

# UNM DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY & ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES ALUMNI CHAPTER

# Winter 2021 Newsletter

newsletter of the Geography Alumni Chapter, University of New Mexico Geography & Environmental Studies  
UNMgesAlumni@gmail.com • geography.unm.edu



photo by Laura Paskus

## **WELCOME!**

### **FROM THE UNM ALUMNI ASSOCIATION & GEOGRAPHY ALUMNI CHAPTER**

The UNM Alumni Association and the Geography Alumni Chapter thank you for downloading our first ever Geography Alumni Chapter Newsletter. It is our hope to bring you content that will inform, inspire, and help bring you closer to what's happening in the world of UNM Geography, both on campus and beyond. As we look to move on from a year marked with challenges we wanted to take on one of the projects we've had in mind since before the pandemic became front-page news. Our mission is building a stronger connection between the Alumni of the UNM Department of Geography & Environmental Studies, and beyond.

So come, join us, take a few minutes to review what your fellow Alumni have been up to, and if you are so moved, send this newsletter along to someone else you know who might be interested. We are trying to connect with Lobos from across the decades, and both those who work in Geography and those who don't. All are welcome, and we look forward to building our community as we look to a more connected post-pandemic world. Some things will have changed since the last time we were able to get together (see below) but one thing we know for sure is that we are all members of one pack, and together we are stronger. **Go Lobos!**

### **Contents**

<a href="#">No joke—2020 has been a great year!</a>	<a href="#">page 2</a>
<a href="#">Building the Alumni Chapter</a>	<a href="#">page 3</a>
<a href="#">Sustainability Studies Program joins GES</a>	<a href="#">page 4</a>
<a href="#">Making a Career in Geography</a>	<a href="#">pages 5-6</a>

<a href="#">Department Launches New Center</a>	<a href="#">page 7</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Executive Updates</a>	<a href="#">page 8</a>
<a href="#">A note from our Clerk, Jacob Wolff</a>	<a href="#">page 9</a>
<a href="#">Plan Now to Leave a Legacy for GES</a>	<a href="#">page 9</a>
<a href="#">Our Mission</a>	<a href="#">page 10</a>

# No joke—2020 has been a great year!

2020 has been a great year! Well, maybe not in all respects—but it's been pretty good for the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies. We have experienced phenomenal growth, even as we have scrambled to adapt to the changes that the pandemic and social turbulence have forced on everyone.

First, we have expanded in terms of faculty, staff, and students. We have added five faculty during 2020—an absolutely remarkable number, especially given the budget crunch that UNM has experienced since the pandemic began. Dr. Liping Yang joined us in January, after having completed a postdoctoral fellowship at Los Alamos National Laboratory. Dr. Yang researches and teaches in the field of geospatial data science. In fall, we had three new faculty arrive. Dr. Miriam Gay-Antaki studies the human dimensions of climate change, focusing on how gender impacts people's experiences with both environmental change and climate science. Dr. Natasha Howard came to our department from the UNM Africana Studies Program, where she maintains a joint appointment. Dr. Howard researches in the broad field of human geography, looking particularly at past and present geographies of Black communities in the Southwest. Dr. Marygold Walsh-Dilley also came to us from across campus. She had been faculty in the UNM Honors College for several years, during which she had been an affiliate faculty member in our department. Dr. Walsh-Dilley researches agriculture and food systems in the Andes. Finally, Dr. Yolanda Lin will join us in December. She studies natural hazards and disasters, thinking about how societies can develop greater resilience when faced with unexpected disruptions.

We are lucky to have added these excellent scholars and teachers to our faculty, which will allow us in the coming years to offer a broader range of courses and support a greater number of graduate students. We now have sixteen permanent faculty, by far the largest the department has been over its 55-year history. We face the challenge of maintaining our faculty's cohesiveness and collegiality amid this growth, but this is a challenge we are happy to accept.

