

Volume 16: Winter 2020

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## Message from the Chair

Welcome to the Winter 2020-2021 edition of the Geography & Planning Department Newsletter.

2020 has been a very challenging year to be sure, but despite the global health pandemic, our faculty and students have accomplished some pretty wonderful things. Our department is fortunate to have people dedicated to our students and we all pulled together to keep our students engaged in their courses as we transitioned to remote learning in March.

Over the summer faculty worked hard to prepare for fall. We attended workshops to enhance online teaching skills,

expanded our knowledge and use of technology, and spent time preparing classrooms and computer labs for our limited in-person classes.

In addition, faculty continued to work on research and service activities, including supervising student projects— see photo to the right. You can read about these activities in the individual faculty sections that follow. I'm so proud of all the work our faculty has done and the incredible way our students have adapted and persevered.

As tough as the pandemic has been, the most difficult thing for our department this year was the loss of our beloved col-

league, Veryan Vermette. Please see the memorial included below.

*Dr. Camille Holmgren*



**Anthony Capizzi and Jennifer Hanson sampling an outfall in Tonawanda.**

## In Memory of Prof. Veryan Vermette



**A quote Veryan left in a letter:**

**“Aspire to inspire before you expire” (Eugene Bell Jr.)**

Veryan Vermette died in August of 2020 from cancer, an outcome she accepted with incredible grace as she was at peace with her life. She is remembered as a proud geographer and teacher, possessing the Canadian norms of tolerance, humility, and carefulness to not offend.

Veryan received her M.A. in Geography from McMaster University. Her thesis focused on the atmospheric thermal regime along the Hudson Bay coastline near Churchill, Manitoba. Upon graduation, she was hired to manage a neutron activation analysis lab at McMaster's research nuclear reactor and, upon

her move to the U.S., she managed a similar lab at the University of Illinois. A final move to SUNY Buffalo State provided her the opportunity to bring together her two professional passions in a teaching career that stretched out over 25 years. Geography and teaching were a tag team that followed her though life. She shied from self-promotion, preferring to quietly see to a job well done. Veryan was a giver. In fact, her final act was to donate her body to the University at Buffalo so she could serve as a teacher to the school's medical students. Veryan is survived by her husband Stephen Vermette and their daughter Kyrie Vermette.

## Tributes to Veryan Vermette from her Geography & Planning Department Colleagues

Veryan was a wonderful person with a sweet soul. Veryan loved to discuss her travel experiences with her colleagues and students. You could never have a bad day with Veryan around. Veryan had a way to put a smile on your face. Veryan was so full of love. Veryan is greatly missed. – Lori Barry

I knew Veryan first as a student and then as a colleague and a friend. I am most grateful for the friendship that we built over the years. Veryan was smart, insightful, and kind—I am fortunate to have known her and been influenced by her. Veryan was an outstanding colleague and a dear friend who will be remembered fondly by many. –Kelly Frothingham

I learned so much from Veryan over the years and reflect often on her words from this summer to “approach each day with joy and wonder and appreciation. Allow me to serve as your reminder to live each day to its fullest, to love deeply, to forgive all, and to be present to those you hold dear.” May we all learn from her to face uncertainty with grace and strength. She was truly an inspiration and light in our community. –Camille Holmgren

I remember the first time I heard Veryan dealing with a challenging student as she lectured in the classroom across from my office. As it ended, I caught her eye as she walked by my office and she popped in for the first of what would be many quick post-lecture chats. Our chats were learning experiences for me, listening to wisdom gained from years in the classroom, trying to pick up something to use myself. She was gracious, open, and genuine. Like everyone, I will miss her, a lot. – Jason Knight

The best things in life are the people we love, the places we have been and the memories we made along the way. Thank you Veryan for some crazy memories. They always put a smile on my face. – Patty Korta

Veryan was an amazing colleague. She was kind, funny, encouraging and supportive. I will miss her sage advice and wisdom. –Mary Perrelli

