

Geography Newsletter

University of South Carolina Department of Geography

Fall 2026

Faculty, staff, and students
gather for a group picture
at Spooky Wednesday



From the Chair's Desk

Dear Students, Colleagues, Alumni, and Friends,

Welcome to our fall newsletter! We are now just over halfway through my first academic semester as Chair, and I am grateful for the support of everyone in our community. The start of a new academic year always brings fresh energy to Callcott, and this semester has been no exception. Our students are back, our classrooms are full, and our faculty are carrying their research from the field to the lab to the community.

As you can see from the faculty publications, our work continues to center on a question that runs through nearly everything we do: how do people, societies, and infrastructure adapt when the ground beneath them is changing, whether from climate hazards, displacement, or new economic pressures? From the rural counties of South Carolina to humanitarian responses in Europe and many places in-between, our faculty and students continue to learn new things through the geographic lens. This fall, we have also begun a department-wide conversation about how to articulate what ties our research together, and what makes our Geography department unique. I look forward to sharing more as that work takes shape.

I hope you enjoy reading the highlights of our fall semester, as much as we love sharing them. Thank you for being part of our community. I look forward to hearing from you, and to seeing many of you at upcoming events this year.

Warm regards,

April Hiscox

*Professor and Chair, Department of Geography
University of South Carolina*

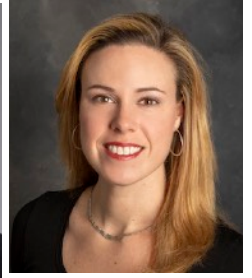
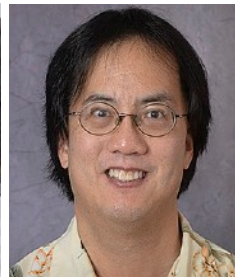
Faculty and Staff Highlights

Dr. Jessica Barnes published the article “[The Politics of Water Vapor: Mold and Moisture in London Homes](#)” in the *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* in late summer.

Dr. Margot Habets joined us this fall as a Research Associate with HVRI.

Dr. Robert Kopack published a new article in the *Journal of Distance Science* in September titled “[Governing by Fragments: Soviet Ruins and the Architecture of Unaccountability in Kazakhstan.](#)”

Top: Jessica Barnes, Margot Habets, and Robert Kopack;
bottom: John Kupfer, Cary Mock,
Alex Greer, and Catherine Studemeyer



Dr. John Kupfer will continue his funded work with the USGS Southeast Climate Adaptation Science Center.

Dr. Cary Mock was featured in both [The New York Times](#) and the [Post and Courier](#) in articles discussing recent hurricanes, including one emphasizing the importance of South Carolina remaining prepared throughout hurricane season.

Dr. Alex Greer joined us this fall as the new Director of HVRI.

Dr. Catherine Studemeyer contributed a chapter to the *Elgar Handbook: A Research Agenda for Critical Security Studies* in April. Her chapter, “[The Kremlin’s Walled Garden: Examining Orthodox Christianity, Ontological Security, and Weaponized Ecology in the War in Ukraine.](#)” examines the intersection of religion, security, and environmental politics in the context of the war in Ukraine.

Dr. Conor Harrison debuted his new book, [Brokers of Power: The Financialization of the U.S. Electricity System](#), during a book talk and signing last month. The book provides a detailed look at the financial interests shaping the energy transition.

Dr. Conor Harrison
(left) with Dr. David
Fuente (right) of USC's
School of the Earth,
Ocean and
Environment at the
book launch



Faculty Spotlight — Dr. Alex Greer

Dr. Alex Greer is the director of the Hazards Vulnerability & Resilience Institute (HVRI) and a professor of geography at the University of South Carolina. He earned his Ph.D. in Disaster Science and Management from the University of Delaware in 2015, developing an interdisciplinary foundation that informs his research at the intersection of climate change adaptation and emergency management.

Alex's research examines how policymakers address the impacts of climate change and disasters, as well as how individuals and households adapt to environmental hazards. His work focuses on the decisions people face before and after disasters, including reducing hazard exposure, preparing for future risks, and rebuilding their lives. His research interests include hazard adjustments, managed retreat, climate adaptation, disaster recovery, and housing policy.

With a background in geology and sociology, Alex brings a multidisciplinary perspective to understanding how place, policy, institutions, and environmental risks shape people's lives. He views geography as more than the study of maps; it provides a framework for understanding the relationships between people and their environments and identifying ways to reduce vulnerability and strengthen community resilience. This

perspective is reflected in his research on the housing challenges people face in the aftermath of disasters.

