

Appalachian State University

DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY & PLANNING

SEMI-ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

Summer '25

FINAL MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR, *Dr. Saskia van de Gevel*



As I conclude my role as Chair of the Department of Geography and Planning, I want to express my deep appreciation for the journey we have shared. During the past five years, our department has navigated global disruptions and institutional shifts with remarkable resilience, integrity, and a renewed sense of purpose. I am proud of how we have deepened our commitment to inclusive excellence, collective accountability, and a culture of evidence-based decision-making.

Effective August 1, 2025, I will become Dean of the College of Natural Resources and Environment at Virginia Tech (see article link here). Appalachian State University has been my academic home since 2008, and I carry with me enduring gratitude for the people, values, and community that have shaped both my career and my leadership philosophy. I leave the department confident in its direction and with

immense pride in all that we have accomplished together.

My approach to leadership has been profoundly shaped by those who came before me. Dr. Jim Young, who first welcomed me into the department, exemplified professionalism and fostered innovative partnerships, most notably with the National Geographic Society. Dr. Kathleen Schroeder, a pioneering leader as the department's first tenured woman geographer and Chair, modeled courageous and strategic leadership. Her enduring guidance—"Go for it. Let them say no."—continues to inform my commitment to equity, modernization, and transformative change. A person's career impact is measured not only by their accomplishments but by the enduring legacy they leave—one that inspires, prepares, and guides future leaders to build and develop their vision with integrity, courage, and a long-term strategy.

continued on next page and page 10

Dr. van de Gevel's Farewell

pages 1, 2, and 10.

Alumni Spotlights | page 5-6

Student Spotlight | pg. 8

also...

Welcome New Faculty | pg. 3

Student Research Day | pg. 3

Graduation | pg. 7

PAB Accreditation Update | pg. 8

Career Panel + Award Ceremony | pg. 9

During my tenure as Chair, I worked closely with faculty and staff to foster a departmental culture rooted in professionalism, transparency, and accountability. We have intentionally moved from a culture where the most dominant voices prevailed to one that values logical reasoning, inclusive participation of all faculty and staff, and shared governance. This evolution has strengthened our academic community and affirmed our collective commitment to student success, departmental civility, and scholarly excellence.

Among our shared accomplishments are several initiatives that have meaningfully transformed our departmental culture and operations:

- **Revised promotion, tenure, merit, and best-practice policies** to align with elevated standards and institutional goals.
- **Launched new and impactful academic programs**, including the forthcoming Online Graduate GIS Certificate (launching Fall 2026).
- **Achieved advancement to candidacy for Planning Accreditation Board (PAB) recognition** (site visit during Fall 2025).
- **Revised and modernized all departmental curricula and degree programs** to support student learning and pedagogical innovation.
- **Secured a STEM-designated CIP code** for the Geography program at the UNC system level, enhancing career opportunities for graduates.
- **Invested in targeted marketing, innovative classrooms, and department modernization**, including the development of a state-of-the-art active learning classroom and updated department marketing design in all classrooms and hallways during the past five years.
- **Strengthened alumni, donor, and prospective student engagement** through strategic advancement efforts, yielding over \$85,000 in new scholarship funding.
- **Expanded faculty and departmental recognition at regional, national, and international levels**, enhancing visibility and impact.
- **Established new pathways for student engagement and career development**, such as career panels, alumni mentorship networks, and expanded learning opportunities.



Dr. van de Gevel pictured with the graduating class of 2024. She undoubtedly made a lasting impact on every student throughout our department! More photos on page 10.

Our strategic communication efforts have been instrumental in extending the department's reach and influence: Initiated a departmental newsletter, now connecting with over 1,000 alumni and external partners.

- **Created and managed the Department Food & Toiletry Pantry**, which has provided thousands of items to students across the university
- **Maintained a long-term tradition of targeted outreach to over 500 high-achieving prospective students**, contributing to increased enrollment and heightened program visibility.
- **Led nationally recognized initiatives focused on enhancing fieldwork safety and promoting civility**, including collaborations with scholars such as Dr. Kathleen Schroeder.

