

History of the Geography (& Environment) Department

The origins of the Geography & Environment Department coincided with the founding of the University, making it one of the oldest departments in the CSU System.



Geography instruction began in the first years of the **San Francisco State Normal School**, when in 1901/02 **Walter J. Kenyon** offered a 10 week Geography course. Kenyon was a member of the original group of faculty selected for the school by its first President Frederic Burk. Originally hired as Instructor of Manual

Methods, Kenyon became the first Supervisor of Geography.



Fig. 1.
Mass map of North America.



Fig. 1.
Chalk Relief of Scandinavia.

Figure 1. Walter J. Kenyon's chalk-talk maps and other figures (SF State Normal School Bulletin).

During the early years, the campus was located downtown on Powell Street near Clay, until the 1906 earthquake when it moved to the Waller and Buchanan site where it remained until 1952/53. Faculty positions were referred to as Supervisor or Assistant Supervisor of various subjects. Supervisor positions were typically held by university graduates, such as Allison Ware in 1905, Freedom W. Hoffman (UC Berkeley) in 1912 and Archibald Anderson in 1913, who became acting President when Burk passed away in 1924. Assistant Supervisors were typically recent normal school graduates, such as Adelyn M. Brickley (1905), Eugenia M. Schmidt (1913), Jura Blair (1914), and Mildred A. Kreischer (1916). In 1916, the geography curriculum consisted of three courses, and by 1923 had expanded to seven, including physical, economic, California resources, human, world regional, and geography teacher preparation.



In 1922 **Anna Verona Dorris** was appointed as the first long-term geography instructor. Educated at the University of California and Columbia University, Dorris's roles were Supervisor of Visual Instruction (cartography and map interpretation) and Assistant Professor of Geography. Her 1928 book *Visual Instruction in the Public Schools* was a pioneer work in visual instruction; For more about her work as a pioneer in visual instruction see Wendell G. Johnson's 2008 article "Anna Verona Dorris and the Visual Instruction Movement, 1918-1928" *Tech Trends* 52(4): 51-58. In the 1920s, Dorris taught such courses as Human Geography, Economic Geography, Geography of the Americas, and *The New Point of View in Teaching Geography*. Her courses were offered by the Social Sciences unit, which housed Contemporary Civilization, Geography, Economics, History, Sociology and Government courses. Anna Dorris also offered Introduction to Geology and Physiography in the Physical Sciences unit.

San Francisco State College

In 1935 the Normal School was reconstituted as San Francisco State College, with a liberal arts curriculum and a Social Science Department offering instruction in the fields of Economics, Geography, Government, History, and Sociology. **Walter A. Hacker**, (Ph.D. 1931, University of Vienna; dissertation on glacial geomorphology of the Alps) was one a group of refugee geographers convinced to come to the states by Carl Sauer. He left Austria in 1933, frustrated with the growing harrassment of intellectuals, to become an instructor in Tientsin (and/or Nanking), China; and was hired by San Francisco State in 1937, teaching courses in physical geography, especially geomorphology, and developed a new course on field work in geography. During the second world war, Hacker helped the federal government map the coast of northern China, where he had expert knowledge and where plans were being considered to initiate an assault on Japan. Although he was instrumental in establishing Geology and Anthropology programs, originally born as GEOG courses, and served as advisor for the major in Earth Science, Dr. Hacker remained with the field and the Department of Geography until his retirement in 1972.

In the 1938 Bulletin was listed introductory physical and cultural geography, map reading and interpretation, economic geography, geomorphology, climatology & oceanography, regional courses in North America, Latin America, Asia & the Pacific, Africa, northern Europe, and southern & central Europe. By 1943 was added courses in cartography, map projections, a regional course on war zones, and political geography, then in 1945 a field work course was introduced.

The end of the Second World War brought the G.I. Bill, which supported a period of rapid growth in the geography program, the College, and indeed higher education throughout the United States. In 1947/48 the Division of Social Science was created, and the geography major and minor established.

