STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
COLLEGE AT SUNY GENESEO
Department of Geography

Dossier for the American Association of Geographers Program Excellence Award

Submitted December 15, 2017

GENESEO
TABLE OF CONTENTS:

I.  INTRODUCTION…………………………2
II.  FOUNDATIONS……………………3-5
III. DISCOVERING GEOGRAPHY……5-6
IV.  HIGH-IMPACT LEARNING………6-7
V.  SCHOLARSHIP………………….8-9
VI. PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT…..9
VII. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT………….9
VIII. BEYOND GENESEO……………10
I. INTRODUCTION (C1, C9)

Geneseo Geography’s noteworthiness begins with our setting. Our college enjoys a national reputation for selectivity and affordability. By standards typical of public undergraduate education, SUNY Geneseo’s incoming students combine an unusual mix of talent, commitment, and diversity. We are, however, less blessed by New York State’s secondary education curriculum in which “Geography” is an amorphous element of Social Studies and is typically taught by non-geographers. As a result, few students come to Geneseo intending to major in Geography. We are, rather, a “discovery discipline” and in that role we benefit from our college’s liberal arts mission and related common core of general education courses. As a bridge discipline actively and effectively serving the common core, we reach out to most Geneseo students in the arts, STEM fields, and professional programs. That outreach sustains our visibility and reputation and has yielded growing numbers of Geography majors, currently more than one hundred.

Recognizing our commitment, our college has recently expanded Geneseo Geography’s faculty to an eighth full-time line. As a team, we combine gender and age balance, diversity of national origins, travel experience, and sub-disciplinary breadth. This aligns with the Department’s mission statement, which reads: The Department of Geography at Geneseo strives to combine successful preparation of its majors for graduate study and professional careers with a mission of effective teaching focused on strong core and service courses and the delivery of high-impact learning experiences. Spanning the discipline’s breadth and providing coursework in human and physical geography and geotechniques, the curriculum strives to enhance geographic literacy while at the same time ensuring that students develop intellectual skills important to the pursuit of an enriching and rewarding life. Faculty versatility also flavors our courses, with each of us regularly offering between four and eight courses. As a result, our majors’ preparation for specialization in graduate or professional milieu has been praised for its breadth. So, too, has our outreach to students majoring in the other disciplines, particularly those seeking offerings in GIS, and in courses with urban, regional, or cultural emphases. Many of our courses serve as electives in other degree programs.

Student preparedness and experience during college years should not, of course, be limited to successful course completion. Our courses are appropriately rigorous; almost all involve projects which apply writing, critical thinking and research skills. But our broader goal is to provide students the best possible preparation for a rewarding life beyond Geneseo, through continued study or professional pursuits. We believe that our commitments to high-impact learning experiences, community engagement, and professional preparation are especially relevant to Geneseo Geography’s nomination as an award finalist.

Fittingly, the nomination coincides with our 50th anniversary as a degree-granting program. We marked the year with the honor of hosting the Annual Meeting of the MSDAAG for the first time in 25 years. As well, 2017 also added the 500th member to our Facebook alumni page, as we cemented in place new community partnerships, celebrated our newest faculty appointment, and were awarded a major NSF grant. These and many other achievements are outlined in the pages that follow, including leadership on campus-wide initiatives highlighted in our institutional five year plan that align with the Public Engagement in Geography theme for the 2018 AAG meeting.

Dr. Darrell Norris, Professor of Geography, SUNY Geneseo

NOTE: After each section title, there is a list of letter and number combinations in parentheses (e.g. C1, C2, C3). These correspond to the 14 criteria for the AAG Program Excellence Award. Each criteria has been addressed, often in multiple sections. There are also numerous hyperlinks throughout the document that lead to articles and short videos produced by the College and local media highlighting departmental projects with a high level of public engagement and student impact.
II. FOUNDATIONS (C1, C3, C5, C6, C14)

Department Constitution: The Department’s Constitution establishes guidelines and procedures for orderly and democratic governance, including requirements and rules for departmental decision-making and faculty committee assignments, budgeting policy, and regular department meetings. In addition, written guidelines lay out expectations for tenure and promotion; teaching peer-review; five-year program review; annual assessment; distribution of travel money; and award of merit pay. The Department has also established policies for field courses and alcohol and drug use.