I very much miss sharing a laugh with Veryan. We shared a similar perspective on education, which, when discussed often led to a smile and laugh, and peace of mind for me. –Wende Mix

As a geographer, Veryan enjoyed traveling the different countries worldwide and discovering different cultures. When Veryan, Stephen, and I conducted the Geography of Asia Field Studies class in China traveling with 11 Buffalo State College students, Veryan suggested and initiated the tasting of local food for dinner project. She not only encouraged every student to participate, but also attended every local dinner party during the trip. This shared practical experience with students inspired me. –Tao Tang

It had been an honor to know Veryan Vermette. She was a wonderful person, colleague, friend, and mentor. She was an inspiration to all. Her kindness, support, and in-depth appreciation for differences and understanding of others had made me feel the most welcome in the department and provided all the wonderful memories and experiences in working alongside her for over 14 years. Veryan Vermette is deeply missed and forever remembered. –Vida Vanchan

## Dr. Camille Holmgren



**Dr. Holmgren at Little Cayman's Booby Pond Nature Reserve, which supports the largest red-footed booby population in the Caribbean.**

Like most Geographers, I love traveling and seeing the world in new ways. When not doing research in deserts, I love to explore the ocean and was fortunate to visit Little Cayman Island in January for a SCUBA trip.

The complex structure of reefs and sheer diversity of fish, sharks, turtles, crustaceans, invertebrates, etc. never cease to amaze. Over my years of diving, however, I've seen disturbing changes. Coral bleaching, algae overgrowth from

nutrient pollution, and overfishing are all taking their toll. Having seen things firsthand helps me convey both the splendor of reefs and threats they face to students in my courses.

Not long after my trip, my attention turned to the practicalities of leading a department during a pandemic. Although this consumed much of my time, I did manage to attend the virtual American Quaternary Association meeting this summer and finished a book chapter on the vegetation

history of an archaeological site in Colorado where humans have been gathering medicinal plants for over 8,000 years. I also organized and participated in a panel on climate change, environmental justice, and housing issues in Buffalo— see section on Race, Class and the City that follows.

## Dr. Jason Knight



Dr. Jason Knight

Dr. Jason Knight continues his deep commitment to urban-engaged applied research across the region. Students in his senior urban planning studio worked with Habitat for Humanity and Grassroots Gardens to inventory vacant, publicly-owned lots in the City of Buffalo and research best reuse practices. Students presented their work to both organizations; Council Members and council members' staff; and other nonprofit housing stakeholders.

Dr. Knight was awarded two grants to conduct housing and policy analyses, while contributing to a number of other housing projects. He was awarded \$21,375 to complete a housing needs assessment, focusing on affordable housing, in Erie and Niagara counties from Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC) and Partnership for the Public Good (PPG). The second, for \$20,050, is to support the City of Tonawanda tackle vacant and abandoned properties under a New York State Zombie

and Vacant Property Grant from the NYS Attorney General's Office. He partnered with Dr. Russell Weaver, Director of Research, at Cornell ILR's Buffalo Co-Lab for both.

He also co-authored the Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice in Erie County and a Housing Market Study for the Town of Amherst. He authored a report on vacancy and tax delinquency for the Buffalo Erie Niagara Land Improvement Corporation (BENLIC).

## Dr. Stephen Vermette

A few noteworthy activities, on my part, include a presentation titled: "Humboldtian Science: Revolutionary use of Emotion and Art to 'Reveal' the Natural Sciences" (the last of my Humboldt series); working with the community group 'Every Person Influences Children' (EPIC) for 'Storytime at Canalside', at which I read the book "Cloulette"; and working with Todd Santos to provide script and historic photos for the WIVB-TV airing of "The National Weather Service has its

roots in Buffalo", in recognition of its 150th anniversary. Interviews and presentations were given to PUSHBuffalo, the Urbanland Magazine, and the Buffalo Sewer Authority, all related to climate change issues. Lastly, I found a home for my report "Western New York's Five Climate Zones" in the '2020 Proceedings of the Rochester Academy of Science'.