Second, we've added a strong cohort of graduate students. We have been impressed with the Master's students who chose to join us this fall—a motivated group of thinkers with a broad range of interests. And for the first time, the department welcomed a cohort of Ph.D. students, who compose the inaugural class of the New Mexico Doctoral Program in Geography, which we share with New Mexico State University. Three of the doctoral students are based in Las Cruces, and seven are based here in Albuquerque. We've been impressed with these folks, and we've appreciated having a greater diversity of graduate students—in terms of experience and training—than we've had in the past.

Of course, our new cohort of grad students have faced the challenge of starting the program while physically distanced from their peers and instructors. All of our students have faced this challenge. Nearly all of our classes this semester are entirely online. This is not the preference of either faculty or students, but necessary for us to comply with public health guidelines, and to maintain the safety of our faculty, students, and staff. Everyone has done amazing jobs to maintain instructional continuity since May. It's not been easy for anyone to manage the drastic change in schoolwork while also managing the diverse disruptions in our personal lives, but everyone's worked together smoothly. In fact, our enrollment rose in the fall semester, by almost 15% above fall 2019—while the UNM as a whole experienced a slight drop in enrollment over the same period.

Finally, we've added some great new staff members. Nathan Holscher is our new Department Administrator. He started in December 2019 after having worked as a finance manager in the Department of Biology for several years. In February, Jason Farmer began in our department's new staff position of Graduate Programs Coordinator. As a recent graduate of our department, Jason brings great institutional knowledge to help support current students. Theron Moore began as our IT Support Tech in March 2020, coming to UNM after working in public school systems in the area. Despite being on campus less than a week before the pandemic, he has taken on the important task of developing a virtual desktop interface through which students can access software in our computer lab from off campus. This new resource has been crucial in adapting to the pandemic.

As you can see, the department has had a great year, despite the turmoil that we have all experienced. On top of all the positive changes I've mentioned, we also count the GES Alumni Group as something great that has come out of 2020. We the faculty value working with students, and we've struggled for years to keep in touch with our graduates and to serve our current students by connecting them with people who've found careers in geography. The work that our alumni have undertaken to establish the GES Alumni Group will help us serve students for years to come, and bring opportunities to alumni and current students alike. We're grateful for the support our graduates have given to the department.

Despite all the positives the department has experienced this year, I am certain that things will only get better after 2020.

—Chris Duvall, Professor and Chair, Department of Geography and Environmental Studies

# Building the Alumni Chapter

## *How we got started*

My friend, Zack McCormick (MA 87) and I were at lunch one day, and we were discussing the Geography Department. We both sit on the GES Advisory Board and attend a "State of the Department" meeting once a year. This is something that Dr. Brad Cullen set up in conjunction with the PhD program when it was being established.

Our lunch discussion was based around what would add value to the department. We agreed that a Geography Alumni Chapter would serve as a point of communication with recent graduates, alumni and students. We had many a lunch in the back room of a small hole-in-the-wall restaurant downtown called "Papa Frank's," which I doubt is going to make it through the pandemic.

Watching the growth of the Department as we see it, we agreed that Geography was going to BOOM! When I was in school in the mid-1980s the word "Job" was hardly ever mentioned. What made the tipping point for jobs in geography was the advent of Big Data. Oh, how the geography discipline needed Big Data!

Now we have Big Data and an urgent need to completely discover how to live on earth. There are a number of internships and jobs in the real world. Yes, geography is booming!

Margaret Ortega, Director of Development/College of Arts & Sciences Development Office, and I met with the UNM Alumni Association and heard the requirements. "Ten people minimum and a Board of Directors with all the usual positions." Zack and I got to work. We worked with Maria Lane, Chris Duvall, and three friends of mine from the 1980s and we started networking. We got a proving group of seven people to attend a formation meeting at Hodgkin Hall Fall of 2019, which was fun since the Geography Department was housed there in its dilapidated state.

We proved that there was a need and a desire. So, we worked more, and we got our required ten people. Then, low and behold, the contact at the Alumni mothership had changed jobs. Things went dark. When I got the attention of the new contact, things started to coalesce. Maria Lane mentioned what we were doing to Jacob Wolff (MS Geog 2017) and he stepped forward.