In 1948 Anna Dorris retired and was replaced by **Lyle E. Gibson** as Assistant Professor of Geography, to teach human and regional geography courses. Gibson also continued the tradition established by Dorris of leading tours on luxury cruises, in his case to Hawai'i and the far east. His **picture** shown here is from a press release announcing one such voyage, from the deck of the SS President Cleveland leaving from San Francisco as the Fifth Annual Summer Adventure Study Cruise, to visit Honolulu, Kobe, Yokohama, Manila and Hong Kong, offering "an opportunity for painless and pleasant education -- and lots of fun."



Moving to the present campus

The campus moved to its present Lake Merced site in 1952, allowing a period of physical expansion to begin and for academic programs to continue their development. Geography was housed in what is now the Business Building from 1952 to 1965. In the 1951 Bulletin were listed one lower division class in regional geography, and upper division classes in field work, maps and map Interpretation, physical geography, economic geography, conservation of natural resources, political geography, regional classes in US & Canada, California, Latin America, Europe, Soviet Union, Eastern Asia, and Southern Asia; and a couple of graduate seminars.



Alfred R. Sumner (Ph.D. 1949, Clark University) left Stanford University to join Drs Hacker and Gibson in 1953. Sumner was known for giving inspiring lectures while at Stanford, but was concerned about university policies leading to the purger of several of his progressive colleagues. At SFSU, he was known as a capable instructor, and an expert on geopolitics and east Asia. He also led highly popular field trips by air over portions of California and to Latin America (R. Hough, pers. comm.)

Walter Olson (Ph.D. Syracuse) arrived in 1955. His focus was geographic education, and established world regional geography as a required class for education students. He eventually moved into administration as dean at Western Illinois University, and in 1975 became president of CSU Stanislaus.



A fifth faculty member, **Astvaldur Eydal**, joined the program in 1959, having completed the *Filosofie licentiat* at the University of Stockholm followed up by a Ph.D. at the University of Washington in 1963. He taught physical geography, especially geomorphology and oceanography, with a strong Icelandic accent, was a master chess player, and climbed major volcanic peaks worldwide.



Figure 2. Geography students in 1956 (University Archives)

