



**The Earth Science and Anthropology Department faculty  
before the move to the new Allied Health and Science Bldg.**

**Geography Discipline  
Program Review  
May, 2010**

## **I. Introduction – Executive Summary**

Geography, with its associated program in Geographic Information Systems, is one of the seven disciplines of the Earth Science and Anthropology Department (ESA) at LAVC. As a discipline, Geography provides a spatially-focused and integrative approach to the study of the Earth, the environment, and human-environment interaction at local, regional and global scales. The discipline has traditionally included physical/biological aspects of the Earth (such as meteorology, geomorphology, hydrology, climatology, biogeography, natural resource management and environmental studies). In addition, the human aspects related to occupation and uses of the Earth have been included in cultural geography, population geography, economic geography, political geography, and urban studies/planning. Human-environment interaction has been included as well in the discussion of the physical and biological realms of the environment. With its unique spatial perspective and with powerful new tools at its disposal (remote sensing, GIS/GPS, satellite imagery), Geography remains a gateway to numerous career specializations given current awareness of the global implications of human population growth, pollution, global warming and urbanization. As the second largest discipline in the ESA department in terms of FTE and FTES, Geography is an important component of the department and offers popular options to students seeking to fulfill GE requirements in both physical science and social science. While the number of declared majors in Geography is low, many students find our courses accessible and valuable in completing their transfer requirements.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS), as a sub-discipline of Geography, is increasingly employed in private, public and government organizations for data storage, statistical / spatial analysis, and graphical representation. A number of social science disciplines such as Archaeology, Political Science, and Sociology also use GIS, and the Architecture and Urban Planning and Environmental Science disciplines have used GIS for a number of years. There is a growing demand for GIS technicians, analysts and programmers as GIS software developers provide new applications and the tool gains wider acceptance. However, efforts to create a viable GIS certificate program have enjoyed only limited success with few students willing to go beyond the opening course, and low enrollments ensuring section cancellation in more advanced GIS. Some faculty have offered brief overviews to the program features and functions, and infused GIS into their physical and cultural courses but student interest to date has been lukewarm.

The new Allied Health and Science building contains a physical geography lab, a GIS lab and prep room in the lab portion of the building, offices on the third floor for faculty, and a small Dendrochronology lab and fieldtrip/ROV submarine storage space in the Annex behind the building. These spaces are adequate for the needs of the Geography program and other disciplines in the department.

In the planning for the new building, strong alliances were formed with other science disciplines and departments and protocols were established for sharing spaces, equipment and perhaps future courses. This reflects the growing integration and collaborative investigations of the broader scientific community, a goal that has been pursued since the early planning stages for the AH&S building.



## **II. History – Geography**

The Geography Program has a long history at Valley with faculty members like Bob Barlow, Joan Clemmons, Angus MacDonald, and Richard Raskoff providing continuity and guidance over many years. Don Gauthier was hired as a fulltime faculty member in 2000 and represents the most recent Geography-only hire. A number of gifted and dedicated adjunct faculty have worked to fill the gaps due to retirements including Jack Kranz, Joan Hackeling, Bruce Piscitello and many others over the period since our last Program Review.

On the curriculum front, the discipline has increased and diversified its basic course offerings to include a cross-listed (with Anthropology) *Food and Culture* class, an 11 unit skills certificate in

Geographic Information Systems and associated GIS courses, including Global Positioning Systems and a GIS internship course. In addition, Environmental Studies 101 was created as part of a District-wide initiative to introduce sustainability to our students and provide a social science perspective on the environment to complement the physical science-based Environmental Science 1.

The current full-time to part-time faculty ratio in the department is 1:4 and reflects the recent retirement of Bob Barlow in 2009. A new fulltime Geographer would go along way towards addressing this imbalance. In addition, the department as a whole suffers from the lack of an adequate supply budget and a part-time tech/lab prep person to assist with setting up and taking down labs, cataloging maps, maintaining department equipment and computers, and other duties.

### **III. Program Description**

#### A. Curriculum

The discipline of Geography offers a broad approach to the study of the physical environment, the impact of human activities on landscapes, and a spatial perspective on the functioning of social, economic and cultural aspects of human tenure on the planet. The department offers an AA in Geography with 20 units and a Skills Certificate in GIS.

Courses are offered that satisfy GE requirements in the natural/physical sciences as well as social and behavioral sciences. Most of the courses offered in Geography are UC and CSU transferable (with the exception of Geography 45 *Food and Culture* and the GIS courses [CSU only]). Two new courses have been added to the curriculum for this program review including Geography 9 *People and Earth's Ecosystem* and Geography 17 *Physical Geography and Lab*. Potential new courses include a field methods course, a global climate course (cross-listed with Earth Science) and courses in urban and economic geography.

A complete list of all courses offered in Geography at LAVC and (other campuses in the District) is attached in Appendix A.

