

Summer 2025

Geography Newsletter

University of South Carolina Department of Geography



Department Chair Dr. Jerry Mitchell, keynote speaker at the Encontro Nacional de Prática de Ensino em Geografia in São Paulo, Brazil.

From the Chair's Desk

Dear Students, Colleagues, Alumni, and Friends,

As Chair of the Department of Geography, I am pleased to welcome you to our summer newsletter. This past year has been a dynamic time here, filled with groundbreaking research, community engagement, and student success. Whether exploring the impact of climate change, mapping disaster resilience, or aiding K-12 educators to improve their knowledge and teaching of geography, our faculty and students continue to demonstrate the vital role geography plays in understanding our world.

In this issue, we highlight some of the incredible work being done at the University of South Carolina — from faculty achievements (there are many!) and student stories to new initiatives and upcoming events. We hope you'll find inspiration in these updates and take pride in the progress we've built together. Thank you for being part of our community.

With warm regards,

Jerry Mitchell

Professor and Chair, Department of Geography

Faculty and Staff Highlights

Dr. Jessie Barnes received a prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship to continue her work on air pollution in the UK.

Congratulations to **Dr. Greg Carbone** for receiving the 2025 Mungo Distinguished Professor of the Year award, the university's highest teaching achievement.

Clockwise from top left:
Jessie Barnes, Greg
Carbone, Susan Cutter,
Carl Dahlman, Shadya
Davis, Kirstin Dow, Varun
Goel, and Sena Nickles.

Long-time director of the Hazards Vulnerability and Resilience Institute, **Dr. Susan Cutter**, has announced her retirement and was recently elected to the National Academy of Science.

Dr. Carl Dahlman was recently appointed as Interim Associate Dean for the Natural Sciences in the McCausland College of Arts and Sciences.



We welcomed **Dr. Shadya Davis** as a Research Assistant Professor in Fall 2024. Her research focus is risk perception, protective actions, and extreme weather.

Another retirement comes from **Dr. Kirstin Dow**, whose research and teaching on climate impacts, vulnerability, and adaptation will be missed.

Dr. Varun Goel joined us as an Assistant Professor in Fall 2024 as part of a college cluster hire in the Social Determinants of Health.

Student services received an important boost with the addition of **Ms. Sena Nickles** as our new Student Services Coordinator in Spring 2025.

Colleagues and friends of
Dr. Kirstin Dow (seated,
right), at her retirement
gathering.



Faculty Spotlight — Dr. Varun Goel

Dr. Varun Goel is a first year Assistant Professor in the Department. As a medical and health geographer, Varun studies the spatial distribution of disease and health disparities around the globe.



Dr. Goel (center), with local
collaborators on a drinking-
water intervention and
health study in rural
Bangladesh.

Varun holds a PhD in geography from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and is a member of the AAG's Health and Medical Geography Specialty Group. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Varun, with the help of others, created a geospatial application to identify people who needed assistance carrying out basic tasks. For example, elderly people needing help getting groceries could use the app to connect with people who were potentially able to help. This summer, Varun is looking forward to a project in Tanzania

and Mozambique with a team of meteorologists, malaria control program officers, and other researchers. The focus is on understanding how to bring climate and social information together with public health data to better equip malaria control programs to deal with natural disasters, such as floods. When Varun is not busy as a new faculty member, he loves spending time cooking Middle Eastern-inspired dishes with his wife and playing pickleball.

Undergraduate Studies

The department's Director of Undergraduate Studies, **Dr. Conor Harrison**, has big plans for many more student-focused events in the upcoming academic year and is working to reestablish our department's Geography Club with help from **Dr. Robert Kopack**. Conor encourages students to enroll in Geography 595, the department's internship course. Led by **Dr. Susan Wang**, the course prepares students for the workplace, lets them explore career options, and allows them to put their skills into practice.

Andrew White (left) and
Richard Vien (right),
at a recent event.



A mix of alumni and current students at a recent event learned how to better prepare themselves when it comes to finding an internship and/or job. Alum **Andrew White**, who currently serves as the GIS Manager at the South Carolina Office of Resilience, shared how important being actively involved in geography-related clubs is to make your profile stand out. **Richard Vien**, a Spring 2025 graduate, excitedly informed the group that he has accepted a GIS technician position at the Summerville Commissioners of Public

Works and stressed how his hard work in Geography 595 and the opportunity to work on GIS-related projects made him an attractive candidate.

Gabriela Cruz (left) and
Regan Hill (right),
at this year's award
ceremony.



Undergraduate Awards

We are pleased to share that **Regan Hill** and **Gabriela Cruz** are this year's honorees to the Rising Senior Award and Julian Petty Award, respectively.

Gamma Theta Upsilon (GTU)

As we approach the new school year, we are looking forward to reconnecting our membership with Gamma Theta Upsilon (GTU), The International Geographical Honor Society. This chapter recognizes geography's next generation of leaders. Stay tuned to find a listing of our students that will join as members this upcoming academic year.

Undergraduate Spotlight — Gabriela Cruz

We are thrilled to spotlight one of our recent class of 2025 graduates, **Gabriela Cruz**, who graduated this spring with honors. In addition to earning her degree, Gabriela completed the Geospatial Intelligence (GEOINT) Certificate. Gabriela also won our Petty Award this year, which celebrates the best graduating senior. Throughout her academic journey Gabriella has been committed to research on global migration and public health. We wish Gabriela the best on her career journey, and we know she will find great success.