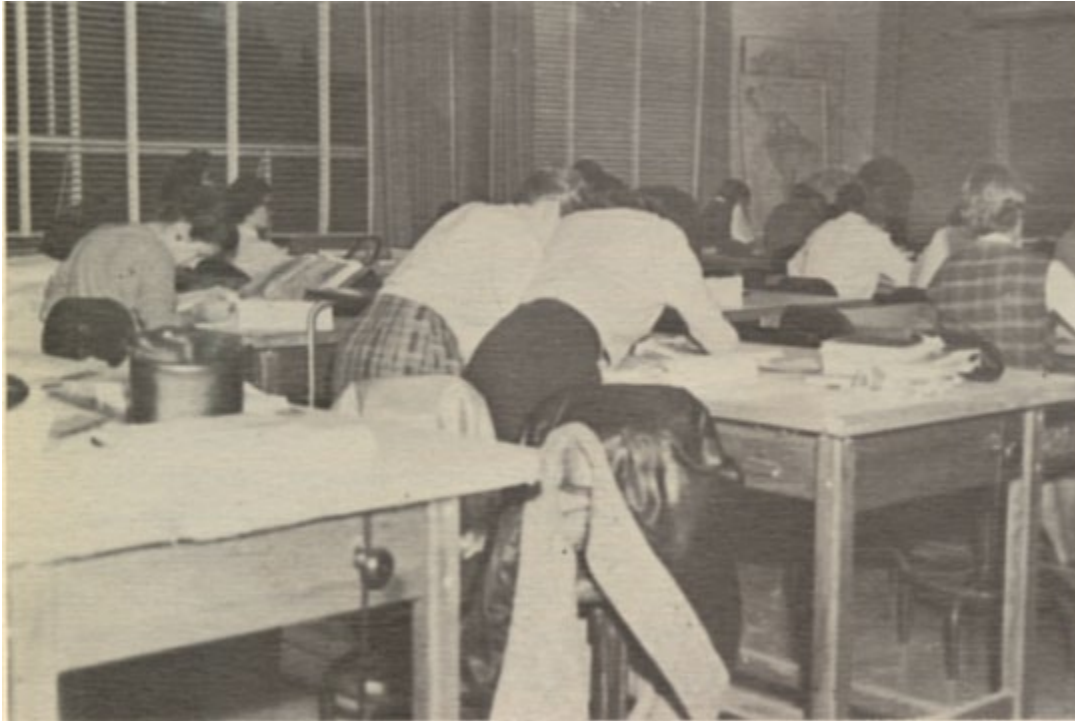


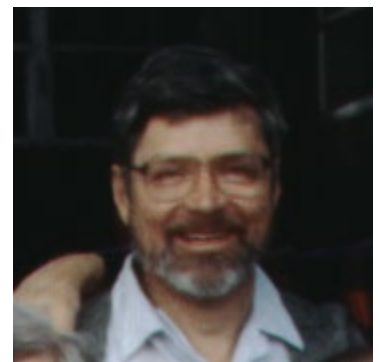
Figure 3. Cartography students hard at work in 1960 (University Archives)

The program finally became the Department of Geography in 1961/62, with Dr. Gibson as Department Head. That year also saw our first graduate course. Dr Gibson left in 1962, when Walter Hacker became Chair.



Jean B. Vance (Ph.D. Geography, Clark University, 1958) was hired in 1962, with specialties in economic and urban geography. Jean was one of a small handful of women who earned Geography Ph.D.'s in the country during the 1950's and early 1960's. Two others, Eleanor Hanlon (Ph.D. 1953) and Mildred Berman (Ph.D. 1962), were also products of Clark. Jean served as a highly capable and strategic chair of the department from 1980 to 1992.

Richard F. Hough (Ph.D. Geography, University of Wisconsin, 1963) brought expertise on Japan and east Asia, also developing the Geography of Ethnic Communities course, and was known for his field trips both at professional meetings and with students: including water for the cities in a trans-Sierra crossing; "Fog and Fault", "SF at Night", even a trip to Japan and East Asia, and his favorite, an exploration of the California Delta.





Robert D. Picker (Ph.D. Geography, University of Washington, Dissertation *Industrial Development in Central Siberia and Northern Kazakhstan*) was hired in 1963, and continued the tradition of geopolitical specialists focusing on Asia, but especially studied the Soviet Union.

Thus seven geographers were listed in the 1964/65 University Catalog, when the old Social Science Division became the School of Behavioral and Social Sciences. At that time, the Department of Geology was established in the School of Natural Science, and the Department of Geography moved to its present location on the second floor of the north wing of the HSS Building.



Figure 4. Vance, Hough, and Crawford at a thesis defense.



Max C. Kirkeberg (CMS, ABD Geography, University of Wisconsin, Madison) was hired in 1965 to replace Sumner. Max's early specialty from grad school was Africa, and he regularly taught the Geography of Africa. His thesis topic dealt with the reconstruction of the pre-colonial political systems in the Bouchi province of Northern Nigeria based on 1 ½ years of field work in Nigeria and 6 months of archival research in London. Max taught a host of regional classes focusing on parts of the US (Southeast, Northeast, Southwest, Mid-West, and California) as well as the World and US & Canada. He particularly loved courses on his adopted home and study area -- San Francisco, including a two semester field class called San Francisco on Foot. He became aware of changes in San Francisco and began to document these photographically. Ultimately his slide collection numbered 58,000 just of San Francisco, which he is in the process of digitizing since 2014, coming in to school every day to work on it.