Zack and I often joked that we were in a small row boat, each with an oar. When Jake stepped forward, he got into the boat, picked up two oars and

he rowed and he rowed. Suddenly the boat started going faster and in a steady direction, with a mission.

Our group grew, and we planned a meeting (again, at Hodgkin Hall) to start the chapter. In late February 2020, 19 people showed up. We did it! We had a short meeting, which Jacob Wolff formulated, and I ran. Zack was there and worked it like a master parliamentarian.

After introductions, we had a productive, round-table discussion. Everyone in the room agreed on our mission. We decided that we could not form a Board of Directors as specified, so we petitioned the UNM Alumni Association for a variance to work with a Manager and a Clerk, which are elected positions, and a flexible number of Executives as needed, who run Departments, more like a business than a committee. Currently, I am the Manager. Jacob Wolff is the Clerk. Our Communications Executive is Laurel Ladwig (MS Geog 2020), Sagert Sheets (MS Geog 2018) is our Gamma Theta Upsilon Chapter Executive, and our Workforce Readiness Executive is Jacob Wolff. Our contact at the UNM Alumni Association is Scott Sanchez, who has been a great help now that we are fully formed as of June 2020.

What I found out in these past two years is that we all think alike. Geographers think in a very certain way. A very subtle way. When we had our February meeting, it was like being at a family reunion as an adult where you do not know extended family well. You can stand next to someone and just know they are family. You can feel it. Geography is coursing through our veins.

-Robert H. Mallory (BA '90), Geography Alumni Chapter Manager



*First Annual General Members Meeting (February 2020)*



# Sustainability Studies Program joins Geography and Environmental Studies

The Sustainability Studies Program (SSP) and Geography and Environmental Studies (GES) signed an agreement in June that makes the SSP part of the GES academic unit. This is an exciting development that will support the future of both programs. The SSP currently offers an undergraduate minor with approximately 50 students in the program. The program emphasizes community engagement, hands-on learning and is a stand-out at UNM for the quality of the undergraduate teaching and the one-on-one attention students receive.

---

*"The students in the program are some of the most passionate on campus and I've loved having them as a professor, so I am really looking forward to stepping into the role of director." Morgan said.*

---

The following is a reprint of an article by Makayla Grijalva published by the UNM ADVANCE initiative's STEM Shoutout for GES faculty member Melinda Morgan. STEM Shoutouts recognize UNM faculty who are doing interesting research, have won awards or been recently published. GES faculty Maria Lane and Marygold Walsh-Dilley have also been given similar Shoutouts, which can be found at <https://advance.unm.edu/stem-highlights/>

## **STEM Shoutouts: Melinda Morgan, Director Sustainability Studies**

Dr. Melinda Morgan took on the role as the new director of the sustainability studies program at the University of New Mexico in June after being affiliated faculty in the program since 2008. The director of the program also holds the W.K. Kellogg Chair in Sustainable Environmental & Food Systems.

"The students in the program are some of the most passionate on campus and I've loved having them as a professor, so I am really looking forward to stepping into the role of director," Morgan said.

She assumed the role after the retirement of the previous director and founder of the Sustainability Studies program Bruce Milne, who has led the program since 2004.

"Bruce Milne's leadership has created a strong legacy and his passion for sustainability created a very vibrant program," Morgan said.

Morgan said that the sustainability studies program had been growing during a time when other university programs saw decreases in enrollment and credits that to an increased interest in environmental studies.

"This is a difficult but exciting time when it comes to taking on environmental challenges and students in New Mexico are rising to that challenge. And the program really reflects that."

While she started as the acting director this summer, the

announcement of the position was postponed to this month. Morgan plans the program will hold a send-off for Milne when it is safe to do so, honoring the time he spent leading the program.

"As you know, this last spring was so challenging," Morgan said. "We were unable to do anything for Bruce to honor his retirement, so it was sort of with a whimper rather than a bang. We want the opportunity to officially honor all of his accomplishments."