<https://cdm16694.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16694coll84/id/6855>.



Dr. Vermette reading the book "Cloulette" for Storytime at Canalside.

## Dr. Tao Tang

Dr. Tang published two research papers this academic year.

Tang, T., M. Radomski, M. Stefan, M. Perrelli, and H. Fan, 2020. UAV-based high spatial and temporal resolution monitoring and mapping of surface moisture status in a vineyard. *Journal of Papers in Applied Geography*. Taylor and Francis Publisher: Volume 6 (4): Page 402-415.

Tang, T., L. Jiang and M. Perrelli, 2020. Data collection and anal-

yses applying unmanned helicopter (UAV) remote sensing to survey water chestnut invasive species. *International Journal of Data Analytics*, Volume 1: Issue 1, Page: 38-51.

Serving as a member of the Professional Development Committee, Dr. Tang was invited by the New York State GIS Association to present his recent research. The presentation on applying drone remote sensing and GIS mapping for

precision farming was warmly received by the members in



attendance.

In January of 2020, Dr. Tang was invited to travel to China to establish a new international 3+2 program and recruit new students to current interna-



Signing new student recruiting program with a Chinese University.



Meeting with Vice President of a Chinese University for tuition paid student recruitment.



**Mary Perrelli**  
Mackinac Island,  
Michigan

## Prof. Mary Perrelli

I spent time this spring preparing our students for the transition to remote learning by securing laptops for students and working with IT to allow remote desktop connections for students in our GIS courses.

Despite Covid restrictions, 2020 included some opportunities for students to work on local storm water outfall inspection projects. Jennifer Hanson and Anthony Capizzi spent the summer in-

specting and verifying outfalls in the town of Tonawanda.

I continue to assist the campus with MS4 storm water requirements. Several new green infrastructure projects have been incorporated into the new Science and Math Academic Complex addition. Including a new [stormwater pond](#).

On the GIS front, we are continuing to grow our new GIS

Certificate program, We also began teaching our GIS courses using ArcGIS Pro in Fall 2020.

My family and I spent a week this summer in Michigan. We visited Mackinac Island and camped at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. The sand dunes are quite impressive and Lake Michigan is beautiful.



**Faculty and students in**  
Sambo Prey Kuk, Cambodia

## Dr. Vida Vanchan

In September of 2020, Dr. Vanchan gave a presentation with Professor John R. Bryson of the University of Birmingham Business School in the United Kingdom on Covid-19 Impacts on American Trade and Global Value Chains as a result of the recently published paper she co-authored on COVID-19 and Global Production Network. This webinar was sponsored by Buffalo State's Economic Development Office and Small Business Development Center and was attended by top government

officials and industry leaders across the state as well as faculty, staff, and students. She also authored a book chapter on a developing city and have been serving as a co-editor of a forthcoming book titled 'Ordinary Cities, Extraordinary Geographies: People, Place and Space'.

Dr. Vanchan was appointed as visiting associate professor and co-taught a Cornell University's study abroad course on Contemporary Cambodia: Labor, Development and Society in January of

2020. This course took students to Cambodia and explored how the dynamic changes in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap (Cambodia) connect to their history, policies, and labor politics.



**View of Lake Ontario**

## Dr. Wende Mix

Dr. Mix continued to develop python programming applications on geospatial programming and analysis using open data, incorporating these chapters into an e-book on geospatial analysis. These materials are used in GEG 584, offered during the Spring and Summer primarily for the DSA program. She continued responsibilities as the Associate Chair/Coordinator, IUDSA & Data Science and Analytics M.S. (Data Science & Analytics (DSA) – [Web-site](#), [LinkedIn](#)) which included development of curriculum and professional labs, participation in seminars, Board Meetings, and several subcommittees. Last year's web mapping applications on the Social Determinants of Health have been expanded to explore the relationship between high needs zip codes and confirmed COVID-19 cases for Erie County. She has supported several community groups, such as the WiFi Warriors

and the Food Security Council, by providing geospatial analysis and interactive mapping applications. Dr. Mix oversaw DSA 690 during the Fall semester which provided her an opportunity to support many master's students on a variety of projects. Additionally, an independent study with a PACM masters student explored modifying cost functions in transportation routing algorithms to incorporate neighborhood and infrastructure penalties. Phase I of the professional lab to develop a relational database and reservation program for the Amherst Senior Transportation Services is in beta testing and additional graduate students in the DSA program are working on phase 2, the focus of which is report generation.