Burton "Roy" Gordon (Ph.D. Geography, UC Berkeley, 1954), a student of Carl Sauer at Berkeley working on human ecology of tropical areas such as Panama and Colombia, was hired in 1965 after ten years at University of New Mexico where he became chair. At SFSU, he developed local research including the natural history and cultural imprints of the Monterey Bay area, and regularly taught courses at the Moss Landing Marine Lab.

In 1966/67, the **Master of Arts in Geography** was approved.



Developing the Environmental Curriculum

Though courses in conservation of natural resources had been offered since the early 1950's, the mid-60's were notably when the department added significant environmental courses to the curriculum in a joint effort with Biology. Today's Our Endangered Planet (BIOL 318) and Environmental Problems and Solutions (GEOG 600) date back to that beginning. The undergraduate program included a focus in environmental management starting in 1970.



Georg Treichel (Ph.D. Geography, UC Berkeley, and like Roy Gordon a student of Carl Sauer) was initially hired as a joint appointment with Biology, in order to establish an environmental studies program, but eventually moved over to Geography full time. Georg was a specialist in the establishment of national parks and wildlife preserves worldwide, and traveled extensively despite being afflicted with polio.

Hans J. Meihoefer (Ph.D. Geography, University of Washington), was hired away from CSU Northridge in 1968 to bring back the department's early reputation in cartography, and always maintained a keen eye for good map design. His early research was on the perception of point symbols, for which he developed the method of range-graded circles. While at SFSU and during a series of sabbaticals, Hans developed international research in agriculture and food supply, and promoted the development of an environmental studies focus, now the BS in Environmental Science. Hans promoted the importance of field work, and made sure that the department curriculum included field experience, even extending to personally buying the department a new van -- the "Hansmobile" -- when he retired.





John E. Westfall (Ph.D. Geography, George Washington University) also joined the faculty in 1968, and combined expertise in air photo interpretation (see his [air photo atlas of the SFSU campus](#)), field surveying, selenography (his *Atlas of the Lunar Terminator* is a unique approach to mapping the moon), and historical geography. In John's air photo class, students collected air photos out of the window of top-wing Cessna airplanes, with John developing a special mount with mirror for using 50-mm cameras safely out the passenger window of these aircraft.

Roger Crawford (Ph.D. Geography, University of Washington) was the first planning specialist in the department, hired in 1969, and focused on bay environments and transportation planning. He was a longtime member of the Bay Conservation and Development Commission, and was one of the first group of faculty involved in the establishment of SFSU's Romberg Tiburon Center for Environmental Studies.



Figure 5. Picker, Kirkeberg, Crawford, Meihoefer, Vance, and Westfall in maybe the 1970s.

Steven Pease (Ph.D. 1978 University of Wisconsin Milwaukee) was hired in 1975, specializing in climatology & remote sensing in 1975. Pease died while on sabbatical in Fall 1984 from an allergic reaction to a malaria prevention drug. His family established the Pease Award in his honor, and this fund provides research support for students every year, with the winner accepting the award at the CoSE Awards Dinner in the fall.



Figure 6. Steve Pease, John Westfall, and Max Kirkeberg, representing the 60s.

The 1970s and 1980s saw a succession of full-time lecturer appointments in physical geography, including **Keith Topps** (1973-76), **Mark Winsor** (1974-77), **Rene Barendregt** (1977-82), and **Larry Band** (1983-84).

Tenure-track appointments resumed in the 1980s.



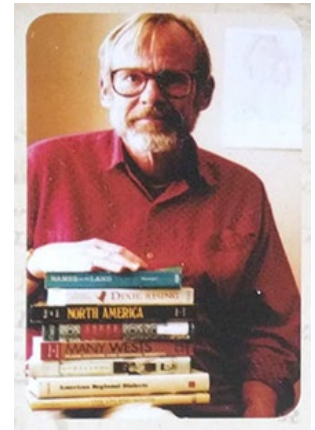
First was **Nancy Wilkinson** (Ph.D. Geography, University of Oregon, 1983), hired in 1986, and has focused her research on California, especially water resources, environmental history, and the changing perceptions of flood hazards and dam-building.



