



DEPARTMENT OF
GEOGRAPHY

College of Arts and Sciences

Geography Newsletter

January/February 2025

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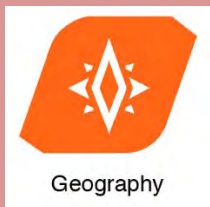
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Weather Whiplash

A record-hot January globally, but Oklahoma got deep freezes punctuated by very warm days.

Upcoming Events

March 3rd (Mon, 3:30, CLB 213) Colloquium,
Dr. Hanson Nyantakyi-Frimpong, Department of
Geography & the Environment, University of Denver,
“From Hatchet to Seed: Work in Political Ecology.”

CAS Recruiting Event: Admitted Students Day

March 4th (Tue, 11:15- 12:30), Student Union 465
March 8th (Sat, 11:15- 12:30), Student Union 265

March 31st (Mon, 3:30, NRC 207) Colloquium,
Christopher P. Davey, Institute for Genocide and
Mass Atrocity Prevention, Binghamton University,
New York, "The Banyamulenge Soldier: The Political
Geography of Genocide and Identity between Congo
and Rwanda.”

March 17-21 Students’ Spring Break

March 24-28 ***Annual Meeting of the American
Association of Geographers***, Detroit

Graduation Ceremonies in Gallagher-Iba Arena

May 9 (Fri, 4:30 p.m.) Graduate Hooding

May 10 (Sat, 9:00 a.m.) CAS Commencement

Welcome to Yao and Makayla!

Yao Xue has joined the Department as a Visiting Assistant Professor. She is teaching Meteorology and Introduction to Physical Geography. She is a Ph.D. candidate in the Environmental Resources and Policy program at Southern Illinois University.

Yao describes her background as a diverse one centered on environmental studies that includes GIS, climate, meteorology, environmental chemistry, and agriculture. She is particularly interested in the impact of extreme weather events on farming.

More specifically, she examines how increasing climate variability influences crop yields and farming practices, with an emphasis on agricultural adaptation to climate change. Her dissertation research analyzes freeze events with high-resolution homogenized datasets and models future trends with climate projections.

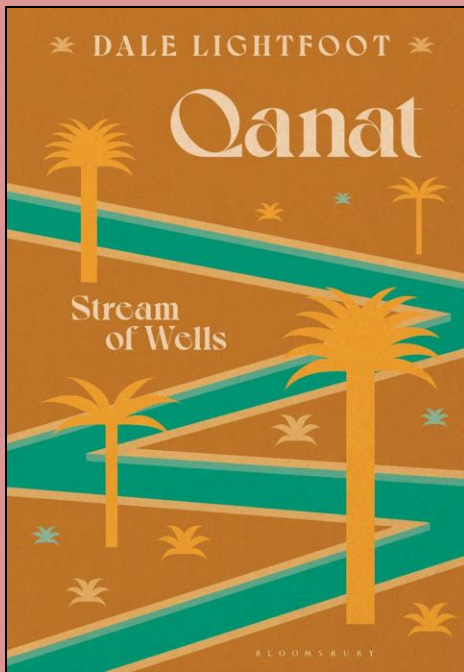
Growing up in a family of educators, Yao developed a passion for teaching from an early age. She is dedicated to supporting students and is a certified instructor of Chinese as a Second Language (CSL) and is eager to share her language and culture.



Makayla Richards is our new student worker in the Department's main office. Makayla is a first-year undergraduate pursuing dual degrees in Global Studies and Natural Resource Ecology and Management, with a concentration in Wildlife Ecology.

Makayla balances her time between classes, work, and time with friends. She says she's on a mission to visit all the dogs in Pete's Pet Posse. On weekends, she likes to return home to visit her eight dachshunds. After completing her degrees, Makayla plans to work in wildlife conservation and environmental sustainability.

Dale Lightfoot's *Qanat: Stream of Wells* Published



Professor Emeritus Dale Lightfoot's long-anticipated book, *Qanat: Stream of Wells*, was published in December 2024. The result of 30 years of field research in a dozen countries and seven years of writing, his book stands as the world's most comprehensive study of these ancient water systems.