#### TAP, VCAP, ACE and Service Learning

Geography courses were once offered in the Transfer Alliance Program. Under new leadership in TAP, the discipline will reconsider

its participation and continue to campaign for TAP-only Honors sections to ensure academic rigor.

In the Valley College Accelerated Program (VCAP) and in the ACE program, the Geography discipline has offered sections in Physical Geography lecture, Physical Geography laboratory, and Cultural Geography.

Geographers have also played an active role in promoting service learning for students with opportunities for community service, independent fieldwork and internships with TreePeople and other community groups.

### Online and Hybrid Sections

So far, the Geography discipline offers only one course in an online format: Geography 1 lecture. Discipline faculty believe there are significant pedagogical issues that remain in offering lab courses and some other Geography classes in online and hybrid formats. Possible new hybrid courses include a global climate class offered in cooperation with the American Meteorological Society and the existing Environmental Studies 101.

### B. Student Learning Outcomes

Course and program level student learning outcomes have been established and approved for all Geography courses (including Environmental Studies 101), programs and certificates. College-wide outcomes are reflected in geography discipline courses especially those related to reasoning and communication skills, global awareness, and social responsibility.

Assessments of SLOs are slated to begin in the Fall of 2010 with a potential experimental assessment in Physical Geography in Spring of 2010. All assessments involve critical analysis, writing and communication skills, and spatial skills that are reflected in the use of maps and other tools of geographic analysis. By its very nature, Geography has a global component that requires an understanding of scale and the functioning of natural and human systems.

Plans for the future assessment of Cultural Geography, Meteorology, Introduction to GIS and other offerings are underway and will begin in Fall 2010 with discipline faculty discussing assessment results and improvements/best practices for each course.

### C. Students

See discussion of student demographics, success and retention rates, survey results and student perceptions in the ES&A Program Review document approved previously.



### D. Faculty and Staff

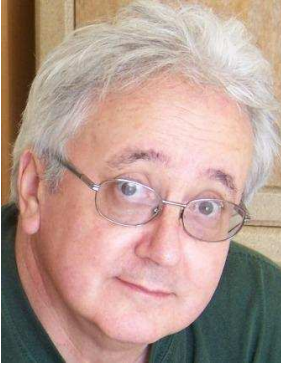
Geography Instructors  
Adjunct faculty

Richard Raskoff  
Jack Kranz  
Joan Hackeling  
Bruce Piscitello

Full-time

Meredith Leonard (see bio under Env. Science)

## Don Gauthier



Don Gauthier began teaching as an adjunct at Los Angeles Valley College in 1995 and is currently Associate Professor of Geography and President of the LAVC Academic Senate. He began his academic career at Penn State University but moved to California to get warm and took classes at numerous community colleges while pursuing a career in the construction industry.

In 1987, Don graduated from Santa Monica College and transferred to UCLA while working as a General Engineer field-testing radar systems. He graduated with B.A. degrees in Geography and History from UCLA and was accepted into the Geography program in Fall, 1989. His early interest was in biogeography but shifted his focus to economic geography while researching the aircraft industry for one of his professors with whom he published an article on American missile programs in "Research and Exploration" in 1992. He also conducted research into alternative vehicles and transportation systems and worked as a demographic researcher for Amerigon, Inc., a designer and builder of an electric car in Monrovia. He finished his thesis in 1993 entitled "The Aircraft Industry and the Rise of the Southern California Regional Production Complex" and was admitted to the UCLA PhD program in 1994.

Don began teaching geography at Santa Monica College in 1994 and soon was teaching at three other colleges as an adjunct and "freeway flier." In 1996, he also began teaching in the PACE program at CSU Dominguez Hills and later, in the Earth Science department. While at CSUDH, he was invited to teach a number of live television/online courses from a wide-range of courses including Natural Processes, Food and Culture, Civilization and Environment, and The New Millennium. In 1997, Don was able to get funds from the LAVC Foundation to teach an online class created by the American

Meteorological Society that used real-time data and problems based on current conditions. He received a VTEA grant to develop a GIS lab in MS 113 with 20 stations and taught the first GIS courses at Valley.

Beginning in 2002, Don worked as a member of the AH&S building BUG and soon after became department chair of the Earth Science Department. He worked with Suzanne Engler, Chair of Anthropology, to merge the two departments and continued as Chair for the merged Department of Earth Science and Anthropology. In 2006, Don was nominated to participate in the first District Academic Leadership Program with three other faculty from Valley College and graduated with the first Alp-ineers at LACCD. He became co-BUG leader with Karen Roy when construction began on the new LEED AH&S building and worked with other departments to finish, furnish, and complete the building.

Currently, Don serves on the District Academic Senate Exec, the District Planning Committee, the Sustainability Committee, the Dolores Huerte Labor Institute Advisory Board, the District Geography Discipline Committee, and the State Academic Senate Relations with Local Senates Committee. On campus, he is a member of the Space and Work Committee, the Sustainability Group, and the Facility Master Plan Committee, in addition to his work as Senate President. He is the current President of the UCLA Friends of Geography and belongs to numerous academic and professional organizations including the Association of American Geographers, the Environmental History Society, and the NAGT, among others.