Jerry Davis (Ph.D. Geography, University of Georgia, 1987) brought new expertise in GIS when he was hired in 1988, but focuses most of his research in field-based geomorphology, in karst and fluvial systems.

Chris McGee (ABD, UC Berkeley; human geography, geographic thought) was hired part-time in 1986 and has not only taught many classes in historical and human geography, but has also served in various capacities, including graduate thesis committees.

In 1988, the Concentration in **Resource Management and Environmental Planning** was added to the Geography M.A.



Geographic Information Science

While courses in cartography date back to at least 1943 and interpretation of aerial photography in 1961, the full breadth of geographic information science was primarily developed in the 1970's and 1980's with courses in remote sensing of environment (1977), computer cartography (1979) and geographic information systems (1987).



Figure 7. Remote Sensing and the launch of Landsat 8 from Vandenberg in 2013.

A year later the Department became the home of the Multidisciplinary GIS Center, now the **Institute for Geographic Information Science**, which includes a research program, certificate program and the GIS Specialty Center for the California State University system.



Figure 8. The early days of the IGISc in 1988, with Andy and Jerry.



Figure 9. Full-time faculty (Picker, Vance, Virginia McDonald (AOC), Crawford, Westfall, Treichel, Kirkeberg, Hough, Foschi, Wilkinson, Davis) in the early 1990s.

An inevitable surge in retirement of faculty hired during the 1960s started in 1989 with the retirement of Dr. Gordon in 1989, followed by the loss of Jean Vance and retirement of Bob Picker, Rich Hough and Georg Treichel in the mid 1990s. These losses did however lead to new hires during the early 1990's.



Trish Foschi (Ph.D. Geography, Oxford) became our new remote sensing specialist in 1990 after a 3-year gap, with research on mixed pixels. She worked with several students on SF Bay delta studies of aquatic plants such as *Egeria densa*, and much of her work was connected with research at the Romberg Tiburon Center.

Barbara Holzman (Ph.D. Environmental Science & Policy, University of California, Berkeley, 1993) was hired in 1992 to provide expertise in biogeography and natural resource management. Her research has included forest succession from fires at the urban rural fringe at Point Reyes, as well as plant communities on the Farallon Islands. She developed the BS in Environmental Studies: Natural Resource Management & Conservation, and served as Director of Environmental Studies, and initiated an introductory course in environmental science, in the core of the BS in Environmental Science that started in 2015.



Larry Foster, former Dean of the Graduate Division, joined the Department in 1992, and stayed with us for several years until his retirement. He was hired earlier in the department, but I need to find that. Larry followed the tradition of some of his predecessors, including Anna Dorris, Lyle Gibson, and George Treichel, in developing a side career as a lecturer on luxury cruises to exotic ports.

Early in Nancy Wilkinson's tenure as department chair was the next surge, in the early 2000's, with the retirements of Roger Crawford, Max Kirkeberg, John Westfall, and Hans Meihoefer.



Qian Guo (Ph.D. Geography, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1996) joined the Department in 1998, with expertise in urban, economic and political geography and the regional geography of China, where he has maintained a longterm study of the development of the loess plateau and the Xinjiang province.

Ellen Hines (Ph.D. Geography, University of Victoria, 2002) was hired in 2001. Her research addresses community ecology of endangered species, mainly marine mammals, related to local conservation and regional coastal and marine management science; her dissertation research was on dugongs along the Andaman coast of Thailand. Since 1999, she has conducted research on sirenians and cetaceans in Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Belize. Dr. Hines is an Appointed Expert to the United Nations World Ocean Assessment and on the IUCN Marine Mammal Protected Area Task Force, and an Expert member on the Sirenian Specialist Group (IUCN Species Survival Commission) since 2005.





