Time flies when you are having fun. It seems like yesterday I was writing last year’s message, yet so many changes in the interim. Over the last 10 years faculty shrinkage has challenged program diversity and morale, but this year has heralded the exciting start of regrowth and reinvigoration. We welcomed Tara Holland as teaching faculty. We are poised to welcome new research faculty in the areas of hydrology and urban social change, and we are beginning searches for new research faculty in the areas of remote sensing of global environmental change and geographies of racialization. Renovation of our teaching labs are imminent, and we have secured a new Departmental Meeting room with windows(!) and funding to begin renovating technical spaces and research labs. Several of our faculty members have received international recognition this past year.
Kirsten Zickfeld was a lead author for the *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C*. Nick Blomley received the 2019 Excellence Award from the *Association of Law, Property and Society*. Internally, Kirsten Zickfeld received the 2019 President’s Award for Leadership in Sustainability, and Geoff Mann and Suzana Dragicevic received the 2019 Faculty of Environment Dean’s Award for Excellence in Research and Teaching, respectively. Alongside these accolades, faculty have created significant media buzz commenting on issues ranging from climate change to urban transformation to health services. All this work has contributed to our 2019 **QS World University ranking**: 5th of all Geography departments in Canada, and 1st amongst Canadian comprehensive universities. John Pierce retired after 43 years of service to SFU as Department Chair and Dean of two Faculties – we raise a glass to you, John. Jason Leach and Evon Khor moved on to new positions elsewhere – we wish you well.

We are also proud of our new graduands: 98 majors/honours, 7 minors, 31 certificate and 7 graduate students in 2018-19. We congratulate you all on your achievements and wish you the very best for your future successes. We hope that you stay connected with us by sending us your stories or joining us at alumni events.

To those of you who we haven’t seen in a while, we invite you to (re)connect with Geography through this newsletter and check out the details of this year’s news, kudos and events on our [website](http://example.com) and [facebook](http://facebook.com) pages.

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**Connect With Us**

The Department of Geography has had many milestone moments in the 2018-19 academic year, one of which is that the new Communications & Events committee was struck. I have had the pleasure as serving as inaugural Chair of the committee, and I will continue to do so for the coming two years. One of the significant priorities of this committee is to deepen the department’s connection to and interaction with alumni members. Not only do we want to organize events that alumni can participate in, such as our Travelogues series and the annual distinguished lecture, but we also want to identify ways that alumni members can remain as active and engaged members of our wider departmental community.

In the coming year we will be investigating ways to do this through venues such as LinkedIn and Twitter. In the meantime, I encourage all alumni members to follow our Facebook page. If you have other suggestions for how we can reach out to alumni, please reach out to me (crooks@sfu.ca). We are also looking to develop a database of alumni members who we can reach out to when organizing career-related and professional development events. If you are interested in being part of this database, please send me an e-mail.

Valorie Crooks, Professor & Chair  
Communications and Events Committee
In today’s increasingly challenging times, opportunities for positive change lie squarely within our educational institutions. Through its wide range of programming from human to physical geography, this department is particularly well placed to tackle the full breadth and depth of complexity of environmental problems that are most pressing today.

Bestselling author Eric Weiner is right to note that “nothing kills creativity faster than a wall.” The interdisciplinary field of Geography moves us beyond a wall mentality, inviting us to frame environmental solutions in a way that straddles boundaries. In many ways, the department is a microcosm of what the Faculty of Environment stands for: collaboration across the disciplines; combining generalist and specialist understanding of the world; bridging social, political and cultural knowledge with a comprehension of the physical natural and built environments within which we are all situated.

And this department does a stellar job at providing exemplary educational opportunities together with cutting edge research. From investigating paranormal cultures to urban sustainability, GIS to geomorphology, climate science to palliative care, our faculty members lead the way in truly innovative ways of thinking.

As my five-year term as Dean comes to an end, I will take with me many memories of the work of exceptional colleagues who represent the very best of what the discipline of Geography has to offer to students and to the broader community as a whole. I wish all members of the Department continuing success in their exceptional teaching, research and community-engaged initiatives.

Ingrid Leman Stefanovic
Dean, Faculty of Environment

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”
― Nelson Mandela
New Faculty Spotlight

I once disastrously competed in an adventure race...through the forest...on snowshoes...that required navigating between checkpoints – and quickly determined that, somewhat ironically for a geographer, I am pretty bad at navigation. I joked that my last words would be “...but I’m not THAT kind of geographer!”