Morgan said that one of her initial goals as the director of the program is to spend time reaching out to different people across the campus — faculty, staff and students — to get feedback on what they hope to see from the program. She said that she hopes this will increase the number of faculty affiliated with sustainability studies and deepen the University's investment in the program.

Morgan, formerly known as Melinda Harm Benson, changed her name in the summer of 2020. Morgan decided to take on her paternal grandmother's maiden name.

"My grandma had an eighth-grade education, worked as a janitor, and raised three kids during the Great Depression. She was one of the strongest women I've ever known," Morgan said. "By taking her name, I feel like I'm drawing on the strength of all my female ancestors. As a professor at UNM, I have a professional life and level of personal freedom none of them would ever have imagined for themselves."

Coinciding with the shift into her new position, Morgan is also in the process of creating a transdisciplinary research collaborative to look at the social-ecological system dynamics of water supply, climate change and wildfire in the Rio Grande watershed. This research collaborative stems from the University's Grand Challenge on Sustainable Water Resources.

"That's the type of sustainability-oriented, interdisciplinary initiative that I would love to see sustainability studies supporting on campus," Morgan said.



*Bandelier Hall West*

# Making a Career in Geography

## Professional Network of Geography Alumni Prove the Power of Spatial Thinking to Address Human-Environmental Challenges

The pandemic spread of COVID-19 continues to devastate communities in all corners of the globe. Medical facilities are running out of beds in major metropolitan centers and rural areas. Families are unable to visit their friends and loved ones in quarantine. Economic and political repercussions, although important considerations for long-term recovery, cannot begin to compare with the physical and emotional toll of this public health crisis.

We face a humbling and humanizing responsibility in the years ahead. Epidemiological science should guide policymakers and individuals, alike, to slow the spread of coronavirus while medical researchers test new and innovative treatments. Urban planners will assist public health professionals in distributing any safe and reliable vaccines. Political tides do shape the emergency response. However, the success of our collective efforts ultimately depends upon spatial analyses of medical, social, and economic data.

Professionals trained in geography departments understand this.

In the early twentieth century, the American Geographical Society charted the physical contours of Latin America in painstaking 1:1,000,000 detail and the Berkeley School imbued generations of scholars to study landscape in all its environmental and cultural dimensions. Geographers served in the diplomatic corps responsible for organizing the League of Nations and later the United Nations. During the quantitative revolution, researchers at Harvard, Northwestern, and Washington spatialized data to refine early GIS analyses. Geospatial methods have become central to the liberal arts and applied sciences in higher education, and the public and private sectors.

Nonetheless, public intellectuals repeatedly intone the “end of geography” and universities closed geography departments throughout the United States. The discipline is not uniformly respected as a scientific field. When a GIS manager with the Florida Department of Health was terminated for blowing the whistle on manipulated coronavirus statistics, politicians alleged she was “not a data scientist.” The American Association of Geographers issued a public statement defending Rebekah Jones.

For the past two decades, faculty members at the University of New Mexico have worked diligently to strengthen the Department of Geography & Environmental Studies. The faculty has more than doubled since 2000 and an inaugural cohort of PhD students joined the NMSU-UNM doctoral program this year. The department is now also home to Sustainability

Studies at UNM and Maria Lane directs the R.H. Mallory Center for Community Geography. In Fall 2020, Chris Duvall taught a geography course at UNM on the global COVID-19 pandemic.