Faculty and Staff: The Geography faculty is diverse and is comprised of three females and five males, including two non-U.S. citizens. Holding the rank of Professor are Dr. Darrell Norris (McMaster University) a cultural geographer; and Dr. Ren Vasiliev (Syracuse University) specializing in cartography. Associate Professors include Dr. David Aagesen (University of Minnesota) a Latin Americanist and cultural ecologist; Dr. James Kernan (West Virginia University) a biogeographer; Dr. David Robertson (University of Oklahoma) a historical and environmental geographer; and, Department Chairperson Dr. Jennifer Rogalsky (University of Tennessee) an urban geographer. Assistant Professors are Dr. Colleen Garrity (Arizona State University) a climatologist; and Dr. Stephen Tulowiecki (University at Buffalo) a biogeographer and GIScience specialist.

Students Numbers and Trends: The Department has more than tripled its number of majors since reaching a low of 28 majors in 2002-2003. It currently has 105 majors (Fall 2017) with the last graduating class reaching 30 majors (May 2017). The Department also coordinates and supports minor degree programs in Geography, Environmental Studies, and Urban Studies, as well as an Education Concentration in Geography. Collectively, these minor programs serve more than 150 students. These totals represent the highest number of majors, graduates, and minors in Department history and they place Geneseo Geography among the larger undergraduate Geography programs in the nation.

Growth in student numbers over the past 15 years has been the result of a combination of factors including: 1) a dedication to engaging instruction in 100-level “gateway” classes; 2) active student recruiting; 3) a high-level of disciplinary exposure provided through integration of geography courses into general education and other curricula; 4) the delivery of high-exposure, high-impact learning experiences such as study abroad and field courses; and, 5) the creation of a positive department culture & community that is well-recognized across the Geneseo campus.

Student Diversity: The Department strives to create an inclusive community and considerable gender and ethnic diversity exists within the Geography student body. In the 2014-15 academic year (the most recent year for which the data are available) approximately 35 percent of Geography majors were women and 15 percent self-identified as members of underrepresented minorities. The Department does not have a formal diversity recruitment policy as student recruitment takes place primarily through introductory courses. With diverse faculty instructors, however, and a focus on globalization, cultural diversity, development, and urbanization, introductory course offerings such as GEOG102: Human Geography and GEOG123: Developing World serve as good courses for recruiting diverse student populations. Five faculty have also received “Safe Zone” training, an internal campus program designed to create a faculty support network for LGBT students.

Curriculum: Focused on a mission to span the discipline’s breadth, the curriculum requires coursework in human and physical geography, and geotechniques. Introductory core courses include: Human Geography, Physical Geography with a lab, and Developing World. Advanced core courses include: Statistics in Geography, Introduction to GIS, Cartography, and Senior Capstone Seminar. In addition, the department offers 28 elective courses covering world regions (e.g., Latin America, Africa), physical geography (e.g., biogeography, climatology), urban studies (e.g., urban issues, planning), cultural and historical geography (e.g., American landscapes, food), and environmental geography (e.g., conservation and natural resource management, environmental stewardship). Study abroad, directed study, internship, and teaching practicum courses are also offered.

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1 Data from the SUNY Geneseo Institutional Research Office and/or the Department of Geography 2015 Program Review, available on request.
2 Data from the SUNY Geneseo Institutional Research Office and/or the Department of Geography 2015 Program Review, available on request.
The Department is committed to engaging in both large-scale and ongoing curriculum revision. In response to growth in the major and changing curriculum requirements set-out by SUNY, the last large-scale revision of the curriculum occurred in 2013. This involved content and/or sequence and prerequisite changes to approximately two-thirds of all Geography coursework. Consequential annual adjustments to the curriculum involved revisions to introductory GIS to make it more accessible to non-majors—and approximately 30% of students enrolled in the course now come from disciplines outside Geography. The curriculum also recently expanded from one senior seminar choice to three. New courses added to the curriculum in the last three years include Environment and Sustainable Development in Puerto Rico (study away), Environmental Stewardship (a service and field course), and Geography of Food. The College is embarking on overarching curricular redesign, to align with Faculty Senate-adopted learning outcomes which include broad & specialized knowledge, intellectual and practical skills (critical thinking, communication, quantitative reasoning, digital literacy, creativity, diversity, global awareness, etc.), and integrative and applied learning. The Department is well represented in this process, with one Faculty member taking a lead role in the 10-person committee.