So, what kind of geographer am I? Broadly, an environmental one: my research has involved a range of topics, including exploring the development impacts on coastal watersheds, forest fragmentation, and vulnerability and adaptation to climate change in the wine sector. Over the past 13 years I have taught at multiple universities across Canada and have become fascinated with how people learn, and how we can most effectively facilitate the learning process through teaching. This is now the focus of my career, and I’m thrilled to be joining the Department of Geography as a Lecturer cross-appointed with the School of Environmental Science. This role gives me the opportunity to draw from my research experiences in both environmental geography and teaching and learning to shape my courses.

I aim to inspire students to be engaged – and engaging – learners and citizens. In my classes, I use various types of active and experiential learning methods to give students opportunities to draw on past experience, learn from others, and develop the confidence to apply new knowledge. This approach, as distinct from using lecturing alone, translates into a deeper, more active engagement with the course material and provides opportunities for students to do work at which they excel as well as work that challenges them to operate outside of their traditional comfort zone. As an instructor, it also makes teaching a lot of fun. In the Geography department, I look forward to teaching Climate Change, Water, and Society; Geography in Practice; and sometimes Earth Systems (for now – hopefully more to come down the line, but definitely not a course on navigation).

“...but I’m not THAT kind of geographer!” Tara Holland, Lecturer
My story since graduation began in a way that is familiar to many post-secondary graduates... Under and unemployment! Immediately after graduation, I continued TAing undergraduate geography courses while job hunting to make sure I still had an income. In late April of 2017, I decided to forego another semester of employment in order to apply my full attention to the job hunt. It was one of the most difficult stretches of my life, and I wondered on more than one occasion if my eight years of post-secondary education had been worth it. However, fortune favours the persistent, so I continued the job search in earnest. I eventually reached out to an old colleague from a previous co-op position, who connected me with an overworked GIS Analyst at Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO). Within a week, I was sitting in a boardroom at DFO’s regional headquarters for an informal interview. Two weeks later, I signed a four-month temporary contract, which was later extended to a 1.5-year contract. Since then, I managed to prove my utility to the organization and was offered an “indeterminate” (i.e. as close to permanent as a job can be) contract, which I accepted.

I am now a GIS Analyst with the DFO Oceans program with a focus on a file called “Regional Response Planning.” I am pictured here on a work trip to Haida Gwaii. My team’s two main activities revolve around oil spill response planning and oil spill response. My role is to act as an information integrator to facilitate inter-and intra-agency information transfer in the event of an oil spill. DFO is a large organization with a substantial presence in BC, in which there are an estimated 2,000 employees. Many of these employees possess valuable subject matter expertise about their local areas. This information can be represented as a map, which will allow us to provide actionable advice to on-water spill response personnel. In addition, other government agencies, such as Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) and BC Ministry of Environment (BC MoE), and First Nations possess knowledge of particularly sensitive to acute pollution events, such as oil spills. One of the most important aspects of my work is my responsibility to integrate environmental sensitivity information from a range of agencies and Nations into a single map that can be passed to on-water responders.

The experiences and opportunities afforded by the SFU Geography program made my personal and career trajectory possible. I would be remiss not to mention the SFU Geography co-op program, and its tireless advisor, Paul DeGrace. Paul and the Faculty of Environment co-op program in general gave me the advice and opportunities necessary for me to begin my career in the Canadian federal public service. The coursework in my undergraduate studies along with the combination of coursework and research in my graduate studies prepared me for the breadth of knowledge required to do my job. SFU’s Geography program does a fantastic job teaching its students to integrate information from a wide range of sources to determine the bigger picture issues at play.

Nicholas Benoy, BA (2013), MSc (2016) in Geography

“SFU’s Geography program does a fantastic job teaching its students to integrate information from a wide range of sources to determine the bigger picture issues at play.”
Graduate Studies Update

Over the years, the Geography Graduate Studies Committee (GSC) has diligently worked to maintain the high quality of our graduate program. One of the characteristics of our graduate program is the richness of different research activities that our faculty with graduate students are conducting due to the multidisciplinary nature of geography. We have an enthusiastic cohort of graduate students and postdoctoral fellows engaged in exciting and innovative research. Recently, we organized a Grad Research Day with presentations from PhD and second year Master degree students showcasing the diversity and depth of their thesis research.