Together, we have built a foundation grounded in mutual respect, shared purpose, and a deep commitment to department civility and high-impact standards. We continue to strike a balance between ambition and humility, achievement and collaboration, and innovation and accountability. That is the legacy we have shaped together.

With sincere gratitude, Dr. Saskia van de Gevel

Meet Our Incoming Faculty, **KRISTEN DE GRAAUW & JACOB WARNER**



Dr. Kristen de Graauw, a Biogeographer and Physical Geographer, received her Ph.D. from West Virginia University in 2020 and has conducted extensive research in log cabin tree-ring dating in the southeastern U.S. She also has fieldwork experience in Mongolia and across the United States. Her teaching and research interests span forest history and ecology, dendrochronology, environmental science, and interdisciplinary approaches that bridge the sciences and humanities.



Dr. Jacob Warner, a Climatologist and Physical Geographer, earned his Ph.D. from Louisiana State University in 2021 and completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. His dissertation research employed stable isotopes from short-lived bivalves (clams) recovered from archaeological sites in Peru to reconstruct past climate variability, with particular emphasis on the El Niño–Southern Oscillation.

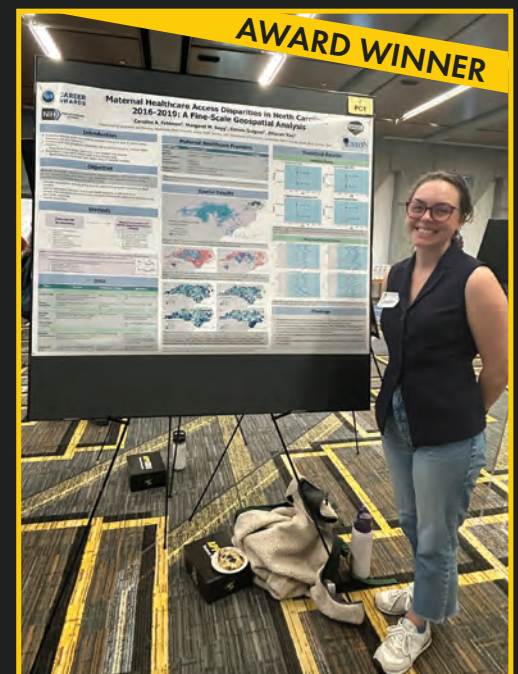
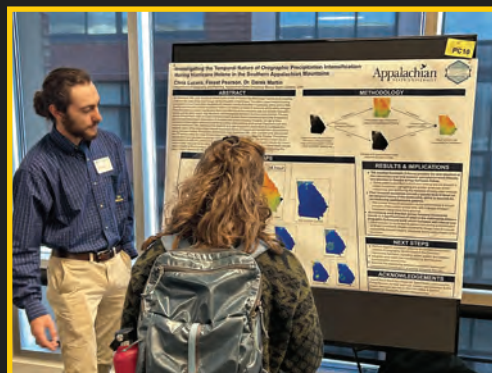
We are thrilled to welcome Dr. de Graauw and Dr. Warner to our department and look forward to the expertise, energy, and new perspectives they bring to our academic community.

GEOGRAPHY & PLANNING STUDENTS RECOGNIZED IN UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE PRESENTATION AWARDS AT ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF STUDENT RESEARCH

The university hosted their annual “Student Research Day” in April, an event that showcases research and creative activities while giving students the opportunity to hone in on their presentation skills. The top three posters for undergrad and graduate research receive distinct recognition from the University.

Three graduate students and two groups of undergrad students were selected to present their research in the form of a poster presentation to a panel of ASU faculty judges. Caroline Fehlman was one of three students recognized in the graduate posters competition for her research detailing higher rates of negative birth outcomes in areas of North Carolina that have lower access to health care. Quinn Keefer, undergrad, was also awarded for his research that found a correlation between heat waves and gun violence in parts of the West Coast and Southeast.

In total, 10 students from Geography and Planning presented their research. Faculty mentors included Dr. Maggie Sugg, Dr. William Wang, Dr. Song Shu, Dr. Derek Martin, and Dr. Bhuwan Thapa.