Lightfoot explores the construction, history, and distribution of qanats and explains why more than 46,000 are still at work today. Drawing on extensive fieldwork, archival research, and technical analysis, this 880-page magnum opus features 65 maps by OSU Cartographer Michael Larson and nearly 100 photographs.

Lightfoot traces qanats from their origins in Iran, across the Middle East and North Africa, into Central and South Asia, and on to Europe and the Americas. His work not only documents a vital piece of human ingenuity but also considers the future of qanats in the context of sustainable water management.

Congratulations, Dale, on this huge contribution to Geography!



Recent Papers Published



Geography PhD Candidate **Ehsan Foroutan** is first author on two recently published journal articles. Keep up the great work, Ehsan!

Foroutan, E., Hu, T., Li, Z., (2025). Revealing Key Factors of Heat-related Illnesses using Geospatial Explainable AI Model: A Case Study in Texas, USA. *Sustainable Cities and Society (IF: 10.5)* <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scs.2025.106243>



Foroutan, E., Yu, H., Saliki, J., Ramchandran, A., (2025). A GIS-based Framework for Routing Decisions to Reduce Livestock Disease Exposure Risk. *Preventive Veterinary Medicine (IF: 2.2)* <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.prevetmed.2025.106472>



Cordova Travels to Mexico City and the UK

Professor **Carlos Cordova** has been busy travelling around the world to present his research and to further develop his knowledge of new methods of analysis.

In November he was invited to present **“The desiccation of the Lakes of the Basin and Mexico: Controversy and Environmental Consequences”** at the Forum on Water and Life in Pre-Hispanic and Colonial Mexico. The event was organized by El Colegio Nacional, a prestigious institution equivalent to the National Academy of Sciences of the United States. The event was broadcast by El Colegio Nacional. It is available on the QR code at right.



At University College, London’s Earth Lab, Carlos attended an intensive course on soil micromorphology, the study of microscopic composition, structure, and formation of sediments.

While in London, Carlos visited the Broad Street pump, a key site in the history of spatial analysis. John Snow’s 1854 cholera map, which pinpointed cases clustering around the pump, proved the link between contaminated water and disease. His work remains a foundation for epidemiology and geographic analysis today.

Geographers in the Field

PhD student **Katelyn Cooke** and her research advisor, **Dr. Carlos Cordova** are working with OSU's Ferguson College of Agricultural to locate an experimental test plot.

Katelyn dissertation aims to understand conditions encountered by prehistoric farmers in Oklahoma and the landscapes they created from crop cultivation. Part of her research involves conducting a (geo)archaeological experiment to address some persistent questions and test a hypothesis that alluvial meadows were places sought by early farmers.



This location, situated on university land at the upstream end of Stillwater Creek west of Lake Carl Blackwell, will serve as an experimental plot for Katelyn's research. She is testing the hypothesis that early farmers actively sought out alluvial meadows for cultivation. With their fertile soils, periodic nutrient replenishment from flooding, and reliable water access, these meadows may have been prime locations for early agricultural activity. Through this study, Katelyn aims to determine whether the environmental characteristics of this site align with those historically favored by early farming communities.

Introducing the Geography Student Lounge



The Student Lounge is a space for students to connect, relax, and unwind. It features an extra-large "Big Bori Bori" bean bag chair, personally selected and hauled to Stillwater from Cape Town by Dr. Thomas Lavanchy.

This lounge was made possible by contributions from Dr. Lavanchy, Dr. Comer, CARS, and CART Services. It also includes a plant with ties to past faculty and a glass bowl from Dr. Lavanchy, often filled with candy.

The lounge is open Monday–Friday, 8:00 AM–5:00 PM. Make it your go-to spot for conversation, relaxation, or meeting fellow students. Stop by and check it out!