Due to COVID, Dr. Mix was forced to cancel her summer trip to Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia national parks and her winter ski trip with her family. However, working from home has allowed her to enjoy her house on the shore of Lake Ontario.

## GIS Day 2020

Our virtual GIS day event this year featured guest speakers Scott Thompson, Lisa Matthies-Wiza and Dr. Julie Carter. Scott, is a 2016 graduate from the Department of Geography and Planning and currently serves as a Planner for the City of Rochester, NY. He provided an overview of GIS maps and tools used to support planning work in the City of Rochester. Lisa, currently serves as the Director of the Erie County Office of Geographic Information Services. She provided an overview of GIS applications developed during Erie County's COVID-19 response, and a glimpse into

the 'real world' logistical challenges behind the scenes. Dr. Julie Carter is a Lecturer in the Department of Elementary Education, Literacy and Educational Leadership at Buffalo State. Her presentation highlights the ways pre-service candidates in the School of Education use GIS to teach civics and history to 4th graders in Buffalo schools.

Any alumni interested in presenting at future GIS day events please email Mary Perrelli at [perrelmf@buffalostate.edu](mailto:perrelmf@buffalostate.edu).

## Race, Class and the City

In fall 2020, the Department hosted a panel session title Race, Class, and the City: A Climate Change, Environmental Justice and Housing Panel, with guest Eric Walker, climate justice strategist for NYSERDA and co-founder of People United for Sustainable Housing. The panel, including Drs. Camille Holmgren and Jason Knight, focused on how long-standing racial and economic inequalities in the American housing system are being amplified by the impacts of global climate change. This panel session explored how housing and climate justice, with a focus on the historic conditions and challenges, can provide opportunities and a pathway toward

just housing and energy systems in Buffalo. Dr. Knight and Walker are collaborating on a project, and grant application, to build civic infrastructure in Buffalo around climate and housing justice.

### Race, Class, and the City:

#### A Climate Change, Environmental Justice & Housing Panel

Long-standing racial and economic inequalities in the American housing system stand to be amplified by the impacts of global climate change. This panel session will explore questions of housing and climate justice, with a focus on the historic conditions, challenges, and opportunities in Buffalo.

Thursday, Nov. 12 – Bengal Pause 12:15-1:30 p.m.

<https://us.bbcollab.com/guest/4350dc8eda434cea889c942c86785374>



Camille Holmgren,  
Professor of Geography &  
Planning, Buffalo State



Jason Knight,  
Assoc. Professor of Geography  
& Planning, Buffalo State



Eric Walker,  
Community Activist,  
Co-founder PUSH Buffalo &  
PUSH Green

## Student News

### Student award winners from May 2020:

Chair's Discretionary Award: [Tyler Dannhauser](#)

David Bullough Memorial Award for Academic Excellence: [Lauren Roetzer](#)

Katheryne Whittemore Award for Outstanding Geography & Planning major: [Regan Flemming](#)

National Council for Geographic Education—outstanding student in planning: [Hailey Whitney](#)

WNY American Planning Association: [Alexis Duwe](#)

Intern of the Year– Geography: [Jennifer Hanson](#)

Intern of the Year– Planning: [Alexis Duwe](#)

**Congratulations to our award winners!**

Click [here](#) to read more about our 2020 department award winners.



Tyler Dannhauser



Lauren Roetzer



Regan Flemming



Hailey Whitney



Alexis Duwe



Jennifer Hanson

Alumni—we want to hear from you! Where are you? What are you doing? Please contact a department faculty member so you can be featured in our next newsletter.

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