Pictured Above: Caroline Fehlman. Far Left: Quinn Keefer. Middle: Chris Lucero presenting to curious on-looker.

FACULTY & STUDENT *Awards*



Pictured: a few of our Outstanding Seniors. Madelynn Spencer, Bridget Barr, and Eli Aquino

Appalachian State Awards of Distinction

Misty Mayfield | W.H. Plemmons Leadership Medallion

Misty conceived of the idea that eventually became known as “App Builds a Home” four years ago as she was finishing a long rotation on the Board of Directors of the local Habitat for Humanity chapter. She learned about other universities (e.g., NCSU, Clemson, and Univ. Tennessee) sponsoring home building projects through her work on the Habitat board. Misty knew that Appalachian State University could enthusiastically support and fund a similar effort because of the sustainability focus that is part of our campus identity. She also saw the commitment that our students, staff, and faculty have for social justice initiatives. Misty continues to provide meritorious leadership that significantly enriches the quality of student life and learning outside of the classroom.

College of Arts and Sciences Awards

Eli Aquino & Bridget Barr | Outstanding Geography Seniors

Matt Mottinger & Nick Schrum | Outstanding Community and Regional Planning Seniors

Ethan Antonelli & Madelynn Spencer | Outstanding Geography & Planning Double Majors

Cratis D. Williams School of Graduate Studies Awards

Caroline Fehlman | Zigli Graduate Student Research Award

Student Government Association & Academic Affairs Goldie Awards

Dr. Elizabeth Shay | Outstanding Academic Advising Award

“Dr. Shay has been a pillar of student support and goes above and beyond advising to help students in the department. Dr. Shay has gone to great lengths to support career development and Foster student resources and organizations before, through, and after the hurricane.”



Pictured: Misty Mayfield (right) with Chancellor Norris and other Plemmons awardees.