A significant part of Alex's research explores housing challenges faced by homeowners and renters displaced by wildfires in California and Hawai'i. He is particularly interested in the barriers that households encounter when seeking stable housing after a disaster. On Maui, Alex has partnered with the Maui Housing Hui, a local housing nonprofit, to conduct focus groups with renters displaced by the devastating 2023 Lahaina wildfire.



Dr. Alex Greer, Director of the Hazards Vulnerability & Resilience Institute, holding his daughter at this year's A&S reception, alongside his wife (right), son, and Dr. April Hiscox, Chair of the Department of Geography.

Through this community-centered research, Alex and his team aim to identify barriers to securing long-term housing and help policymakers better understand household needs. Their findings can inform recovery programs, address gaps in housing assistance, and improve support for disaster survivors. Beyond informing policy, this work also allows Alex to connect academic research with the real-world experiences of the people most affected by disasters.

Alex finds this work especially rewarding because it connects academic research with real-world needs. Hearing directly from disaster survivors helps him understand the challenges they face and ensures their experiences inform research and policy decisions.

Alongside his commitment to community-centered research, mentorship is equally important to Alex. He is committed to helping graduate students develop the research, writing, and leadership skills needed to become successful researchers and the next generation of scholars. One of his proudest accomplishments was securing a National Science Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant (DDRIG) with a Ph.D. student, giving the student an opportunity to lead research on disaster recovery while gaining experience in grant writing and project development.

Reflecting on what motivates him to do what he does, Alex stated, "The real-world impact of my work is what gets me up in the morning, but so does mentoring students and developing the next generation of scholars. Being able to bring both together in one package is really special."

His commitment to research and mentorship is reflected in his scholarly contributions, which have appeared in leading journals, including *Applied*

Geography and *Risk Analysis*, and have been featured in major media outlets such as *The New York Times*, NPR, and *Scientific American*.

As director of HVRI, Alex looks forward to building on this work by strengthening interdisciplinary collaboration, connecting researchers across campus, and expanding the institute's impact. He believes that addressing the complex challenges associated with hazards and disasters requires collaboration across disciplines and partnerships with affected communities.

Ultimately, Alex's work is driven by a desire to reduce human suffering and improve disaster recovery. Through conversations with survivors, he has documented how recovery can take years and how the assistance programs designed to help survivors recover can bring their own challenges. These experiences motivate him to pursue research that informs better policies, reduces future risks, and makes recovery more accessible and responsive to survivors' needs. In his leadership role, Alex is honored to guide HVRI and approaches the responsibility with humility and a commitment to advancing the institute's mission.

In addition to his research and leadership responsibilities, Alex brings his expertise into the classroom. He teaches GEOG 530: Environmental Hazards, helping students explore the relationships among people, the environment, and disaster risk.

Outside the university, Alex enjoys spending time with his wife and two children, traveling, reading science fiction and fantasy, grilling and smoking food, and cheering on college football. Having grown up in Tennessee, he remains a Tennessee Volunteers fan, although he is happy to support the South Carolina Gamecocks when the teams are not playing each other.

Through his research, teaching, leadership, and mentorship, Alex hopes to build stronger, more resilient communities and ensure disaster survivors have the resources, support, and opportunities they need to recover and thrive.

Undergraduate Studies

Undergraduate Studies was excited to welcome our geography students back for the fall semester! Dr. Conor Harrison, Director of Undergraduate Studies, is looking forward to a semester filled with opportunities to celebrate geography.

One highlight of the semester will be Geography Awareness Week, November 16–20, when Undergraduate Studies will host three exciting events. The week will feature a movie night and discussion, an all-day humanitarian map-a-thon focused on updating open-source maps, and a geography quiz bowl, pitting capstone students against faculty and graduate students.

The Department's Geography Club is also off to a great start. At the beginning of the semester, the Club welcomed new and returning students to its first gathering of the year. The Geography Club recently elected its new executive leadership team:

- *President: Matthew Prill, Senior, Cyber Policy and Ethics*
- *Vice President: Alayna Zitelli, Sophomore, Cyber Policy and Ethics*
- *Secretary: Jonathon Olson, Freshman, Pre-Business*
- *Treasurer: Eric Gomez, Senior, Pharmaceutical Sciences*
- *Events & Outreach Chair: Jenna Kellenberger, Sophomore, Geography*
- *Communications Chair: Dyana Martinez, Junior, Finance*



Members of the
University of South
Carolina Geography
Club at the Fall
Welcome Back
Gathering



Undergraduate Spotlight — Andrew Mims

Andrew Mims discovered his interest in geography while taking AP Human Geography in high school. The course inspired his passion for urban planning and helped him see how geography could lead to a meaningful career.