He lives with his wife Wendy (married 25 years!), three dogs and an out-of-control xeroscape garden near LAX. Don has two sons in college – one at Hunter College in New York and one at UCLA (who transferred from LAVC last year as an Anthropology major).



## E. Facilities, Equipment and Technology

### Geography Facilities and Equipment

The new AH&S building contains a Physical Geography Lab and adjacent prep room, a 40 Hewlett-Packard workstation GIS/Spatial Analysis lab with an adjacent printer/plotter room, a shared field-trip storage room and a dendrochronology/rock lab in the Annex building. These spaces are new, clean and large enough for our needs for the foreseeable future.

The Bond program has provided funds for a much-needed revitalization of equipment, maps, videos and DVDs for all disciplines, including Geography. New map cases have also been ordered to house the extensive topographic and other flat-maps and charts that have been gathered over the years. One drawback is the lack of sufficient wall-space to hang wall maps.

Despite its initial problems, the AH&S building is a spectacular facility for teaching and learning.



## F. Campus Resource Utilization

### Geography Holdings in the Campus Library

The campus library has over 550 titles in geography and a wide-range of related books, electronic books and articles, as well as periodicals that cover the diverse aspects of the discipline. National and international periodicals are also available through online databases. The collection of discipline related materials is more than sufficient to meet the needs of faculty and students.

Geography department faculty owned videos are available in the prep room (AHS138) as well as numerous new titles procured with bond program funding.

### Computer Labs

The GIS/Spatial Analysis Lab on the second floor of the lab building has 40 workstations with GIS installed, and associated printers and large-format plotters. In addition, there are two COWs with 60 computers total for use on the first floor lab (AHS 136), as well as our pre-bond COW that has laptops to be used by students in the shared tutoring lab on the second floor.

A small GIS class could use the Bio-Informatics lab if cleared with the Biology department.

### Tutoring

Geography student success, especially those enrolled in Geography lab sections, could be enhanced by tutoring personnel and more hours dedicated to Geography. A firm commitment to hire and train new tutors is needed from Administration.

### ACE and VCAP

These two programs continue to request Geography sections as offerings for their respective constituencies. We are pleased to participate.

### Relations with Other Departments

Perhaps the largest area for potential interaction is in the development of new sustainable curriculum and the creation of a multidisciplinary environmental studies program or certificate. Also, we continue to share common spaces and resources with our fellow occupants as we had planned during the early phases of the building program.

There is huge potential for inter-disciplinary curriculum development around sustainability and urban studies. A LEED

program for training USGBC Green Associates would provide certification opportunities to our faculty, staff and students in disciplines such as interior design, urban planning and architecture.

### Off-Campus Resources

The Geography discipline hopes to use the Gold Creek facility for its field trips and the development of a fieldwork course. Field trips continue to inspire and excite students.

Contacts continue to grow with other discipline faculty across the District and across campuses in other segments of higher ed. As Chair of the District Geography Discipline Committee, Don Gauthier has invited faculty from various campuses to discuss issues and build cooperation opportunities between campuses.

### Transfer Institutions and Advisory Boards

Ongoing talks at conferences with faculty from CSUN, CSUDH, CSUF and UCLA provide valuable insights into possible changes in course offerings and articulation. Feedback is invaluable.

If the GIS Certificate is revived, the original Advisory Board will need to be reconfigured and re-manned.

## **IV. Needs Analysis and Recommendations**

### Curriculum

The Geography discipline needs more and updated digital map data and satellite imagery. A search is underway for potential funding sources including a grant. A commitment is needed to continue to fund an annual GIS license upgrade for the GIS/Spatial Analysis lab.

Geography will assess all SLOs over the next two years as part of the regular and established cycle.

Geography discipline faculty will reach out to CSUN Geography faculty about reinstating California Geography as fully transferable, and to UCLA Geography faculty to set up agreements to assist transfers and articulation issues.

Develop new environmental studies courses working with campus faculty across various disciplines in the social sciences and humanities.

Incorporate GIS and Gold Creek educational assets into existing courses.

### Faculty and Staff

An additional Geographer with broad expertise and some GIS experience would be essential in the near term to keep our discipline current and adequately staffed.

A dedicated or shared tech/lab prep person to maintain equipment, set up and tear down labs, provide support to faculty in the lab during classes (especially GIS) is needed.

Get a firm commitment to hire Geography tutors to assist students.

### Facilities and Equipment

Finalize all FF&E orders and complete deliveries in queue. Unpack, label and organize received materials in prep room this summer.

### Students

Help set up a student geography club. Work with outside Wilderness Coordinators to arrange trips to remote areas for service work.