Graduate Studies ---

Dr. Caroline Nagel returns as the Director of Graduate Studies after a year-long sabbatical in 2024-2025. We are also pleased to announce that we have nine incoming graduate students for the 2025-2026 school year. These students, degree programs, former institutions, and advisors are:

- ✦ **Yong Hyuk Cho**, PhD, Kyung Hee University, Seoul, South Korea, DeBoom/Harrison
- ✦ **Tiancheng Li**, PhD, Arizona State University, Sicheng Wang
- ✦ **Jessica Flach**, PhD, University of South Carolina, Nagel
- ✦ **Hadijja Nakawooya**, PhD, Johns Hopkins University, Goel
- ✦ **Samiha Nuzhat**, PhD, Missouri State University, Goel
- ✦ **Sarah Truesdale**, PhD, University of South Carolina, Mitchell
- ✦ **Gwyneth Waddington**, PhD, University of South Carolina, Cutter
- ✦ **Acadia Lewis**, Masters, Virginia Tech, Kupfer
- ✦ **Reagan Martin**, Masters, Charleston Southern University, Kupfer

Graduate Spotlight — Benjamin Marosites

Benjamin Marosites, a PhD student with a focus on boundary meteorology and instrumentation, also serves as the president of the Geography Graduate Student Association (GGSA). In this leadership role, he is a bridge between his peers and the department's faculty and staff and works to ensure that graduate students get the help and resources they need. His current research has him working alongside **Dr. April Hiscox** and colleagues from the University of Illinois on the Stable Atmospheric Variability ANd Transport (SAVANT) field campaign. Ben holds the University of South Carolina's Geography Department in high regard and is grateful for the faculty for providing great mentorship and guidance. When not busy studying or conducting research, he enjoys spending quality time with his family and significant other.

USC grad student Benjamin Marosites (left) and Sonia Wharton of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (right), at the Mountain Lake Biological Station (MLBS) near Blacksburg, Virginia, examining the atmospheric Lidar they deploy to profile wind speed and direction through the lower atmosphere.



Alumni

We want to keep up with our University of South Carolina geography graduates, and we know that you do too! Stay connected with us and the program's current events by joining our Alumni mailing list. Send an email with your name and the year you graduated to the Student Services Coordinator, **Sena Nickles**, at nickless@mailbox.sc.edu.

Distinguished Alumni Award — Seth Marcus

Seth Marcus (left) receiving the department's first Distinguished Alumni Award from Chair Jerry Mitchell (right).



Seth Marcus, MA 1999, was the winner of the department's inaugural Distinguished Alumni Award. Seth has been an advocate for geography and geospatial technology for more than 25 years and has worked at the federal level with HUD, HHS, and Ginnie Mae. He has recently begun working with Esri. Congratulations, Seth!

Alumni Spotlight — Dr. Benjamin Haywood

Dr. Benjamin Haywood earned his PhD from the department in 2014. He has served in many administrative and faculty roles since, most recently as the Director of Community Science at the National Audubon Society, where he leads the society's flagship community science initiatives including the Climate Watch and Great Backyard Bird Count programs. He is also an active member of the Association for Advancing Participatory Sciences (AAPS) and the Professional and Organizational Development Network (POD). He has created lasting programs such as launching bird banding stations, equity-focused STEM initiatives, and community science networks. In his role as an educator and mentor, he uses his personal experience, knowledge and voice to advocate for LGBTQ+ inclusion in STEM fields. His recent fieldwork includes blending the social and natural sciences to explore

Dr. Benjamin Haywood.

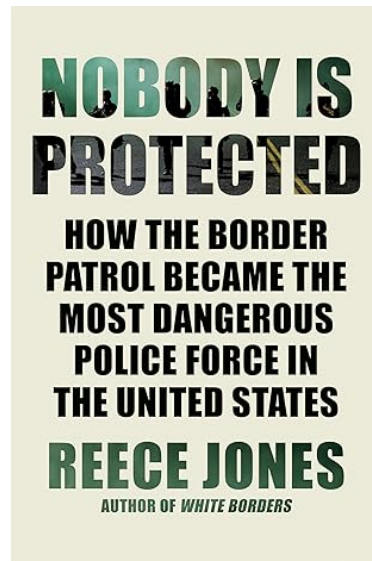


how people engage with science in informal settings and how that engagement can inspire action-based conversations. He is also exploring field experiments to expand community science engagement in Latin America, with a focus on identifying both motivations and barriers to participation. When Ben is not busy with research, he enjoys being outdoors, spending quality time with his young niece, and traveling with his boyfriend.

Around Callcott and Campus

Minghi Distinguished Lectureship

Reece Jones's
Nobody Is Protected.
Jones presented the 2025
Minghi Lecture.



We had the opportunity to hear from **Dr. Reece Jones**, Professor and Chair of the Department of Geography and Environment at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

He shared current events and challenges that are taken place at our border. In his latest book, *Nobody is Protected: How the Border Patrol Became the Most Dangerous Police Force in the United States*, Dr. Jones gives voice to the untold stories of the history of the U.S. Border Patrol and how past laws have shaped the climate of border patrol enforcement today in our country.

McCausland College of Arts and Sciences

USC's College of Arts and Sciences is now officially the McCausland College of Arts and Sciences. Find out more about **Peter McCausland**, [the USC graduate behind the name change](#).

Support Our Mission

USC Geography is successful in part due to the generous support of our alumni and friends. Your donations fund scholarships, student research travel, and the incoming graduate student field experience among other things. If you would like to help support geography's students and programs, you can visit our [Giving](#) page.

Upcoming Events

Do not miss out on the latest events taking place within the Department of Geography. Visit our [department calendar](#) to learn about upcoming colloquia, the annual Minghi Lecture, and other events.

We Want to Hear from You

Share geography related pictures, videos, stories, or spotlight suggestions with us for our next newsletter. Contact **Sena Nickles**, Student Services Coordinator, at nickless@mailbox.sc.edu.