Department Infrastructure: In 2014, the Department was one of four units selected to move into a new building on the Geneseo campus that contains state-of-the-art physical geography and GIS teaching labs, a cartography lab, a physical geography research wet lab with fume hoods, a GIS research lab, a physical geography prep/storage room, and $175,000 worth of laboratory and field equipment for studying soil, water, wildlife, streams, plants, and climate. The Department also has ready access to the 14,000 acre Letchworth State Park for field research, and to exhibit areas and classrooms in the Humphrey Nature Center for teaching and community outreach.

Culture and Community: The department discussed departmental needs during faculty meetings for several years, and identified geospatial technology as a key growth area. Faculty conducted a survey of geospatial course offerings at other institutions, developed GIS allies in other departments, developed and delivered faculty and staff GIS workshops, and maintained an ongoing dialog with administrators. These efforts were rewarded with a new faculty line and hire in 2017. This is a notable achievement given declining state funding and a policy of “replacement only” hiring across the Geneseo campus.

Geneseo Geography has a campus-wide reputation for faculty—as well as student-faculty—collegiality. This reputation is vital to the Department’s role as a “discovery major” and to its recent growth. The department hosts a number of academic and social events each year, including “Geofest” at the Syracuse Geography Department, where students learn more about the graduate school experience, a faculty catered Study Day Pancake Breakfast each fall, and an Awards Picnic each spring.

The department is home to the Eta Gamma chapter of Gamma Theta Upsilon, and grants five awards and a scholarship annually. GTU induction and awards are presented at the department’s Awards Picnic every spring. Many students are active members in the AAG, Middle States AAG, and state and regional professional organizations.

The department also supports student organizations, including the Geography Club, the GIS Association (GISA), and Friends of Recreation, Conservation, and Environmental Stewardship (FORCES). GISA emphasizes accessibility to GIS for non-majors, and has actively worked with YouthMappers. FORCES is actively engaged with conservation work on regional public lands, and has won a campus award for outstanding service, the Livingston County Environmental Management Council Earth Day Award, a statewide award for outstanding FORCES leadership, and a statewide award for outstanding FORCES chapter.

Foundation Account: The Department has a modest foundation account built from alumni donations exceeding $15,000. The Department annually spends between $2,000 to $4,000 from its foundation account, primarily in support of field instruction (transportation and accommodation expenses) and student awards.

III. DISCOVERING GEOGRAPHY (C2, C3, C10, C12, C13)

Student Enrollment: The Department serves large numbers of Geneseo students, averaging approximately 4,500 annual student credit hours (SCH) of instruction per academic year. In addition, averaging about 640 SCH each per academic year, Geography faculty slightly exceed the Geneseo college average. Overall, the department ranks 9th out of 22 Geneseo academic units in SCH per faculty line, showing that while the department is carrying more than
its share of the overall student teaching load campus-wide, it is not overextending itself.\(^3\) Although the department offers multiple introductory courses with enrollments between 70 and 100 students every semester, it also offers advanced-level courses with capped enrollments at 12 (e.g., senior seminar, study abroad, and service courses), and faculty supervise numerous one-on-one learning experiences (e.g., directed studies).

**General Education:** The department delivers general education coursework across six of the nine common core learning areas at Geneseo, including: 1) natural science; 2) social science; 3) analytical reasoning; 4) multiculturalism; 5) freshman writing; and 6) U.S. history. The Department leads the college in terms of range of general education courses offered. All faculty teach at least one large introductory general education course per year, with most teaching one every semester.