---

*We are reminded that global challenges require comprehensive data and coordination among experts in our field and others. Geographers work at the nexus of society and the environment.*

---

Establishing this vibrant community of scholars, students, and now alumni is proving advantageous for partner organizations in and beyond the American Southwest. Recent graduates are gainfully employed under a variety of job titles across a range of institutions. Hayley Hajic (MS '18) serves as a research scientist with the Southwest Environmental Finance Center and Courtney Brock (MS '18) works for the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration in Washington, D.C. Aaron Russell (MS '17) is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Delaware. His research focuses predominantly on the development of the offshore wind energy industry. John Felix (BS '18), Rafen Page (BS '20), and Sagert Sheets (MS '18) serve on the cartography and GIS team in the transportation planning division at the Mid-Region Council of Governments. Steven Montiel (BS '07), a Transportation Program Manager of Finance & Administration, works closely with elected officials from across Central New Mexico who represent the Mid-Region Council of Governments. Zach Taraschi (MS '18) studied with Chris Lippitt and now leads drone and photogrammetry projects for Souder, Miller & Associates, a regional engineering firm. In the Spring of 2019, Kurt Menke (MS '00) was awarded the GES Distinguished Alumni Award for his contributions to the field as an open-source GIS consultant. Susanna Diller (MS '17) has worked in community GIS, with the Census Bureau, and now serves as a civilian planner with the Air Force. Aron Roberts (MS '20) came to New Mexico after completing his undergraduate studies at the University of Exeter in England. He works with Tammira Taylor (MS '17) and Akashia Allen (MS '18) on the GIS team for Albuquerque Public Schools. William Brewer (MS '16) uses GIS and remote sensing as a research specialist with Cal Fire to assess properties and infrastructure damaged by natural disasters. Laurel Ladwig (MS '20) is the partnership coordinator for the ABQ Backyard Refuge Program with Friends of Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge and serves on the advisory committee for Bernalillo County Open Space Master Naturalists. Natali Cáceres (PhD '20) teaches feminist geography and political ecology at the Universidad Central Del Ecuador. Several graduates, including Su Zhang (MS '15, PhD '17) and Gladys Valentin

*continued on page 6*

*'Making A Career in Geography' continued from page 5*

(MS '17), lead projects with UNM's Earth Data Analysis Center. Sean O'Neill (MS '19), previously the IT manager for UNM's spatial computing lab, now serves as a senior geospatial developer at the New Mexico State Land Office. The list goes on.

Recent graduates from UNM collaborate within and between agencies, and often serve as professional references for one another. "After graduation I moved back home to Pennsylvania for a job in political advocacy and urban development, said Jacob Wolff (MS '17). "But when a public outreach position opened up in Albuquerque last year, I jumped on the opportunity to come back and work with my old UNM classmates."

From water science to regional planning, natural resource conservation, and geospatial technologies, graduates of geography serve in diverse professional capacities that address the most pressing issues facing our communities. Geospatial skills are in demand, but our strength is built on professional networks. The relevance of geography as a discipline is not immediately recognized beyond the university.

The department prioritizes experiential learning. Faculty host the annual colloquia series featuring academics and practitioners. Undergraduate courses include fieldwork with scientific organizations and planning agencies, and many students intern with alumni before accepting full-time job offers. Our Alumni Chapter was founded to reinforce the department's mission to train students for a meaningful transition from the classroom into rewarding careers.

In the 1990s, this was not as much the case. There were limited opportunities for graduates and virtually no support from the university upon graduation. As we have started to build this alumni chapter, it has been very interesting to talk to more recent graduates as there are so many great opportunities in the field. But, one thing remains and that is that geographers, early-career and more established, think in a now marketable, always special (spatial) way.

It has become indisputably clear that environmental forces -- defined broadly from viral outbreaks to rising sea levels and rapid deforestation -- are not easily controlled. There are few quick political fixes or market-based interventions because ecological agents transcend national boundaries. Coordination is paramount. This is the case for our recovery from COVID-19 and it could serve as a diplomatic model for managing the mounting impacts of anthropogenic climate change.

We are reminded that global challenges require comprehensive data and coordination among experts in our field and others. Geographers work at the nexus of society and the environment. The current public health crisis is but one example. It touches us all painfully, personally and professionally. Our work is important. But to succeed, we must work together. That is why we are building the Alumni Chapter of graduates from the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies. If you have any pearls of wisdom and would like to help build the alumni chapter of the future, please reach out. We are always working to build our community!

