May 2015

Dear Alumni, Emeriti, and Friends of the CWU Geography Department,

Greetings from Ellensburg! We are drawing near the close of another academic year, and it is a good time for reflection and celebration.

Although the university continues to face daunting challenges in a difficult fiscal environment, the state of the Department of Geography is strong. We now have about 70 majors, a number that is up 30 percent over a year ago. A big reason for our success is the new Bachelor of Science in Geography, to which we began admitting students in April 2014. CWU is now the only program in Washington to offer both the BA and BS, although many large Geography departments elsewhere in the US offer both degrees as well. At CWU, students pursuing the BS can choose either the Geographic Information Science specialization or the Environmental & Resource Geography specialization. These offerings have been tailored to match the interests of our students and to optimize their career prospects. The new degree was very much a team effort but Craig Revels, our Curriculum Committee chair last year, merits special recognition for his hard work in bringing this long-sought goal to fruition.

Another exciting development on the curriculum front is the recent approval of a new Bachelor of Science in Integrated Energy Management and the associated Institute of Integrated Energy Studies (I2ES). Geography will play a leading role in the new program. In fact, its director is Elvin Delgado. Dr. Delgado’s research focuses on the political ecology of the oil industry, especially in South America. His expertise in energy resources is matched by Elvin’s personal energy, and the combination has powered the formation of the new program and institute.

Dr. Delgado is one of the two newest faculty members in Geography. The other is Kevin Archer, who was recruited from the University of South Florida (USF) to become our new chair in Fall 2012. A native of Seattle, Kevin had led a large department at USF for many years; and in addition to his strong leadership skills, he brought to CWU keen interests in cities and the social construction of nature. As luck would have it, only 8 months into his new role in our department, Kevin was drafted to become the interim Dean of Graduate Studies & Research, and I stepped into his place as interim chair in May 2013.

Along with the new faculty members in the department, we have also seen some familiar faces move on (or at least move down the corridor in Dean Hall to emeriti faculty rooms). Jim Huckabay retired in June 2013 and Robert Kuhlken retired in March 2015. Jim is firmly
ensconced in the Ellensburg community as evidenced by his weekly column “Inside the Outdoors” in The Daily Record. He and other local emeriti from the department meet monthly at the Copper Kettle. Robert, conversely, plans to relocate to warmer climes in Tennessee soon, but in the meantime he is hard at work wrapping up on his new book about the geography of fishing ... and probably getting in some fishing along the way!

Perhaps the biggest change in the department is the retirement of Marilyn Mason after nearly 24 years of service to CWU, including 17 as the secretary of the Department of Geography. Marilyn’s infectious sense of humor brought much good cheer to those who were fortunate to be her colleagues, and she was a ready source of information and assistance to our many students. Marilyn and her husband Hal, who also retired in 2014, are keeping busy. Their biggest undertaking is a new house they are building in the hills near US 97.

Finding a person to take Marilyn’s place was a daunting challenge and we feel exceptionally lucky that we were able to hire Monica Reece-Bruya as our new secretary. Monica has already proven to be exceptionally competent and has quickly become a familiar, friendly face to whom students can turn for help.

Although many of the people in the department have changed, we continue to honor the traditions that have long defined the Department of Geography. One of these is active engagement in the community. For instance, Mat Novak serves on the Ellensburg Planning Commission, Bob Hickey is on the Kittitas County Planning Commission, and Holly English is a member of local and state recreation and environmental advocacy groups.

Many faculty have spoken to the public on their areas of expertise, including Mike Pease who has carried his passion for water issues into local churches and Elaine Glenn who spoke about the Islamic State to a Yakima Rotary Club gathering in January 2015 that numbered in the hundreds. And Karl Lillquist continues to co-lead (with Geology’s Nick Zentner) the very popular Ice Age Floods series of talks and field trips.

These connections pay off in many ways, including opportunities for students. For instance, students in Jennifer Lipton’s large Air Photo Interpretation course in Fall 2014 were able to do hands on projects for the myriad local agencies and groups to which Jennifer has forged links.

Another hallmark of our department is student involvement in faculty research. For instance, dozens of students have spent time in the field and in the lab with Megan Walsh extracting lake sediment cores and then painstakingly studying their contents to explore the fire history and changing ecology of the Northwest. And Anthony Gabriel, ably assisted by our GIS guru David Cordner, has employed many students on grant- and contract-funded work examining wetlands and coastal areas in Washington. Like the many internships we now facilitate at agencies such
as the Kittitas County Planning Department, these experiences have helped our students to grow to move forward confidently from CWU.

In fact, our students have done very well in the job market lately. They have secured employment with leading firms like Google and with many different government agencies in our region and beyond. Two recent alumni even have the job title “Geographer” (at Expedia in Bellevue)! A wonderful online resource for our job-seeking students and alumni is the Northwest Geography Jobs List which emerita faculty member Nancy Hultquist updates almost daily with new listings of interest in our region. And we are working on setting up an alumni page on our department website to facilitate connections among recent and not-so-recent graduates of our program.

We are deeply moved when we learn how much many alumni and emeriti care about CWU and about the Department of Geography. One way they express that concern is with their financial support. One particularly spectacular example was the gift of $100,000 by alumnus Joseph Stoltman and his wife Gillian Stoltman in early 2014. Joe graduated from CWU in 1962 and has gone on to a distinguished career in geography at Western Michigan University, where he is a Distinguished Faculty Scholar. The Stoltmans’ endowment will support scholarships for Geography majors for many years into the future, beginning with the first recipients in Fall 2015.

As you can see, there is a lot going on in the Department of Geography. The next time you’re in Ellensburg, please pay us a visit. We’d love to learn more about what you’ve been doing!

John Bowen, Interim Chair