Andrew enrolled at the University of South Carolina, where he is now a senior majoring in Geography with an emphasis in GIS, along with minors in Environmental Studies and Business Administration. Courses such as Geographic Information Systems and Landform Geography helped build the foundation for his academic and professional experiences.



Andrew Mims,
Senior Geography
Major with Minors
in Environmental
Studies and
Business
Administration

Although still an undergraduate student, Andrew has completed three internships that have given him valuable hands-on experience.

With the City of Columbia's Zoning and Planning Department, Andrew supported efforts to plan and implement new zoning laws. He also helped identify and map billboards that did not comply with state ordinances regarding billboard placement.

At the South Carolina Department of Transportation, Andrew worked in the Environmental Department, where he helped process environmental permit applications for projects across the state. His work

included reviewing projects involving existing infrastructure, such as bridges, to ensure wildlife-protection measures were considered before construction began.

Andrew served as a GIS Intern with Berkeley Electric Cooperative in South Carolina's Lowcountry. He contributed to mapping projects related to underground utility planning, using ArcGIS Pro and other utility systems to support community projects.

Outside the classroom, Andrew serves as Philanthropy Chair for the University of South Carolina's Sigma Chi Gamma Nu Chapter. In this role, he helps organize charitable fundraisers and community-service events. Last spring, the chapter raised \$27,000 for the Huntsman Cancer Institute through its annual "Derby Days" fundraiser.

In his free time, Andrew enjoys playing tennis with friends, hiking, and meditating.

Reflecting on his journey, Andrew encourages students to explore the many opportunities geography offers. "Geography is so varied — you do not have to follow one track," he said. "You can find your niche and what interests you. Do not box yourself in."

After graduating this spring, Andrew plans to use his GIS knowledge and internship experience to begin his career.



Nelson Kowu, conducted his fieldwork in Sharkey and Issaquena Counties, Mississippi

Graduate Studies

Great things are happening in Graduate Studies! Dr. Caroline Nagel, Director of Graduate Studies, shared updates on the exciting research and professional experiences of our graduate students.

Nelson Kowu: Investigating Flooding and Agriculture in Mississippi

Fourth-year doctoral student Nelson Kowu spent seven weeks over the summer conducting dissertation fieldwork in Sharkey and Issaquena Counties, Mississippi. He interviewed farmers and residents about their experiences with flooding and agriculture in the Yazoo Mississippi Delta. His research examines how environmental assessments account for the cumulative effects of a century of flood control and agricultural development. This work is part of an NSF EPSCoR collaboration with Mississippi State University and Mississippi Valley State University focused on climate vulnerability in the Delta.



Acadia Lewis, at the Belle W. Baruch Institute for Marine and Coastal Sciences

Acadia Lewis: Mapping Coastal Wetlands

Second-year master's student Acadia Lewis conducted fieldwork this summer at the Belle Baruch Institute for Marine and Coastal Sciences. Her research maps coastal wetlands to investigate the relationship between microalgal biomass and mud snails. Using multispectral sensors and sediment cores, Acadia assesses the spatial organization of microscopic organisms at fine scales. She also gained professional experience as a geospatial analyst intern at the South Carolina Geological Survey.

Ben Marosites: Exploring Aerosol-Cloud Interactions and Prescribed-Fire Impacts

Fourth-year doctoral student Ben Marosites was accepted into the Department of Energy's Big Open Data Science Summer School this past summer. Spending time at the National Weather Service in Norman, OK, he gained hands-on experience in atmospheric data analysis, high-performance computing, machine learning, and explainable AI. His team investigated aerosol-cloud interactions by using an XGBoost model to predict cloud condensation nuclei (CCN) concentrations from other aerosol measurements. The project highlighted the potential and limitations of machine learning in atmospheric research and the importance of scientifically meaningful model predictions.



Ben Marosites (right), with his team at the Department of Energy's Big Open Data Science Summer School

Samiha Nuzhat: Supporting Geospatial Research at USC

Second-year doctoral student Samiha Nuzhat is serving as the GIS Support Assistant at Thomas Cooper Library this semester. She provides geospatial research and mapping support to USC students, faculty, and staff, while collaborating on projects that include interactive maps and web-based geospatial presentations. Samiha also facilitates ArcGIS StoryMaps workshops and consults with researchers on visualizing, analyzing, and communicating geospatial data.