---

***If you have an interesting career, share it. Ask a student or small group of students to tour your facility (when COVID-19 allows), speak to geography classes about what you do, and, most importantly, be a Mentor.***

---



*Bandelier Hall West*



# DEPARTMENT LAUNCHES NEW CENTER FOCUSED ON COMMUNITY GEOGRAPHY

In August 2020, the Department of Geography & Environmental Studies (GES) launched a brand-new center with the mission of bringing UNM and its communities together to address critical human-environment issues. The R.H. Mallory Center for Community Geography will provide support and funding to students and faculty who want to bring a community-engaged perspective into classrooms, research projects, and public events.

According to Geography professor Maria Lane, who serves as the center's first director, "communities are facing complex human-environment issues right here in New Mexico, and we believe we can support community priorities while also providing students with important learning experiences and research opportunities."

Lane said she expects to spend most of the first year in a listening and building phase. "Our goal for 2020-2021 is to talk with groups and communities in central New Mexico to find out where and how our student geographers, faculty researchers, and geospatial technologies can be of help." One project is already on tap for spring 2021. Students in a new "Critical Cartography" course will work on a community-based mapping project to support ongoing work to develop the El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro National Trail in Bernalillo County. Lane hopes to use this course as a pilot for community-engagement approaches that could be brought into other courses in the future.

The center is currently donor-funded and will make additional funding available for the 2021-2022 academic

year. According to Lane, students will be able to apply for direct research funds, and faculty will be able to apply for funds to hire student researchers or to add community engagement activities to their courses. The center itself will also host events that bring public and university audiences into conversation about human-environment dynamics and issues.

After the first year, the Center for Community Geography will also begin raising external funds to support its community-engagement mission. Potential donors who are interested in supporting community engagement are encouraged to contact the department for more information or to discuss specific project opportunities. And all alumni are encouraged to reach out with ideas for community partnerships in New Mexico.

According to Lane, community groups aren't the only ones who will benefit from the center's work, since students gain valuable experience by studying real-world environmental and geographical issues. "I think the new center will actually help us improve our teaching and research at UNM," she said. "We know as educators that the deepest forms of learning take place when students connect what they are learning to their own lives, and when they help build knowledge through their own actions and interactions," she said. By bringing real-world problems into the classroom, and by sending students out into the community in partnership with community groups, Lane hopes that the Center for Community Geography will thus bring mutual benefit to UNM and its surrounding community.

GES Department Chair Chris Duvall said the Center for Community Geography is a great match for a growing department that focuses on critical and complex issues. "Our state is a living laboratory for geographers who study human landscapes, natural environments, and the complex relations between them," he said. "Many of our students and faculty already pursue place-based research right here in New Mexico, from mapping changing grassland dynamics to conducting geospatial analysis of healthcare inequities, and we also participate in interdisciplinary teams focused on related issues like evaluating water management policies. The Center for Community Geography will help focus these projects on local priorities and expand these opportunities for students."

Although the COVID-19 pandemic presents numerous constraints for university operations this year, the new Center for Community Geography has already launched its website, and alumni and community members are encouraged to learn more at <http://communitygeography.unm.edu>. Lane also encourages interested community partners to get in touch via email: [mdlane@unm.edu](mailto:mdlane@unm.edu).



*Geography & Environmental Studies students at Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge*