**Service to Other Degree Programs:** The Geography curriculum provides significant service to non-majors. Induced Workload Matrix (IWM) data measuring department service to majors as a share of total course enrollments show that the Department ranks sixth among all Geneseo programs in terms of service to non-Geography majors: between 80 and 85 percent of students enrolled in Geography classes are non-majors.\(^4\) Beyond general education coursework, the department also offers non-majors coursework fulfilling elective requirements in four cognate majors: 1) African Studies; 2) Black Studies; 3) International Relations; and, 4) Political Science. Nine interdisciplinary minors are also serviced by Geography courses: 1) Africana Studies; 2) American Studies; 3) Asian Studies; 4) Conflict Studies; 5) Environmental Studies; 6) International Relations; 7) Latin American Studies; 8) Urban Studies; and, 9) Women’s Studies.

**First-year experience:** In 2016, Geography collaborated with the Department of Student Life to develop and deliver a [Letchworth First-Year Experience](#) course for incoming first year students that is based in nearby Letchworth State Park. Students camp in the park, take day trips to learn about the physical and cultural landscape, participate in service learning projects, and go hiking and whitewater rafting. This course received Honorable Mention in the SUNY system-wide Outstanding Student Affairs Programs for 2017. The program has yielded two geography majors, and several geography and/or environmental studies minors from a pool of 24 participants.

### IV. HIGH-IMPACT LEARNING (C2, C4, C7, C9, C11, C13)

**Study Abroad and Study Away:** Long a campus leader in offering study abroad coursework, four of eight faculty presently offer Geography and interdisciplinary short courses in Argentina, Western Canada, Ghana, and Puerto Rico. The Canada course was the cover story in a recent issue in the Geneseo *Scene*, the college alumni magazine, in an [article on pages 12-15](#). The Department also has a long established semester-long student exchange program with the Faculty of Spatial Sciences at the University of Groningen, Netherlands. Between two and six students study between our campuses annually. In addition, the Department has also offered a “study away” short course in Appalachia, and is developing a Snow Science intersession course to be held in Silverton, Colorado.

**Field courses/experiences:** The department is also a campus leader in providing field experience. In addition to the First-Year Experience and Study Abroad/Away programs, many faculty include day trips in their courses to study topics including food, sports, urban studies, and biogeography. Geography also initiated a collaboration with a biologist to integrate Field Biogeography students with Conservation Biology students on a [project that is partnered with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation](#). Started with a SUNY Geneseo Curriculum Innovation Grant, this project has involved more than 150 students in the study of conservation practices on a public access unique ecosystem since 2012.

**Service Learning:** The department continues to innovate pedagogical experiences, and has run a project for seven years that pairs geography majors with seventh graders to learn about biogeography and GIS. More than 100 seventh graders and two dozen geography majors have participated. This project has been featured in the local media, and in the Geneseo *Scene*, in an [article on page 5](#).

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\(^3\) Data from the SUNY Geneseo Institutional Research Office and/or the *Department of Geography 2015 Program Review*, available on request.

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Directed Studies, Internships and Teaching Practicums: As codified in its mission statement, the department prioritizes high-impact learning experiences, including directed studies, internships and teaching practicums. Most Geography faculty regularly provide directed studies opportunities to students as an “overload” teaching activity. Between the 2013-2014 and 2016-2017 academic years, faculty supervised 69 directed studies courses, an average of 18 per year. In 2016-2017, faculty enrolled 19 students in directed studies courses. Professional presentations and other research outputs from this supervised research are discussed in the next section of this report.

Geneseo Geography students are also active interns. Organizations and offices providing Geography and planning internship opportunities include the National Geographic Society, Student Conservation Association, New York Department of Environmental Conservation, New York Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, NYC Department of City Planning, City of Rochester Neighborhood Service Center, Association for the Preservation of Geneseo, Genesee Valley Conservancy, Genese Transportation Council, Livingston County Planning Department, Solar Foundation, SUNY Geneseo Office of Sustainability, the Huyck Preserve, and the Caumsett State Historic Park Preserve. The Department has record of 33 majors completing internship credits from 2013-2014 through 2016-2017. Geography students completed 13 internship courses in 2016-2017.