Samiha Nuzhat

These projects highlight the diverse research, practical experience, and community engagement of our graduate students as they address important environmental and geospatial challenges.

Graduate Spotlight — Samiha Nuzhat

Samiha Nuzhat's academic journey spans environmental science, bioinformatics, public health, and geography. Originally from Bangladesh, she brings an interdisciplinary perspective to her research, examining how environmental change and geographic inequalities shape people's lives.

Samiha earned a double major in environmental science and bioinformatics from the Asian University for Women in Bangladesh in 2020. She later earned a master's degree in public health, specializing in epidemiology, from Independent University, Bangladesh, followed by a second master's degree in geography from Missouri State University.

Her interest in geography grew from a desire to understand how location influences people's experiences and access to resources. "I always wanted to work with locational data and understand how things vary by location," she explained. She sees geography as a powerful field of study to understand differences across places and address real-world challenges.

Now a second-year doctoral student in geography at the University of South Carolina, Samiha focuses on human-environment interactions, climate change adaptation, and health disparities.

Much of her research centers on Bangladesh, where her knowledge of the native language and local context informs her work. Before graduate school, she spent nearly three years working with development organizations in the

country. These experiences, particularly her work with vulnerable populations, inspired her to investigate social and environmental inequalities and explore how research can drive meaningful change.



Samiha Nuzhat's research encompasses human-environment interactions, climate change adaptation, and health disparities in Bangladesh

Samiha's dissertation examines how climate change affects women's reproductive health and access to health care in northeastern Bangladesh, particularly in a unique wetland environment known as *Haor*. Seasonal flooding and changing rainfall patterns can leave some villages surrounded by water for six or seven months each year, making essential resources and services difficult to access. With support from a Walker Institute grant, Samiha traveled to Bangladesh this summer to conduct fieldwork.

"I want to understand why some populations suffer more than others," she explained. Her goal is to identify patterns of inequality and inform policies and development initiatives that improve conditions for underserved communities.

Beyond her dissertation, Samiha collaborates on research exploring household water use in Bangladesh, dietary patterns in India, and malaria drug resistance in East Africa. Her work on household water use examines how access to drinking water affects the sources families use for cooking, bathing, and cleaning. Preliminary findings suggest that when drinking water sources are far from home, households may rely on nearby sources for other needs, even when the water is potentially polluted.

Samiha also serves as a geographic information systems (GIS) support assistant in the university library. She provides consultations, leads workshops, and helps students learn geospatial technologies. She enjoys supporting students and values the collaborative environment among her colleagues.

Outside academia, Samiha enjoys watching sitcoms and movies, listening to music, and cooking for friends and family. She is a particular fan of *The Big Bang Theory*.

For Samiha, geography is about much more than maps. It offers a way to understand how places shape people's experiences, opportunities, and challenges. Through her interdisciplinary research, she hopes to deepen understanding of the links between climate, health, and gender while helping improve the lives of vulnerable communities.

Alumni

We want to keep up with our University of South Carolina geography graduates, and we know you do, too! Stay connected with us and keep up with the program's latest news and events by joining our alumni mailing list. To join, send an email with your name and graduation year to Student Services Coordinator **Sena Nickles**, at nickless@mailbox.sc.edu.

Latest Happenings

As part of our efforts to celebrate our alumni, we recently launched our first "[Where Are They Now?](#)" feature, giving us the opportunity to spotlight their accomplishments since graduation. We were excited to kick off the series with Jack Jeffrey, Class of 2025. Follow along on our social media platforms to learn where his geography degree has taken him!

USC Geography Alumni Award Nominations Now Open

We are accepting nominations for our *Distinguished Alumni* award through **December 15, 2026**. Both undergraduate and graduate alumni are eligible. A nomination consists of two letters, one from the nominator that includes the nominee's name, degree, and year of graduation along with a statement on the nominee's achievements, leadership, service, and advocacy for geography. The second is a recommendation letter from someone other than the nominator. Both the nomination letter and the recommendation letter should be sent together by the nominator to our Student Services Coordinator, Sena Nickles, at nickless@mailbox.sc.edu. The awardee will be announced in Spring 2027.

Alumni Spotlight — Terrance Randolph

Sometimes, a career takes an unexpected turn, sparked by a single class, a meaningful experience, or a conversation that opens the door to new possibilities. For **Terrance Randolph**, a 2016 University of South Carolina graduate, geography became the bridge between his military experience, his interest in different cultures, and his growing passion for technology.

