UWM. We have had great outings to Hubbard Park and Swing Park, and recently we took advantage of the bowling lanes in the UWM Union, currently undergoing major renovations. For several students, this was their first time bowling, an activity that has long played a huge role in Milwaukee's cultural history. After two years of virtual meetings of the American Association of Geographers, we're hoping that many of our students will be able to experience this international conference in person this spring.

As usual, exciting things are happening in the department. This fall, geography majors have a new option called the climate-environment track, which combines and replaces our former physical and environmental tracks and allows them to focus their studies on the biophysical and social dimensions of climate change. We're also excited about the growth and activity of the Alpha Mu chapter of GTU, the national geographic honor society, under the leadership of current president Sarah Ryniker. Thanks to student initiatives, we revived the honor society a few years ago, and it has once again become a thriving organization. Meanwhile, our graduate students and faculty remain engaged in an amazing range of research activities, which encompass topics as diverse as phenology, natural hazards, Covid-19, racial covenants, Muslims in Milwaukee, patterns of opioid abuse, informal science learning about urban water, and much more. We're also excited to welcome our fall Harold and Florence Mayer speaker, Professor [Heejun Chang](#), a leading expert on hydrology and spatial analysis.

We have been fortunate to remain strong and stable as a department during a time when UWM continues to face major challenges. With fewer students enrolling, the size of the university faculty and staff has continued to decrease, and we anticipate further contraction and change in the years to come. Although we unfortunately are unlikely to be able to hire new faculty or staff any time soon, we remain grateful for such resources as the [Greater Milwaukee Foundation Mary Jo Read Fund](#), which helps us recognize our most distinguished majors, supplement our graduate assistantships, and sponsor student travel to conferences and research sites. We're also happy to continue celebrating the exciting work of our alums in this newsletter, and we hope that many of you will consider sharing your stories with us for future editions. Thank you all so much for your ongoing support!

All best wishes,



Ryan Holifield  
Chair, Department of Geography



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### Contents:

Letter from the Chair	p. 1
New Students	p. 2
Revitalize Milwaukee Internship	p. 3
Millennium Geospatial GIS Internship	p.4

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College of Letters & Science

# New graduate students

## **Ahya Rezaei**

Hi, I'm Ahya, and I was born and raised in Hamedan, a city in the western part of Iran and I came to Milwaukee to obtain my PhD. I received my undergraduate degree in plant protection in Bu Ali Sina University and my graduate degree in Remote Sensing and GIS in University of Tabriz, Iran. My research interests include working with satellite images like Optic and RADAR in Phenology. I am eager to narrow these down over the following semester of my program. My personal interest is looking at the night sky.

## **Miracle Oluwasegun Mark**

Hello! Mark here, and I'm excited to start my MS journey at UWM. Although I am originally from Nigeria's Kogi state, I was born and raised in Ilorin, Kwara state. At the University of Ilorin, I earned my first degree in Geography and Environmental Management. Urban sustainability and environmental justice are two of my research interests. I enjoy playing the guitar, playing video games, watching soccer, and playing scrabble as hobbies.

## **Mathew Chidera Ugwuanyi**

Hi, I am Mathew, I was born and raised in Enugu State, Nigeria. I attended the University of Nigeria Nsukka, where I graduated from the Department of Geography with a bachelor's degree in Geography. I am excited to start my MS program in Geography at UWM. My research interests include GIS, phenology, remote sensing, and ecosystem conservation. My hobbies are playing soccer, marathons, traveling and music.

## **Saeedeh Morassafar**

Hello! My name is Saeedeh, and I was born and raised in Iran. I received my undergraduate and Master of Geography and Urban Planning from Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran, Iran. After graduating, I worked as a graduate assistant at my previous university and have experience working with non-profit organizations in Iran. I have always been passionate about expanding my knowledge in the field of geography and studying at some of the accredited universities abroad. So, I decided to move to Germany and study my second master's degree in Spatial Planning at TU Dortmund, Germany. I am so glad that I started my PhD at UWM. Pursuing a graduate degree allows me to spend my time in academia. I can collaborate with faculty members, students, and researchers in a supportive, friendly, and comfortable atmosphere. My research interest is mainly focused on sustainable development, urban green spaces, urban geography, gender studies, and health. Traveling to nature and playing sports like yoga, badminton, tennis, biking, and soccer have been my favorite hobbies during my spare time.

## **Alex John Segneri**

My name is AJ (they/them/ellos). I was born and raised in Illinois, where I have been a community organizer and educator for the last two decades, addressing issues in the interactions of social and economic justice as I have been involved in many grassroots and nonprofit organizations throughout the Midwest. My academic career has been in the social sciences and humanities. I received my master's in social justice at Prescott College in Arizona. I am enthusiastic about being part of the PhD program in Geography at UWM. My research interests lie within human geography, which examines our culture, economy, politics, and society with a critical lens on our urban landscapes.