Teaching practicums offer students practical teaching experience in undergraduate Geography. Practicum students work closely with a supervising professor for a specified course in Geography. Responsibilities may include assisting in preparation and presentation of lectures and labs, holding office hours and review sessions with students, helping to prepare exams and assignments, writing hypothetical syllabi or assignments, and more. In 2015-2018, Geography faculty supervised three students through teaching practicums.

Teaching Assistantships: Annually, the department employs eight teaching assistants to support physical geography and GIS laboratory instruction. Teaching assistants attend weekly meetings with faculty, hold office hours, and are responsible for direct peer support, updates and revisions to laboratory exercises, and preparation and clean-up. These critical experiences help students secure graduate school placement and employment.

Tutor: In Fall 2017, we created a new position for a senior Geography major to serve as a 100-level course tutor. The tutor holds regular weekly “walk-in” office hours for assistance with studying, note taking, test preparation, paper writing, etc. In 2016-2017, we served 664 students in these 100-level general education and service classes, approximately 12 percent of all SUNY Geneseo students. With issues of accessibility, retention, and the new statewide Excelsior Scholarship (free tuition for students with families earning less than $100,000), we feel that this tutoring service could increase students’ educational outcomes, and help with retention of students. It is also a high impact learning experience for the tutor himself/herself.

Research Assistantships and Fellowships: Geography students and faculty have also been successful at securing funds from competitive institutional programs for academic year research assistants and summer research fellowships and resources. From 2015-2017, Geography students have been awarded five semester-long research assistantships and two major summer research awards. One of these students was awarded an additional prestigious award, only given to students blending natural and social science research, and an external Award from the Rochester Academy of Sciences. These Geneseo Foundation awards all involve student-faculty research collaboration, and awards are highly competitive. They are decided upon by a panel of faculty from all twenty departments on campus.

V. SCHOLARSHIP (C2, C7, C11)

Student-Faculty Scholarship: The Department practices a teacher-scholar model of undergraduate education whereby deep-level learning is achieved through student research collaboration with faculty. As already highlighted, faculty supervise numerous directed studies, the vast majority of which target the design, production and professional dissemination of original research. Student research projects are also commonly generated from course assignments, internship experiences, and research assistantships. As a result, Geneseo Geography students are exceptionally active in professional conference participation. Between 2013-2014 and 2016-2017, Geography faculty supervised 137 student conference presentations at professional and academic venues, and average of 34 per year! In 2016-2017, Geography students delivered 34 faculty-directed research presentations, including seven presentations at the American Association of Geographers (AAG) Annual Meeting in Boston; eight presentations at
the Annual Meeting of the Middle States Division of the AAG; two presentations at the COPLAC Northeast Regional Conference; and 15 presentations at GREAT Day (a college-wide student research exposition).

In addition to conference presentations, student-faculty research collaborations also occasionally result in professional publications. Over the last decade, Geography students have authored two publications in the Middle States Geographer, the academic journal of the MSDAAG. Three students also co-authored a book with two faculty members (Exploring Geneseo Architecture published by the Association for the Preservation of Geneseo); and students have produced a handful of OCLC referenced reports commissioned by local organizations including the Genesee Valley Conservancy. Students have also produced maps and datasets for the Livingston County Planning Department.

**Faculty Publication and Conference Activity:** In addition to collaborating with students on research, the teacher-scholar model of undergraduate education followed by the Department also stresses the enrichment of teaching through faculty pursuit of an active program of research. Geography faculty have published five books including two for university presses (From Abbotts to Zurich: New York State Placenames (Syracuse) and Hard as The Rock Itself: Place and Identity in the American Mining Town (Colorado). Additional book publication includes two supplementary texts for Pulsipher’s World Regional Geography textbook, now in multiple editions. Faculty have also published peer-reviewed work in edited books and leading journals. Book chapters include work in The Handbook of Critical Physical Geography and Preserving Western History. Refereed journals include The Journal of Environmental History; The Journal of Cultural Geography; Ecological Monographs; Canadian Geographer; the Professional Geographer; Fire Ecology; Urban Geography; Journal of Transport Geography; Applied Vegetation Science; Ecological Modelling; Plant Ecology; and the Middle States Geographer.