photo by Laurel Ladwig

# Chapter Executive Updates

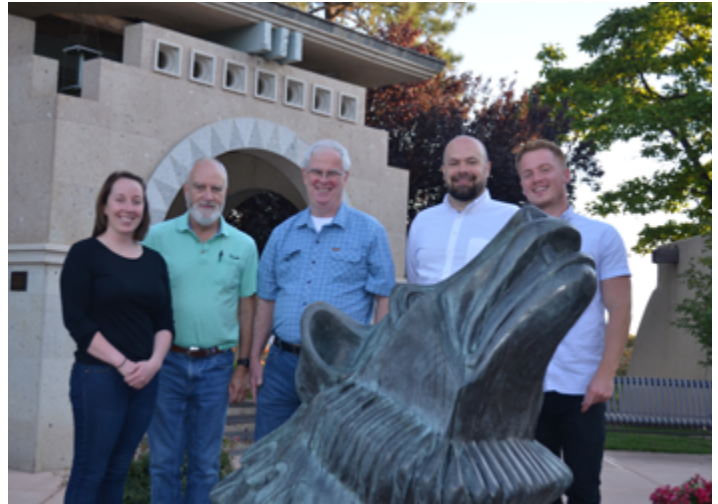
## Gamma Theta Upsilon at UNM

My name is Sagert Sheets. I completed my master's degree in geography in 2018 and I'm the Gamma Theta Upsilon Executive for our nascent alumni chapter. I have been a GIS Analyst at the Mid-Region Council of Governments (MRCOG – formerly MRG-COG and informally MR. COG). I currently coordinate GIS projects for the Mid-Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MRMPO). Like many, my journey to and through geography started with maps. Now my professional passion is for everything around the maps: the interpersonal and technological systems that churn and turn as maps are created, that must be navigated and integrated and carefully maintained; and on occasion, I still get to put together a nice map.

I'm thrilled to be part of a GIS Team of three – all UNM GES alum from recent years – as we hone our skills of thinking and collaborating regionally, planning for next week and for 2045, and exploring all available avenues of cartographic expression. We are like many in our fields, who find themselves on small teams (or sometimes even as the sole geographer) and juggling hats. This draws us to our state's tight-knit geospatial community. We connect with each other at the New Mexico Geographic Information Council (NMGIC) and Geospatial Advisory Committee (GAC) meetings, for example. This sense of the importance of community – of spaces to compare notes, put heads together, celebrate triumphs, and share challenges – is part of what drives the ambition of the UNM GES alumni group. And one of the ways we're actualizing this is by bringing a Gamma Theta Upsilon (GTU) chapter to UNM.

GTU is an international honor society for geography. We'll be sharing more of our progress with the chapter in future communications, but for now, check out GTU's website for more details, including membership requirements and their 6-goal mission. We feel their mission – particularly their emphasis on both the academic and professional experiences of geographers – strongly aligns with ours and the department's. We are excited to add this organization to our state's tight-knit geographic community.

Feel free to reach out to [UNMgesAlumni@gmail.com](mailto:UNMgesAlumni@gmail.com) for more information!



*GES Alumni (pictured left to right): Hayley Hajic, Robert H. Mallory, Zachary McCormick, Sagert Sheets, Aron Roberts*

## Alumni Communications

I'm Laurel Ladwig, the Communications Executive. I graduated in May and am excited about our (precocious) fledgling alumni chapter. It is my job to help get the word out and to help build our community. In addition to this newsletter, you can sign up for our eBlast which will keep you abreast of goings-on in the department and community in addition to future virtual alumni events. Please send us content for our GES eBlast whenever you have news or events that might be of interest to fellow alumni. The eBlast is an expedient way to get timely information to our community. This newsletter will be published a few times a year and we look forward to this being a forum for sharing articles about both academic and professional work. Please contribute articles about your professional and community projects or applications of geographic research. You can send contributions for either forum to [UNMgesAlumni@gmail.com](mailto:UNMgesAlumni@gmail.com). We'd also like to expand our collection of "executives" who can take on different projects. A great addition to the communications team would be someone who would like to take on our social media presence. We are working to keep our alumni connected, especially during this pandemic, and want more alumni to join us in this effort!

---

*Contact us at  
[UNMgesAlumni@gmail.com](mailto:UNMgesAlumni@gmail.com)  
if you'd like to contribute articles  
or photos for future issues of  
this newsletter.*

---



## A note from our Clerk, Jacob Wolff

When you mention geography in casual conversation, for most people the globe comes to mind: rivers, roads, lakes, oceans, mountains, cities, and the political boundaries that parallel or cut across these features. However, geography, to me, is about understanding the qualitative dimensions of our communities that are not easily mapped.

I was not drawn toward the technical aspects of the discipline.