## **Yiming Zhang**

Hi, my name is Yiming, and I am from China. It's an excellent opportunity to pursue my PhD degree at UWM. I received my bachelor's degree in hydraulic and hydropower engineering from China at Changsha University of Science and Technology. The first time I learned about GIS was when I studied as an exchange student at East Stroudsburg University in Pennsylvania. After receiving my bachelor's degree in China, I decided to explore it further. So, I went back to learn GIS at ESU and got my master's degree in Application of GIS/RS in Environmental Science. My research interests include GIS and public health. I play guitar and make vlogs in my free time!

***On October 14, 2022, geography students and professors hit the UWM Union bowling lanes!***



# Making an impact @Revitalize Milwaukee

By Sarah Vickery, College of Letters & Science

This summer, Klaudia Rixmann met a mother and son who were in desperate need of a wheelchair ramp. The adult son needed a wheelchair to get around after a surgery left him unable to walk on his own. He moved in with his mother so that she could assist with his day-to-day care. But their Milwaukee home had a series of steps leading up to the front door.

“Every time the son needed to leave the home, his mother had to collapse the wheelchair, bring it down the stairs, open the wheelchair back up, and then support her son down the stairs and back into the wheelchair,” Rixmann said. “Coming home, the same thing again. They did this every single time the son needed to leave the home.” So, she and coworkers decided to do something about it.

Rixmann is a summer intern at Revitalize Milwaukee, a nonprofit that helps low-income seniors, veterans, and disabled people in the city make crucial repairs to their homes. Rixmann encountered the organization while she was researching a project for one of her geography classes – she is double-majoring in geography and German – and was so taken with their mission that she asked the CEO if she could sign on as an intern over the summer.

“I was very clear – I don’t have any construction or building experience, so I can’t help with that,” she laughed. Instead, Rixmann has worked in the company’s headquarters, assisting with marketing, fundraising, outreach and education. She answers phone calls from home owners in distress and helps them to file applications and paperwork, as well as conducts site visits to determine what renovations might be needed.

That is a crucial part of the program, because “a lot of people have been living in their situations for years and they don’t realize it’s unsafe or unhealthy,” Rixmann said. “We had people living for a number of years without electricity, and they’ve just gotten used to that. They’ll call us about a broken stair, but not the fact that they don’t have electricity.”

On the home visits, she said, she gets to interview the potential clients and learn about them and their families. Developing that rapport helps people gain trust in the organization and helps Revitalize Milwaukee understand what repairs the home might need.

“A lot of these homeowners, all they have is Social Security. They still have to buy food and pay utility bills,” Rixmann noted. “Almost every month, they’re facing a choice of, do I buy my medication this month or do I pay my utility bill or do I skip on my mortgage? And so, they do not have the capacity to save for a \$10,000 wheelchair ramp or other repairs.”

Rixmann was drawn to geography, and urban geography specifically, because she was looking for ways to address the local problems she saw around her in Milwaukee. Lack of affordable housing and dangerous conditions like lead paint and lead pipes are issues that affect a number of Milwaukeeans, especially the city’s Black residents.

“You can clearly see on a map based on income and based on race, there are very clear lines in Milwaukee. There are huge disparities. Redlining really shaped the urban landscaping of Milwaukee,” Rixmann, who is white, explained. “Revitalize Milwaukee tries to bridge those disparities.”

But it’s one thing to learn about redlining and racial covenants in a geography classroom, and another to see them in action on the city’s streets. And it’s a lot different to learn about a problem academically than it is to solve it practically. Rixmann said one of the most valuable things about her internship has been learning to take the concepts that she’s learned in the halls of UWM and apply them to a nonprofit setting.

“I realized that you need that business side of it. You need that more realistic, technical side,” Rixmann said. “Last week, we had a ‘Block Build’ where we had to rehab 23 homes in one day. How do we organize that? What do coordination do you need, what marketing? I think it’s been awesome to learn those skills.”

And, she added, it’s been rewarding to see how she and Revitalize Milwaukee have helped to make a difference in people’s lives, even through something as simple as a wheelchair ramp.



## **Revitalize Milwaukee’s Impact**

- 3,000 homes repaired since 2006
- 400+ homes to be repaired in 2022
- \$1,880 average monthly income of homeowners
- \$22 million invested in repairs since 2006
- 25,000 hours of volunteer time invested in Milwaukee

[Source](#)

## Millennium Geospatial Internship....in his own words

What I like about Millennium Geospatial the most is that they work with their employees and help teach them some more fundamental skills about GIS. The company has offices across the Midwest from Minnesota and right here in Wisconsin. I have certainly learned how to use more geoprocessing tools that I didn't know existed, processed data at a faster pace, and got to design maps that have a real-world function. I got to have real world experience about how a geospatial company operates. Since this is a company that values its employees, time and education are big things they strive on. They also know the geography departments from UWM, Madison, and other places. So, they are very student friendly. Overall, I have enjoyed working for Millennium Geospatial and would work for them in the future.

**Richard John, Senior**  
*Geography major on the Geographic Information Science track*



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