Another characteristic of our graduate program is the high-quality mentorship training that opens a multitude of career options for our graduate students to pursue from academia, industry and government to NGOs. Following the success of the past workshop titled “Demystifying the Academic Hiring Process” organized by GSC and sponsored by the SFU GPS SCORE funding program, hosted another workshop titled “Mapping Your Future - Geography Career Opportunities Beyond Academia”. This workshop provided an opportunity for our current grads to engage with our alumni grad students who shared and discussed their personal career paths and experiences in the non-academic sector.

Undergraduate Studies Update

There has been a lot going on in SFU Geography’s undergraduate program over the last year. Over 600 students are currently registered in our major, minor and certificate programs, and our courses have almost 4,000 enrollments across three very busy teaching semesters. With that level of sustained activity, our programming has expanded over the years to meet the needs and interests of our students. As the times and students change, we have dedicated ourselves not just to expansion but to transforming our programs to help students get access to the ideas and skills they need, and to help prepare them to go out into the world and realize the changes we need to make in our communities. Recently, this has led us to renovate and reorganize our undergraduate programming in a way that increases its flexibility and accessibility, and allows students to get both focus and breadth out of their Geography degree.

The most notable changes include the reorganization of our B.A. program more explicitly toward Human Geography which, while maintaining our undergraduate education’s dedication to the breadth of geographic knowledge, gives students who want to focus on social science a more appropriate program structure. Our Bachelor of Environment in Global Environmental Systems (GES) is an integrated mix of social and earth systems science, and has proven very attractive to students, as the number of majors continues to grow. Indeed, since the GES program is clearly filling the programming role that the B.A. Environmental Specialty once did, we have closed the latter and restructured the GES to even better prepare the next generation of environmental leaders.

The Physical Geography program reorganization is currently underway. We are streamlining the degree, and integrating options for two different professional accreditations from which students can choose: the Professional Geoscientist, which has long been on offer, and the Professional Agrologist. Both accreditations give students designations that are increasingly important to finding employment in environmental services and natural resource sectors.

All of these programs include opportunities for experiential learning, and together with the Joint Major in Geographic Information Science that we offer with SFU’s School of Computing Science and the Joint Major in Geography and Business that we offer with the Beedie School of Business, provide undergraduates access to cutting-edge theoretical, applied, and field-based education across the analytical and technical range of social and biophysical sciences. The challenges facing our communities and our planet are fundamentally geographic: they are complex, shaped by social and natural forces, and bound up in the real worlds of place and space. Our hope is to expose our students to the many ways we can and must take on those challenges.
Update from the Graduate Geography Association

This past year has been an exciting and busy one for the Geography Graduate Association. We have organized a number of fun and productive events to build the graduate student community within the Geography department, to keep us engaged with events and opportunities on campus, and to continue building our crucial place in the department.

In September, we held our annual graduate retreat – this year to Bowen Island – to welcome our incoming cohort. We shared a magnificent ferry ride, explored the Bowen community, hiked up a small mountain for an impressive view, and finished the day with an impromptu game of capture the flag. The retreat was a great success, with grads spending the day getting to know each other and having a shared experience before the onslaught of the fall term.

The GGA also held a number of social events throughout the year, including events from bowling parties, to regular happy hour outings at Club Ilia, to potlucks and game nights. These events help to build a sense of place and community among grads, helping us to feel more supported in our studies and giving us a short break from the demanding life of graduate work. We also began holding a regular, informal Writing Support Group to help each other face the endless daunting challenges that academic writing presents.

Graduate students continue to be active members of department committees, participating in the behind-the-scenes action of departmental logistics. GGA members help to represent the interests of graduate students by participating in departmental meetings, establishing advocacy and solidarity student groups, and helping to organize seminars and public talks.

The GGA also helped to support graduate students attending and presenting at conferences around the world. This past year, students travelled to New Orleans, Quebec City, Washington, D.C., and Winnipeg to present their compelling research.

Though things are winding down during the summer months, the GGA continues to support graduate students through department-specific initiatives, social events, and other student-centred functions. We look forward to enjoying some hard-earned relaxation this summer, and then to welcoming next year’s cohort this fall!