Initially interested in business, Terrance began his academic journey at Midlands Technical College, where a geography course sparked his curiosity. His interest in human geography was shaped in part by his military service, including a deployment to Afghanistan as part of NATO operations. Working alongside Romanian and Bulgarian service members, as well as local

Afghans, broadened his understanding of different cultures and perspectives and strengthened his interest in the connections between people and places.

After transferring to the University of South Carolina, Terrance discovered new career possibilities in geography. Leading up to a meeting with his advisor, he began noticing posters showcasing student research collaborations with NASA. Intrigued, he saw how geography could extend beyond studying people and places into a field with practical applications and growing career potential. This curiosity would eventually lead him to Geographic Information Systems (GIS).



Terrance Randolph,
Geography alumnus,
Class of 2016

Balancing school with family responsibilities, including raising his first son, wasn't easy. Though unsure of his technical abilities, Terrance's advisor encouraged him to explore GIS, combining his interest in human geography with in-demand technical skills. After discussing the opportunity with his partner, he decided to take the leap toward a new academic and professional path.

That decision became a turning point in his career. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in Geography from USC with a focus on GIS, then continued expanding his technical expertise by completing a Master of Science in Applied Data Science at Syracuse University in 2020.

Today, Terrance works as a Geospatial Data Scientist at Vantor, a private American spatial intelligence and software company based in Westminster, Colorado. In this role, he combines satellite imagery, geospatial data, and machine learning to support complex intelligence and Earth observation projects. As part of a machine learning team, he manages data pipelines and helps develop models that identify objects, such as vehicles and aircraft, in satellite imagery. His work brings together programming, cloud engineering, data processing, and geospatial analysis to transform complex data into meaningful insights.

Beyond his professional responsibilities, Terrance remains interested in research related to geographic artificial intelligence (GeoAI) and the emerging technologies shaping the field. His journey reflects the value of staying curious, embracing unfamiliar opportunities, and recognizing the many directions a background in geography can lead.

Terrance encourages current students and aspiring geographers to approach the discipline with an open mind and explore opportunities beyond the classroom.

“We’re all geographers because we all live on this beautiful planet,” Terrance explains. “Don’t pigeonhole yourself or limit yourself to what you’re learning in your courses. Experiment, explore, and dive deeper.”

When he’s not working or conducting research, Terrance enjoys spending time outdoors with his children and making memories with his family.

Around Callcott and Campus

Introducing the Geography Forum: A New Chapter for the Colloquium Series

The department opened the academic year with five thought-provoking events, marking the launch of the new **Geography Forum**, formerly the department’s traditional colloquium series. The new semester-long event brings together students, faculty, and the broader community for learning, collaboration, and professional growth in two series: *Invited Research Talks* and *Interactive Engagement Events*.

So far this fall, our Invited Research Talks have featured three distinguished speakers: **Dr. David Fuente** from the University of South Carolina’s School of the Earth, Ocean, and Environment, who spoke on “Financing the Transition to Safe and Resilient Water and Sanitation Services for All: Evidence on What Works and What Doesn’t from Sub-Saharan Africa”; **Dr. Chris Uejio** from Florida State University’s Department of Geography, who presented “Climate, Health, and Vulnerability Frontiers”; and **Dr. Lars Pomara** from the USDA Forest Service, who discussed “Fire in a Dynamic Region: Risks, Resilience, and Restoration in the Southeastern US.”

From the left: Dr. David Fuente, Dr. Chris Uejio, Dr. Lars Pomara, and Kevin Haynes, MPA



Our Interactive Engagement Events have included Speed Networking and a University of South Carolina Campus GIS session led by **Kevin Haynes**, Geospatial Officer at the University of South Carolina, who explored how Gamecock Geospatial is shaping USC's future through data, Geography and GIScience.

The department is looking forward to hosting one more event by the end of the year. All events are open to the public, with information available through our social media channels and the Upcoming Events section in our newsletters.

McCausland College of Arts and Sciences

As an alumnus of the Department of Geography, you are also part of the university's McCausland College of Arts and Sciences. [Connect with McCausland College and other USC departments.](#)

Support Our Mission

USC Geography is successful in part due to the generous support of our alumni and friends. Your donations fund scholarships, student research travel, and the incoming graduate student field experience among other things. If you would like to help support geography's students and programs, you can visit our [Giving](#) page.

We Want to Hear from You

Share geography related pictures, videos, stories, or spotlight suggestions with us for our next newsletter. Contact **Sena Nickles**, Student Services Coordinator, at nickless@mailbox.sc.edu.

Upcoming Events

Do not miss out on the latest events taking place within the Department of Geography. [Visit our department calendar](#) for upcoming colloquia events and the annual Minghi Lecture.