In addition, the Department and College generously support professional and academic conference travel and Geography faculty regularly present original research at conferences each year, including the AAG national meeting, the Middle States AAG meeting, the ESRI meeting, the Geographic Information Sharing Specialty Interest Group (GIS/SIG), NY State GeoCon, NY Geospatial Summit, and the Pioneer America Society, among others. Geography faculty presented 14 presentations at academic conferences over the last two academic years, with 11 presentations scheduled for 2016-2017.

**Faculty Grants:** As a primarily undergraduate institution where faculty have high teaching loads, expectations for grant procurement are reasonably low at SUNY Geneseo. Nonetheless, Geography faculty are active grant writers. Over the last three years, faculty have submitted five major external grant applications totaling close to $600,000 (including three NSF grant proposals and one each to the American Honda and Sohn foundations). These grant writing efforts were rewarded in 2017 with two faculty members collaborating as principal investigators on an NSF grant representing the largest grant award in Department history, as well as the largest NSF grant awarded to the college in 2017. A Geography and Spatial Sciences (GSS) Research at Undergraduate Institutions (RUI) award totaling $232,000, the grant is titled Assessing the environmental and human drivers and cultural dimensions of changes in oak forests of the eastern United States. An interdisciplinary project combining historical geography, biogeography and GIScience, and involving local field research, the grant is supporting nine summer research assistantships for Geography majors over its three year term. All three student RAs employed by the grant in 2017 are presenting related original research projects at the 2018 Annual Meeting of the AAG.

**VI. PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT (C2, C8, C9, C10, C11)**

**AAG & MSDAAG:** Faculty regularly participate at the AAG national meeting by presenting research, facilitating student presentations, organizing sessions, and serving as panelists. Faculty are also active in the Middle States AAG, and regularly bring a large group of student presenters. A faculty member is serving a three year sequence as Vice President, President, and Past Present in the Middle State Division. SUNY Geneseo hosted the MSDAAG Annual Meeting in October 2017, and it had the largest attendance in Division history, including 158 participants from 15 different universities representing every state in the division. Regrettably, Puerto Rico was not represented. Approximately 100 students attended, 67 of whom were undergraduates, and 56 of whom were attending their first academic conference.

**Professional Leadership:** Faculty have also served on the board of GISSIG, a regional GIS organization for professionals, and the NY GIS Association, a statewide organization for the promotion of GIS expertise. A faculty
VII. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT (C2, C7, C9, C10, C11, C12, C13)

Geography is a campus leader is establishing new community partnerships. Notably, Geography faculty spearheaded development of campus-wide initiatives to establish 1) an instructional program in Red Hook, Brooklyn; and 2) a formal partnership between Letchworth State Park and SUNY Geneseo. A faculty member was at the forefront of creating The Geneseo Landing at Red Hook, a partnership to develop a functioning classroom, research, and interaction space in Red Hook, Brooklyn. A classroom and an apartment will be used for courses, faculty research, alumni events, hosting international guests, supporting internships and student teaching experiences, and more. Thus far, two Geography hybrid courses (part online; part fieldwork) have taken place in Red Hook. The faculty member also conducted 2017 sabbatical research in Red Hook, supplemented by a research incentive grant from the college, further deepening the connections and relations with the neighborhood. Additionally, two geography majors received competitive college-wide research assistantships to conduct GIS and other analysis in Red Hook. The project was feature in the Geneseo Scene, in an article on pages 8-11. Another Geography faculty negotiated the memorandum of understanding with the NY Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, was charged with advancing the partnership, and acquired nearly $180,000 for technology, equipment, interns, transportation, and a sponsored professorship. The Partnership was incorporated in the Geneseo 2021 Five Year Plan and the College Community Engagement Plan, and has been featured in the regional media, including the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, Batavia Daily News, and Livingston County News. Over 100 students have conducted research, volunteered, exhibited work, and delivered public programs in the park in the past year alone.