The GGA Executive
The Geography Student Union had another successful year organizing events for undergraduate students. Our student union had the pleasure of organizing the 10th annual Experiential Learning Trip to Victoria, BC (pictured here). Each year, our student union executives plan a weekend getaway to a nearby city. This year, we chose the city of Victoria to explore its rich history and unique sites to visit. With the recent trip coming to an end, we look forward to planning summer events! Successful events organized by the student union this year include a brewery visit, board game night, escape room, and a visit to the Bloedel Conservatory. We look forward to another successful academic year ahead!

The GSU Executive
Alumni Donations in Action – Physical Geography Field School

Geography 310 students took to the skies this May as part of the annual physical geography field school thanks to a generous donation supporting the student experience from a geography department alumnus. Students researched and proposed the purchase of low-cost, rapidly-deployable aerial sensors that would support their field research projects. The donated funds allowed us to purchase 2.5 m diameter helium-filled balloons, and a set of light-weight time-lapse cameras for student use. Students built the platform for mounting their sensors, which included a payload of cameras, GPS receivers, and temperature/pressure probes. Integrating remote sensing, mission planning, sensor deployment, and georeferencing, students were tasked with mapping a deforested landscape and generating a merged, scaled, georeferenced aerial photograph. We also collected data on environmental lapse rates. The students battled through challenges in wind and lift capacity and dynamically solved challenges in the field, successfully producing merged and scaled aerial photographs. Next year we plan to advance the methods by having students modify some of the cameras with different filters in order to remotely evaluate vegetation health.

Andrew Perkins, Lecturer

Geography Field School students work in teams to build the sensor platforms for their balloon flights and prepare their cameras for the collection of time-lapse imagery.

Geography Field School students Brent Cruickshank, Joshua Espiritu, Emily Koopmans, Morgan Wright, and Marco Pe Benito prepare to walk to the launch site.

Geography Field School students Justin Walch and April Gullacher organize their balloon-tethers before launch.

Geography Field School students work in teams to build the sensor platforms for their balloon flights and prepare their cameras for the collection of time-lapse imagery.
In July of 2018 I traveled to the Chilcotin Region of British Columbia to complete my first Master’s field season. My goal was to understand the processes responsible for the formation of large esker ridge complexes in this region. I completed geophysical and sedimentological surveys on these eskers over a period of four weeks in order to understand their internal composition and structure. The work itself was often challenging, involving carrying geophysical equipment across uneven, often densely forested terrain in the heat of July. Road access to some sites was limited and we commonly had to trek through the unknown to reach my target field sites (I would like to apologize again to my field assistants for making them walk through a surprise swamp!). Though difficult at times, this field season was ultimately a success. The next stage is to process these geophysical data and subsequently to interpret the processes that led to the formation of these eskers. The products of this field work will comprise a section of my thesis, aimed at understanding the various genetic factors that lead to different esker shapes.

Meaghan Dinney, MSc Candidate

I recently completed my third trip to Yuma, Arizona, USA for data collection interviews. My research focuses on the transnational access to health care by the older Canadians who travel south seasonally to avoid our cold Canadian winters - otherwise known as 'Snowbirds.' My previous research in the area has been focused on formal health networks and interviews with medical professionals, while my most recent trip has launched a closer examination into the informal care aspects of health management while abroad.

John Pickering, PhD Candidate
In this photo, Doctoral candidate Natalia Perez and her supervisor Nicholas Blomley are surrounded by participants of “Grounding Law: learning with each other”, an international legal geography workshop they co-organized on May 28-29, 2019, at SFU’s downtown campus. This innovative gathering of Colombian and Canadian/American legal geographers sought to analyze how law, both as a set of practices and as a form of knowledge, is grounded in distinctive ways in particular places and histories. In so doing, this workshop promises to contribute to “provincialize” Anglospheric legal geography, which relates directly to the post-colonial epistemic orientation of Natalia’s doctoral work.

Natalia Perez, PhD Candidate

I became interested in studying the politics of oil and gas pipelines after witnessing the widespread opposition to the proposed Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion here in B.C.’s lower mainland. I was curious to know what the federal government meant when it declared that the pipeline was in the “national interest”. My research suggests that concepts like national interest naturalize and neutralize the arguments of those who oppose pipelines, insinuating that to be against pipelines is to be un-Canadian. Overall, this helps the Canadian state to secure political legitimacy—without which it could not call itself properly “sovereign”.

Liam Fox, MA Candidate