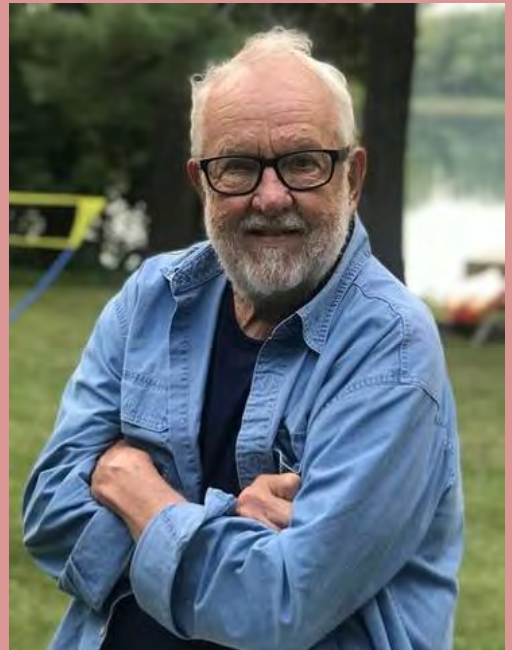
Memorial

Richard “Dick” Hecock (1939-2024)

Professor and Head Emeritus

Dick Hecock was born in 1939 in Detroit, Michigan where he lived until he graduated from high school, and he spent every summer on the North Shore of Detroit Lakes, Minnesota. After graduating from Albion College in 1960, he bought an around-the-world plane ticket and spent months traveling solo in Europe and South and East Asia, driven by a deep curiosity and a love of adventure. He returned to the US and quickly completed his PhD in Geography at Clark University in Massachusetts before accepting a job as a professor at Eastern Michigan University.

In 1969, Dick took a job at Oklahoma State University, where he served as Department Head from 1979-89. He was esteemed by his colleagues and students, and he made sure there were plenty of social events, including an annual chili dinner and hosting the departmental Christmas parties. Dick taught many courses, of which the Geography of Latin America was particularly memorable for his students because of his extensive travels in the region, and his research focused on river recreation and recreation behavior. He co-authored a book titled “Leisure, Tourism and Social Change (University of Michigan Press, 1984), and he helped start OSU’s campus in Kameoka, Japan in the early 1990s. After a 23-year career at OSU, and sabbaticals in Mexico, Scotland, Japan, and Scandinavia, Dick took an early retirement in 1992, and he and his wife Georgia moved to Detroit Lakes permanently.



In Detroit Lakes, Dick began his second act, working for many years as the administrator of the Pelican River Watershed District. In addition to becoming the-guy-who-knew-everything about the ecology of Detroit Lake, Dick was deeply involved in the community through his dedication to St. Luke’s, the Breakfast Rotary Club, and the Becker County Historical Society, among many other groups and organizations.

Dick loved people and he cared greatly for his many communities, neighbors, and friends. Detroit Lakes was especially important to him, and he reveled in his family’s long connection to this beautiful place. He cherished the lakes and the woods and the seasons and the people. He played the organ at St. Luke’s, battled invasive species in the lakes, and kept people warm with his good cheer at the Poles ‘N Holes ice-fishing derby. Dick and Georgia continued to travel the world, from Patagonia, to the Middle East, to Russia, and beyond.

Dick Hecock passed away unexpectedly on November 8, 2024 at the age of 85 doing what he loved, clearing trails on a beautiful fall day at Pickerel Lake.

Memorial Dr. James R. Curtis (1947-2023)



Dr. James R. Curtis, a respected cultural geographer and accomplished writer, passed away in 2023. He was a faculty member in the Department of Geography at Oklahoma State University from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, where he was known for his engaging scholarship, commitment to field research, and ability to inspire students with his deep understanding of cultural landscapes.

Dr. Curtis earned his Ph.D. in Geography in 1978 and developed a distinguished career exploring themes of cultural identity, migration, and place.

His research on Cuban-American communities and the U.S.-Mexico border resulted in influential publications, including *The Mexican Border Cities: Landscape Anatomy and Place Personality* (1993). Beyond his academic work, he had a deep passion for fiction writing. He authored the novel *Shangó* (1996) and worked on several other literary projects that explored the complexities of life in Cuba and along the Mexican border.

Colleagues and students will remember Dr. Curtis for his sharp intellect, his love of storytelling, and his dedication to documenting the world's diverse cultural landscapes. His contributions to both geography and literature leave a lasting legacy.