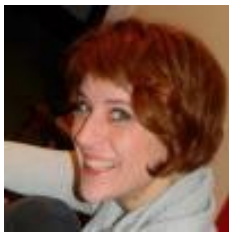
Andrew Oliphant (Ph.D. Geography, University of Canterbury, 2002) was hired in 2002 as a climatologist, and is a leader in applying eddy covariance methods to flux tower measurements of energy balance as well as carbon and water vapor flux from soils and vegetation, with applications in agriculture, meadows and urban areas. His field sites range inter-nationally from Antarctica to Iran, and in the US includes such oddities as San Francisco and temporary urbanization of the Black

Rock Desert.



Jason Henderson (Ph.D. Geography, University of Georgia, 2002) was hired in 2003 to continue the land use planning specialty established by Roger Crawford. Jason's work focuses especially on transportation, including automobility, but is a dedicated bicyclist and developed a new course in Bicycle Geographies, with the goal of promoting student use of this growing alternative to automotive transportation.

XiaoHang Liu (Ph.D. Geography, University of California, Santa Barbara) added to the GIS and quantitative methods expertise in the department when she arrived in 2003. Her research has focused on areas ranging from urban population estimation using remote sensing to health research to digital elevation model development and accuracy.



Courtney Donovan (Ph.D. Geography, University of Washington, 2008), hired in 2007, studies health geographies and gender, including the politics of health and health care, visual methodologies, medical humanities, graphic novels and art.

Jennifer Blecha (Ph.D. Geography, University of Minnesota, 2007) focuses on urban ecology, food systems and sustainable agriculture and urban agriculture. Hired in 2007, her research looks at keeping farm animals such as chickens in the city, including the practice of backyard slaughter.





Leonhard Blesius (Ph.D. Geoscience, University of Iowa, 2002) was also hired in 2007, and is our principal remote sensing specialist who studies landslide susceptibility. He has been developing low-altitude remote sensing methods using unpiloted aerial systems, and has studied the application of hyperspectral methods for vegetation mapping.

The **MS in Geographic Information Science** accepted its first students in Fall 2009.

Geography & Environment

In 2011, the department moved to the **College of Science & Engineering** as part of university restructuring into 6 colleges. Soon afterwards, the department name was shortened to **Department of Geography & Environment** (2013), and a **BS in Environmental Science** initiated in Fall 2015.



Tendai Chitewere (Ph.D. Anthropology, Binghamton University (SUNY), 2006) came to our department in 2012 and has continued her research on sustainable communities. As a member of the SF BUILD program, she has studied health disparities in urban communities.

Leora Nanus (Ph.D. Geography, University of Colorado, Boulder, 2008) was hired in 2014, with a focus on hydrology, water quality and environmental science. Her research looks at the nitrogen cycle and links air and water quality in national parks.





Figure 10. Full-time faculty (Guo, Davis, Theresa Kane (AOC), Holzman, Henderson, Blesius, Chitewere, Oliphant, Blecha, Wilkinson, Donovan, Nanus, Hines, Liu) January 2016.



Sara Baguskas (Ph.D. Geography, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2014) was hired in 2017, with specialties in terrestrial biogeography, plant ecophysiology, climate change, coastal fog, Mediterranean-climate ecosystems, water resource management, urban ecohydrology, science education and outreach.

Department chairs in recent decades have included Roger Crawford (1979-1980), Jean Vance (1980-92), Hans J. Meihoefer (1992-97), Nancy Wilkinson (1997-2010), Jerry Davis (2010-2019), and Andrew Oliphant (2019-present).



Erica Maciel is here representing the central figure in the department: the Academic Office Coordinator. The history of those serving in this critical role is sadly largely unknown, but two of the group shots above (figures 9 and 10) show Virginia McDonald and Theresa Kane.

Similarly, part-time and adjunct professors, so critical to reaching the majority of our students, especially in introductory classes, are not represented in this history, though some served this role for many years, such as Chris McGee, mentioned earlier.

As time moves along and as we've managed to survive major disruptions like COVID-19, this history will continue and this document will get new entries....