

**Profile of the
Department of Geography and Geology
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
2003 Regents Teaching Excellence Award Recipient**

The Essence of UW-SP Geography and Geology

The Department of Geography and Geology offers a curriculum which provides students with a broad understanding of the global dimensions of human activities, and the excellent oral, written, analytical, and technical skills required to be successful in today's complex world. Both as a whole and in its individual parts, the curriculum contributes to the University's base of liberal arts education. The Department administers a major in geography with three options: 1) the Physical Environment; 2) Regional Analysis & Community Development; and 3) Cartography and Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

In order to become a leader in teaching excellence at UW-Stevens Point, the Department has pursued five strategies over the years: 1) development of a responsive, dynamic and rigorous curriculum that prepares students for both graduate school and professional careers; 2) cultivation of innovative teaching strategies; 3) an untiring effort at ensuring a more holistic understanding of student success; 4) maintaining a vigorous internship and student field research program; and 5) hiring and retaining excellent teacher-scholars.

In the Department's Own Words:

- “As teachers of Geography and Geology, our jobs are to nurture curiosity of the Earth and motivate students to comprehend its significance. Geography helps us find answers about the location of phenomenon and objects and how they got there. Geology helps us understand evolution, structure, and composition of the Earth, the processes that alter the surface as well as assessing the resources and hazards associated with the natural environment.”
- “A strong ‘paper’ curriculum is useless unless one has the ability to successfully transmit its contents and objectives to students. It is for this reason that the Department of Geography and Geology strives for innovative and novel ways of teaching. While individual faculty vary in the details of their philosophy of teaching, there is a collective philosophy in the department that teaching is a communication of new knowledge and abilities to students, which can be only successful when an enabling learning environment is present.”

Teaching as a Reflective, Scholarly, and Collaborative Activity

- The Department views itself as a community of teacher-scholars, in which teaching is the primary mission and carries the most weight in hiring, retention, and promotion decisions.
- A heavy teaching load (12-credit hours) is distributed throughout the Department; all instructors teach both introductory and advanced classes, and all instructors teach lab courses as part of their regular load.
- Annual staff retreats: at the beginning of each academic year, before classes begin, the faculty holds a retreat to build community and assess the Department's goals and objectives.
- The Department strives to recruit women and minorities although these have been traditionally underrepresented in Geography and Geology.
- Over the past 10 years, the Department has produced five UWSP Teaching Excellence Award winners and one UW System Regents Teaching Excellence Award winner.

- The focus on teaching builds upon the Department's record of scholarly research and achievement: over the same period, the faculty has published over 90 scholarly articles and book chapters, over 116 technical reports, has given more than 100 scholarly presentations, and has received over \$1.6 million in grant money.

A Thoughtfully Constructed, Effective Curriculum

- Geography and geology are evolving disciplines, motivated in particular by the development of new technologies and changing environmental factors.
- Constant renewal and self-assessment: every two years, there is a formal and extensive assessment evaluation that involves the review of core courses, student achievement, program health, and long-term goals.
- The Regional Analysis and Community Development option was redefined and revitalized in the past few years, growing from 5 to 20 students.
- The Spatial Analysis and GIS (Geographic Information Systems) minor was started two years ago in response to new technology, the department's own self-assessment, and a student survey, alumni questionnaire, and a statewide needs assessment that determined that a new technical minor was needed. There are currently 64 students in this minor!
- Fieldwork is not an add-on. It is an integral part of the discipline; it is how geography and geology are taught; and it is how the faculty conducts research, in partnership with students.
- Over the last fifteen years, the faculty has aggressively sought and acquired innovative technologies to use in the classroom and in the field. The National Science Foundation, among other grant agencies, has awarded hundreds of thousands of dollars to the Department since 1988.
- State-of-the art technology thoughtfully integrated not only into classrooms and computer labs, but also into the curriculum, through the use of the World Wide Web. The Department has an award-winning website, and is nationally known for its virtual field trips!

A Positive Climate for Student Learning

- Students rave about the openness, accessibility, and friendliness of the faculty.
- Student advising by the faculty is considered the first step in ensuring student success.
- Since 1991, the Department has directed over 80 internships, with over \$120,000 awarded to students. Internships have been established in county and city governments, private companies, and state and federal agencies. Many of these internships lead to job offers to students by the sponsoring organizations.
- Multiple assessment methods integrated into the curriculum to evaluate student learning.
- The Department sponsors three awards each year to recognize excellence in its students: one for outstanding academic achievement; another for outstanding writing achievement; and a third for excellence in cartography.
- All majors engage in field projects with faculty, for example geological fieldwork in Morocco and in Big Bend National Park, mapping a state park (Hartman Creek State Park), and detecting wild lupine using satellite imagery for the Wisconsin DNR. Some of these projects have resulted in publications.
- In the senior seminar project or capstone course, each student undertakes a selected research project involving scientific rigor and investigation. Over the past few years, students have conducted research involving web-based mapping, crime analysis using GIS, and remote sensing used to complete fieldwork in Morocco. At the end of their senior year, all majors are required to give a poster presentation at the UWSP Letters & Science Undergraduate Research Symposium.
- The Department maintains a job search index that helps students match their skills and education with future employment, and works diligently to provide career counseling and job experience in the form of internships and student-faculty research projects.

In the Words of the Department's Students

- “I am attending the University of Nebraska-Lincoln for a Master’s Degree in geography. The head of the department at UNL, David Wishard, has told me on several occasions that I am, ‘the most qualified graduate student that has joined the department in years.’ This statement carries weight with me, because the other geography graduate students, most of whom majored in geography as undergraduates, and with whom I have become well acquainted, are of high intelligence and skill, but were somehow not provided with, by UNL’s standards, as well balanced an undergraduate education.”
 - Rebecca A. Colwell, UW-SP Geography and Geology Graduate

“The Department staff’s commitment to teaching excellence and their passionate interest in the academic success of their students, made my time with the Department one of the most rewarding experiences I have encountered during either my college or professional career. . . . Even though I completed my degree at UWSP in 1996, I continue to seek Dr. Rice’s advice professionally in matters relating to GIS and cartographic research. Today, I actively recruit UWSP Department of Geography and Geology students for Forest Service employment within my unit.”

- Thomas L. Willems, UWSP Geography and Geology Graduate, and current USDA Forest Service Staff Archaeologist with the Black Hills National Forest in South Dakota

Department Facts, Activities, and Resources

- *Personnel:*
 - Nine full-time equivalent faculty; one .75 full-time and one .50 full-time faculty;
 - One full-time administrative assistant;
 - Eleven students employed to work in the Map Center, Computer Labs, and as Graders.
- *Students:*
 - 83 Geography Majors;
 - 9 Geography Minors;
 - 14 Geology Minors
 - 18 Earth Science Minors;
 - 71 GIS & Spatial Analysis Minors;
 - Five Student Awards Given Annually for, e.g., Academic Scholarship and Writing Achievement.
- *Curriculum :*
 - Geography major requires 40 credits in geography and a 2.5 GPA;
 - Three options available: Physical Environment; Cartography and GIS; and Regional Analysis;
 - Over 50 courses taught at least every three years;
 - Geography majors must present a senior research project at a yearly UWSP symposium;
 - Integrated innovative technology in all classes;
 - Over \$200,000 awarded in curriculum-related grants between 1999-2002;
 - The Department has directed over 80 internships since 1991 with over \$120,000 awarded to students.
- *Assessment:*
 - Annual evaluation and planning session at Summer Retreat;
 - In addition to student evaluations, program assessment techniques include evaluation of capstone course, alumni surveys, internship surveys, and formal critique of student portfolios.