K-12: The department has been active in K-12 outreach. A faculty member helped the local middle school navigate the ESRI K-12 program and acquire GIS software for their computer lab. Geography faculty and students mentor seventh grade science students as they explore the technology. A faculty member has developed and delivered two GIS workshops for NY Master Teachers, a program that rewards excellent teachers. Two faculty members are currently GeoMentors, and one is among the 36 GeoMentor Case Studies featured on the AAG website.

Community Service: Faculty are also involved with the Genesee Valley Conservancy, a regional land trust. Two faculty sit on the board and serve on the acquisitions committee and one chairs the research committee. Two faculty members have been active with the Association for the Preservation of Geneseo (APOG), a village historic preservation group. Another faculty member served on the Village Planning Board.

Invited Lectures and workshops: Due to their high level of public engagement, Geography faculty receive many requests to share their experiences and expertise with the public. Faculty have recently delivered public presentations, both lectures and workshops, for local organizations including the Association for the Preservation of Geneseo, Genesee Valley Conservancy, Livingston County Historical Society Museum, Army Corps of Engineers, and Letchworth State Park. Two Department initiatives that are proving to be particularly productive in terms of generating local requests for presentations and workshops, are the Letchworth State Park Initiative, featured in a short video produced by the college about community workshops, and the NSF-funded research on oak forests featured in the Livingston County News.

VIII. BEYOND GENESEO (C2, C4, C9, C12)

Capstone course: Because of the growth of the major, it was decided in 2016 that the department needed to expand the capstone course offerings, in order to continue giving students a small seminar-style, research and capstone experience (enrollment in the capstone was nearing 30 students). GEOG 374: Geographic Thought is now supplemented by GEOG 331: Field Biogeography Senior Seminar and GEOG 387: Urban Issues Senior Seminar. Having three smaller options for a capstone course gives students a true seminar experience, and allows them choice based on their specialty area. All capstone courses must meet several learning outcomes, including an understanding of disciplinary trends and debates, expertise in a sub-area of the discipline, professional development, and writing and public speaking skills. All capstone courses require intensive writing assignments, seminar discussions, and oral presentations.

Graduate School: Systematic graduate school placement data are not available for Geneseo Geography graduates. The department estimates, however, that between 30 and 40% of its graduates pursue advanced degrees within three
years of graduation. For example, the Department has record of fifteen graduates presently pursuing graduate degrees including five current PhD candidates. The department has record of six graduates earning PhDs over the last ten years. Geneseo alumni have earned PhDs at the Pennsylvania State University, University of Washington, University of Minnesota, University of West Virginia, Syracuse University, University of Utah, University of Montana, and the University of North Carolina.

In order to better prepare students for graduate study, the department sends approximately ten students per year to “Geofest” at Syracuse University. Geofest is part of Syracuse Geography’s “Future Professoriate Project” where graduate students and faculty host senior geography majors from regional colleges and universities to give them a sense of what graduate school in geography is like. Breakout sessions include discussions on graduate school applications, assistantships, research, course load, and more. As a follow up to “Geofest”, the Geneseo Geography department hosts an annual Graduate School Roundtable to discuss selecting graduate schools, contacting potential advisors, the application process, writing letters of intent, requirements for recommendation letters, and more.

**AGOG:** The Department maintains an active Facebook community—Alumni Geographers of Geneseo—which is a venue to post job openings, network, share news, and communicate events. There are currently more than 500 members of this online community.

**Alumni Panels:** Each year, the department invites a number of alumni back to the department to tell their stories, and advise our current students on career and graduate school paths. Most notably, alumni are invited for a four-member panel discussion in the senior capstone classes. In recent years, the department has invited GIS professionals, urban and regional planners, environmental consultants, non-profit employees, Peace Corps volunteers, National Geographic Society expedition advisors, crime analysts, PhD candidates, and more. Faculty also invite alumni to speak with students in other courses, such as Intro to Urban and Regional Planning, Intro to GIS, Biogeography, and others.