With fluid social relations and an evolving sense of place, how does Martineztown become Edo, for example, and whose stories are erased by this cartographic revision? I came to the University of New Mexico from Pennsylvania so I could study questions like this.

It might then seem unusual that as Clerk I've also chosen the task of building the Alumni Chapter's workforce readiness initiative. But at the core of geography's four traditions -- cartography, geomorphology, regional studies, and human/environmental interaction -- we find a common cause to shape a better world.

Since we are managing our Chapter more like a business, my role as Clerk is basically a blend of Secretary and Treasurer. I work with the Manager to ensure that we operate effectively, but efficiently. The Chapter is a consortium of geographic professionals. Our priority is to elevate the initiatives lead by alumni and share opportunities with the next generation of graduates.

Geographers work in the private and public sectors, for institutions of higher learning, nonprofit and scientific services, and within the diplomatic corps of government. Our skillsets are valuable, and useful.

The breadth of our discipline can make the job search daunting. Few organizations hire geographers, at least not under that job title. Yet, learning how to pitch your geospatial skills can pay out dividends in a paycheck and in life's purpose. Recent graduates have fared well in securing positions across the Southwest and beyond.

Our Alumni Chapter is leveraging the strength of this professional network to host a Workforce Readiness Webinar for current students in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies. We have a couple people tentatively signed up as panelists, but event planning takes time. A date needs to be set in coordination with the department calendar and we should have some discussion questions drafted in advance.

If you are interested in serving as an event planning executive, please do not hesitate to reach out to me or Laurel Ladwig, our communications executive. We'd love to have you on our leadership team! This is a rewarding opportunity to network and help us build the Alumni Chapter of the future, one that provides real world contacts and opportunities to current and future graduates.

## Plan Now to Leave a Legacy for the Department of Geography

Congratulations to the new Geography Alumni Chapter, and big thanks to all who generously support the department. For many of us, there is a strong desire to make a difference in our world. The search for significance and a desire to plan for the future leads us to ponder our legacy. Many who have been touched by their UNM experience have chosen to make a gift through their estate that honors the university and people who have positively impacted their lives. If you would like more information on how to include UNM in your estate plan through a will or trust, beneficiary designation of a retirement or other financial account, or another type of gift, contact Diana Martinez at [Diana.Martinez@unmfund.org](mailto:Diana.Martinez@unmfund.org) / (505) 277-0817 or visit <https://unmfund.org/giftplans.org>.



*Sandia Foothills*  
photo by Maria Lane

## **Our Mission:**

**"To provide a platform for professional development and networking for Geography Professionals in the New Mexico Region."**

### ***How do we fulfill our Mission?***

Create a professional network that is welcoming to GES students during their academic program and job search.

Host/facilitate networking events for GES students and alumni, by whatever means appropriate.

Notify the geography department of job openings in your specific field.

Work with the geography department to identify or provide internship opportunities for students.

### ***How do we do that?***

We communicate and we network.

Our members can do things like:

Ask a Student to Dinner (when COVID-19 allows)

Take a Student to Lunch (when COVID-19 allows).

If you have an interesting career, share it. Ask a student or small group of students to tour your facility (when COVID-19 allows), speak to geography classes about what you do, and, most importantly, be a Mentor.

A Mentor can be an email buddy, phone buddy, or any interaction and support, basically.

Volunteer to be a Mentor and talk about Geography and help us build the Geography Alumni Chapter of the UNM Alumni Association of the future and innovate ways forward toward a better earth-focused future.

Become an Executive and help us build by managing an activity, task or project. We use the word Executive for these positions because an Executive has the autonomy to make day-to-day decisions without approval. This reduces administrative drag on projects and initiatives.

### ***How do you become a Mentor or an Executive?***

Contact us at: UNMgesAlumni@gmail.com or through our Alumni Relations Officer, Scott Sanchez at: scottsanchez@unm.edu

***One last thought. If you like this newsletter and dialogue with the chapter, please forward this newsletter, or our sporadic eBlasts, to others you know who would enjoy and benefit from it. Help us build.***