MTSU Department of Geosciences
News and Notes - March 2016
mtsu.edu/geosciences

Update from the Department Chair, Dr. Warner Cribb:

Spring Semester brought an unusual opportunity and challenge to MTSU Geosciences. If you follow Tennessee news, you are aware that Governor Bill Haslam is proposing complete reorganization of the state community college and university system. If approved by the Tennessee General Assembly, the Focus on College and University Success (FOCUS) Act will create a new governing board for each four-year university currently governed by the Tennessee Board of Regents. Assuming legislative approval of the FOCUS Act, the new MTSU board will begin its oversight by Fall Semester 2017. There are many unanswered questions pertaining to how the new board will view MTSU's mission and funding. Over the past several years, MTSU has experienced significant budget pressures resulting from decreased state funding, implementation of the Tennessee Promise (provides two years of free community college tuition to Tennessee high school graduates, thus limiting MTSU 1st-year student enrollment), and limits on tuition increases. In particular, budget pressures make it more difficult to recruit, support, and retain talented tenure-track faculty, as well as the many dedicated non tenure-track faculty and staff members who do valuable work for the entire university. Fortunately, Geosciences has been able to develop new recurring revenue sources, such as mandatory lab and field trip fees, which so far have allowed the Department to continue its operating budget focus on core academic expenses and faculty support.

It is important for our alumni to recognize that regardless of graduation year, the value of an MTSU degree is directly related to the academic reputation of the University today. If you have not visited the Department in recent years, you would be surprised by the many on-going changes and improvements, both in academic programs and in facilities. We have several new young and energetic faculty who help us to attract bright students and high levels of external funding. We have one of the fastest growing graduate programs in the University. We have created many new courses to train students in geoscience knowledge and technical skills identified by employers as important to workforce development. One year from now, Geosciences will be housed in completely renovated classrooms and laboratories in Davis Hall. These and other improvements all contribute toward increasing the value of MTSU Geoscience degrees. The important task of continuing to improve our academic programs and resources will be easier with strong alumni involvement. Accordingly, I ask that you stay informed of the FOCUS Act and communicate support for MTSU and Geosciences to Tennessee legislative representatives and senators. The University has set up a web site (http://www.mtsu.edu/focus) detailing the FOCUS act and its implementation at MTSU. I also ask that you stay involved with our students by serving as professional mentors, providing internships, volunteering to speak to student groups, meeting with the Dean and his staff, and by contributing to our scholarship funds. Your efforts will make an immeasurable difference in the lives of our students, as well as in the value of your degree.
“Without continual growth and progress, such words as improvement, achievement, and success have no meaning”.  

Benjamin Franklin. As far back as I can remember I wanted to have a job that would allow me to work outdoors. The beauty of nature and the magnificence of mixed colors in the landscape is the true meaning of the “perfect creation” for me. At the same time, wanting to learn of the relations, patterns, history, evolution and how we perceive those changes set me in a path that defined my life. I became a Geodesic Engineer in my home country Colombia, and inspired by the technology, the curriculum and the professors applied to MTSU’s M.S.P.S program with a concentration Geoscience.

It is not easy for an international student to come to a new country with a different language and different perceptions. But after a year of being enrolled in the program, the most honest word that comes to my mind when I talk to my classmates or my friends about my experience is “amazing.” The graduate program is definitely hard in terms of dedication and responsibilities but there is a group full of people that are willing to help you and oriented you to achieve the goal that you have. At the same time, I am blessed to work in the geospatial laboratory where there’s always a new topic, new research or an academic discussion that you can be involved in and actively participate.

From cellular automates, simulation of sensors, channel formation, prediction, etc. the possibilities for learning are unlimited. The research that I was involved when I got to the university was Simulating Multispectral Imagery using Spectral Band Synthesis Techniques and Hyperspectral Datasets. The academic theory, the background literature and the research design were developed in a mutual cooperation between my advisor, Dr. Henrique Momm, and me. The opportunities to present our work in several conferences and be recognized for it is one of the most valuable experience of my graduate studies. Not only do you get to expose my work to a professional audience but also because I have an advisor that understands the academic background and also motivates me to reach my fully potential by challenging me to understand and learn new theories and research methods.

I truly believe that continuous understanding and research in geosciences will allow us to build a better world, and by acknowledging challenges and creating new opportunities, we can help our world to improve and transcend our limits better future.

Congratulations to our December 2016 Graduates!

Christopher Hatfield (BS)  Forest Stroud (BS)  
Lauren McAdoo (BS)  Mendy Lovelady (BS)  
Geoff Wheaton (BS)  Rachel Bush (BS)  
Nicole Ritchie (BS)  Andrew Manci (BS)  
Justin Jackson (BS)  Ian Murray (MS)  
Alexander McCloud (MS)
Faculty Spotlight - Paul O’Farrell (1944-2015)

This space is normally reserved to highlight the teaching, research and service activities of a current Geosciences faculty member. In this issue, we would like to pay tribute to former faculty member Paul O’Farrell, who passed away on December 16, 2016. Paul was a graduate of East Tennessee State University and Kent State University. He proudly taught Geography and Geology at MTSU where he eagerly shared his love of the world of Geoscience to thousands of students over his career of 23 years before his retirement in 2010. In addition to his teaching career, Paul served as a consultant to the Office of Space Technology at the NASA Headquarters in Washington DC and the Earth Satellite Corporation. He has numerous publications including technical reports, textbooks, cartographic products and articles in the National Geographic Magazine. After retirement, Paul moved with his wife, Val, to Florida where he spent time with his three daughters, twelve grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren.

Those who knew Paul will agree that he was one of the most intellectual faculty members on the MTSU campus. Paul could teach classes in both geology and geography, and could carry on an engaging conversation on topics ranging from politics to the weather. His Irish sense of humor was notorious, and he is credited with coining the phrase ‘Head-Shed’ in reference to the MTSU Cope Administration Building. Paul gave far more to MTSU than he could have ever received, but never asked for any recognition. His motto was, ‘People who share from within do not need the spotlight’. On January 7, a celebration of his life and memorial service was held KOM 326, the classroom in which Paul taught most of his classes. It was well attended by family, colleagues, and former students. Paul’s family has asked that memorials to Paul be contributed to the MTSU undergraduate scholarship given in his name (see below).

We will miss you, Paul.

Alumni and Friends – Mentoring and Giving!

The faculty sincerely hopes that you also will consider making a one-time or recurring gift to our student scholarship fund. Funding student scholarships is the number one financial priority for the Department of Geosciences!! We cannot do this without your support. As MTSU Geosciences expands its teaching and research programs, the Department attracts an increasing number of highly qualified students interested in geoscience careers. Unfortunately, the rising cost of a college education is the determining factor for many students in deciding whether or not to pursue and complete their degrees. Please consider making a contribution to one of the scholarship funds named in the honor of retired Geosciences faculty members: Dr. Ralph Fullerton, Dr. Burt Bordine, Dr. Albert Ogden and Mr. Paul O’Farrel. Making a one-time or recurring gift to these scholarship funds is easy through our giving website: http://www.mtsu.edu/supportgeosciences

Thank you for your support of MTSU Geosciences!