ALUMNI Spotlights

DEREK GODDARD, PLS, GISP
M.A. GEOGRAPHY, '06

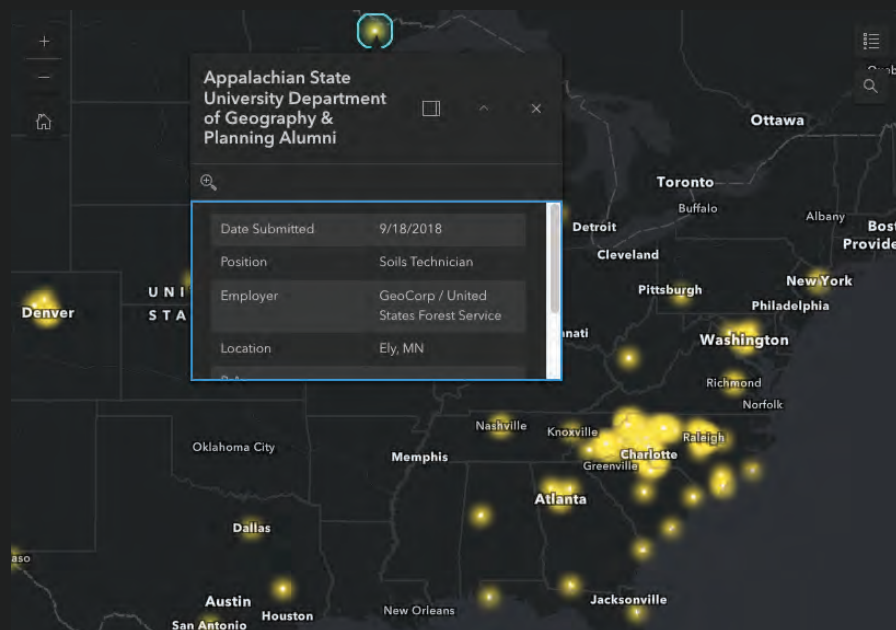
PRESIDENT AT BREC, A STRATUS TEAM COMPANY



“

I chose the graduate program in App State's Department of Geography and Planning because of the ability to be a general practitioner who understands the entire spatial dynamic of how people interact with the environment. My research and practical focus while I was at App State was with stream restoration and environmental planning. I was and am still deeply interested in regulatory processes that affect and subsequently allow the impact of natural systems. During grad school in the Department, I was able to gain practical experience and connections to the planning community in NC. My experience in the Department was rewarding and fulfilling. It prepared me to lead a team of 12 environmental, survey, and engineering professionals as the president of BREC, a Status team company. To date, I have personally supervised over 20 miles of stream restoration, testified in the highest courts as a qualified expert on water quality regulatory processes, and provided in depth Clean Water Act guidance to such clients as the NCDOT, Amazon, App State, Hilton, Marriott, Trout Unlimited, and the Department of Defense.

”



**WANT TO LEARN MORE
ABOUT OUR ALUMNI?**

**CLICK HERE FOR OUR
ALUMNI WEB MAP!**

ALUMNI Spotlights

CAITLIN BOWERS

B.S. GEOGRAPHY, '11

NEIGHBORHOOD INVESTMENT MANAGER
CITY OF GREENSBORO, NC



“

"My Appalachian State experience began with a World Geography class and then led me to the Geography and Planning Department where I learned how my lifelong passion for geography could lead to real impacts in community and place-making. Since graduating in 2011, I have worked for the City of Greensboro, NC to help finance and develop affordable housing, support vulnerable populations, and manage federal grants. I serve on the board of the NC Community Development Association, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life in NC as a resource to community and economic development practitioners."

”

SHEA BRUER

B.S. COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL PLANNING, '24

GIS TECHNICIAN & ANALYST

URBAN3



Shea Bruer uses his degree in Community and Regional Planning and GIS Certificate as a GIS Technician/Analyst at Urban3, which analyzes how development patterns affect city's tax revenues. Shea has a passion for the intersection of multimedia storytelling, sustainable communities, and geospatial technology. This is evident in his active projects with Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART), Gainesville, TX, and Rapid City, SD. He recently completed a project with Austin, MN analyzing parcel data to determine what development practices lead to financially sustainable communities. His work with Austin will be used to influence future land use decisions for the city. Shea is a proud Appalachian State alumni and is grateful for his opportunity to study at the University College Cork in Cork, Ireland. Prior to joining Urban3 as a GIS Tech, Shea was a Research Assistant in our department conducting an exploratory matched-pair multiple case study comparing urban planning practices in the Scottish Highlands and Western North Carolina.

Congrats!

TO THE **CLASS** OF
— **2025** —



Prior to the College of Arts and Sciences Spring 2025 Commencement, the department hosted a reception to celebrate our undergraduate and graduate students in a more personal setting alongside their families, friends, and faculty. Dr. Derek Martin, Graduate Program Director, recognized each graduating master's student by highlighting their contributions to the department through research and teaching assistantships. While it is always difficult to see them leave, we are immensely proud of their accomplishments and excited for their future adventures.



GRAD STUDENT Spotlight

CAROLINE FEHLMAN, MA '25

Zigli Research Award Winner '25

ASU Student Research Poster Presentation Winner '25

Faculty Mentor, Dr. Maggie Sugg



“

My thesis focused on using spatial epidemiologic methods to assess geographic access to maternal healthcare providers and its association with severe maternal and infant health outcomes, while taking into account how individual and community covariates influence the relationship. My research interest includes using spatial and statistical methods for women's health related topics, like maternal health, cancer, and reproductive health.

”

Caroline recently defended her thesis titled, “Maternal Healthcare Access Disparities in North Carolina, 2016-2019: A Fine-Scale Geospatial Analysis”, which also led her to winning the Zigli Award from the Cratis D. Williams School of Graduate Studies. Caroline's nominator for the Zigli Research Awards described her as “a very bright and motivated student who has a very high potential for making a real impact.” It's also worth mentioning that Caroline also completed a master's degree in Mathematics in concurrence with her Geography master's! After graduation, Fehlman will pursue her Ph.D. at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.

COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL PLANNING UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM GRANTED CANDIDACY STATUS BY PLANNING ACCREDITATION BOARD

This Spring, the American Planning Association's Planning Accreditation Board (PAB) honored our Community and Regional Planning undergraduate program by accelerating our application to join only 16 other universities with PAB accredited undergraduate programs to candidacy status! This exciting development for our program will better align our graduates for AICP professional certification and support increased opportunities for students and faculty. It is an acknowledgement of the high quality of work undertaken by our Planning students, developed by our faculty, and demonstrated by alumni. For next steps, Drs. Elizabeth Shay and Chris Quattro will travel to Minneapolis this coming October to meet with the PAB board, followed up by a site visit to our campus in early November. We look forward to welcoming the PAB representatives and showcasing all the great work of our department!

The department extends a huge thanks to Dr. Elizabeth Shay and Dr. Chris Quattro! The amount of time and effort they have put into accreditation is immense.

Click the logo to read more about PAB and accreditation standards.



Planning Accreditation Board

END OF YEAR AWARDS CEREMONY & CAREER PANEL



Students and panelists

We traditionally host an Awards Ceremony at the end of the spring semester to recognize student accomplishments, including recipients of departmental scholarships and awards presented by the College of Arts and Sciences. This year, we also incorporated a Career Panel into the celebration.

The panel featured alumni from the department who represented a wide range of careers made possible with a degree in geography and/or planning. Students asked thoughtful questions about career trajectories, day-to-day professional responsibilities, the evolving role of Geographic Information Science (GIS), the integration of artificial intelligence in geospatial technologies (noting that GIS has incorporated AI for years), and strategies for achieving work-life balance. We are deeply grateful to the panelists for taking the time to return to campus and share their insights with our students. Panelists included Derek Goddard, Keith Miller, Jessica Mitchell, Kent Rothrock, Hannah Williams, and John Young.

Following the panel discussion, Josh Platt and Dr. Derek Martin announced this year's scholarship recipients, joined by a few of the department's generous donors and former chairs, including Dr. Neal Lineback and Dr. Jim Young.



"It is true what I mentioned on the panel - it was the advice and mentorship of you all that have encouraged me to be where I am today. It was such an honor to be able to share some of my career story and advice with the students. I hope they found it to be as wonderful of an event as I thought it was! It was great to be back in the Department again, and I am glad that my work can be such an inspiration. The students' recognition is very humbling, and I am glad that my contribution continues to add value."

- **Jessica Mitchell**, pictured with Dr. van de Gevel

DR. VAN DE GEVEL APPOINTED DEAN, VIRGINIA TECH'S COLLEGE OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

Effective August 1st, Dr. Saskia van de Gevel will begin her role as Dean of CNRE at Virginia Tech. Faculty and students are sad to see her go, but are beyond excited for her new journey. In addition to achievements mentioned in Page 2, Dr. van de Gevel has created a culture in our department that is hard to quantify; a supportive environment that fosters scholarship, creativity, and collaboration among faculty and students. Anyone who walked the halls of Rankin Science West during her tenure undoubtedly felt the warmth and camaraderie. We will miss you, Saskia! Appalachian State's College of Arts and Sciences Dean, Mike Madritch, will announce our interim chair soon.



ARE YOU INTERESTED IN HELPING OUR STUDENTS?

Ways you can help:

- Share internship opportunities
- Share job openings
- Donate to our food pantry
- Contribute to scholarships



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THE DEPARTMENT!

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This issue's title page banner:

Zoning for Infill Development: San Antonio's Create-Your-Own Zoning District by Chris Quattro and Esteban López Ochoa

In the past two decades, planning researchers and professionals have widely discussed zoning innovations supporting growth management and infill. Traditional Euclidean zoning ordinances restrict infill possibilities by specifying lot size, setbacks, parking, and single-use requirements. Here, we examined the effectiveness of San Antonio's (TX) Infill Development Zone (IDZ), a regulatory tool for incremental infill development. By analyzing 7 years of IDZ rezoning requests and current distributions of all IDZ parcels, we found that this zoning tool fostered flexibility for various types of infill development throughout the urban core without forgoing regulatory oversight. Cities seeking to encourage infill through an incremental approach could find the IDZ model beneficial. Click the text for the article and banner for the interactive map.