**Professional Placement:** SUNY Geneseo does not have a system in place to generate accurate employment data for Geneseo Geography graduates. However, the Department has a strong record of placing graduates in professional fields including planning, environmental and agricultural sciences, land conservation, and geospatial technology fields. For example, Lightower Fiber Networks (formerly called FiberTech) a leader in providing fiber internet technology, and Eagle View (formerly Pictometry), a technology leader in oblique aerial imagery (both based in Rochester, NY) actively recruit our majors. Many graduates are also finding success at a variety of planning agencies and consulting firms, very often incorporating GIS, in areas of public works, land conservation, transportation, environmental remediation, and city and regional planning. Recent placements have also included “bridging” or “gap year” opportunities such as Americorps, Peace Corps, and the Student Conservation Association.

**IX. CONCLUSION**

In sum, SUNY Geneseo Geography is an outstanding department that is dedicated to effective teaching, scholarship, service. It has particular strengths in delivering high-impact learning experiences to its students, engaging the public, and preparing its majors for graduate school and professional life. A growing program, already among the largest undergraduate Geography departments in the United States, Geneseo Geography is a vital part of an institution that is widely recognized as one of the country’s premier public liberal arts institutions. The Department has agreed to this nomination and is able to provide additional documentation for each item addressed above. The remainder of this document is comprised of letters of support for the SUNY Geneseo Department of Geography.
29 November, 2017

American Association of Geographers
2018 AAG Award for Bachelors Program Excellence

To the Selection Committee:

It is with great enthusiasm that I provide a letter of support for the nomination of the Department of Geography at the State University of New York at Geneseo as a Bachelors Program of Excellence. It was my good fortune to work with this department for seven years, first as Provost and then as Interim President. I found that, without exception, they functioned as a strong and engaged academic unit, providing excellent leadership on the campus and in the community and engaging students in high-quality active learning. They have had several substantial accomplishments in the last few years and have also demonstrated excellence cumulatively over the last decade. They are richly deserving of this award and recognition.

The breadth and generosity of this department's work is remarkable. They consistently demonstrate many of the qualities of the ideal department as identified by PKAL in 2002: a common agenda with everyone 'pushing the wagon' in the same direction; flexible leadership; a high level of collegiality and mutual respect; sharp, motivated students who feel they are part of a group and are engaged in their learning and in their community; successful alumni who stay in touch. With programs in physical and human geography, urban studies, and environmental studies, the department attracts a wide and diverse range of capable students. They have also been active in outreach across the campus, working to offer GIS coursework for non-majors and even offering summer workshops for faculty and staff from across the curriculum. They are clearly succeeding in their mission of enhancing the visibility and perceived value of geography as a discipline and in developing among their students the intellectual skills important to the pursuit of an enriching and rewarding life.

The department maintains active research programs and offers their students outstanding opportunities for undergraduate research, both on campus and in the field. Their graduates are well-prepared for graduate school and the professions. Faculty support students in presenting their research in professional venues, including regional AAG conferences, and several have won awards for their work. Most recently, department faculty Dr. David Robertson and Dr. Steve Tulowiecki and a colleague from Buffalo were awarded a National Science Foundation grant for an RUI to study the decline of white oak forests in the Northeastern United States. Student research assistants will be involved throughout the three-year project. Departmental student research takes place in many venues, including internationally; the department regularly offers a Canadian Field Studies course that emphasizes student research. Faculty and students have
undertaken study and research with other international partner institutions, including Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ghana.

Two recent initiatives that deserve special mention are the Red Hook, Brooklyn project, and the Letchworth State Park Partnership. The program in Red Hook focuses on urban geography and is led by Dr. Jen Rogalsky. Working with a Geneseo alumnus, Dr. Rogalsky and the College were able to develop a base of study in Red Hook that allows Geneseo students and faculty to research in a unique urban community. The program is described in the Winter 2017 issue of the Geneseo Scene (https://issuu.com/sunygeneseo/docs/geneseo-scene-winter-2017). Working in this diverse setting has been a tremendous opportunity for students to understand urban change and community development in action.

The very successful partnership with Letchworth State Park is ably led by Dr. James Kernan. In 2013, SUNY Geneseo was approached by the Letchworth Nature Center Campaign Committee about becoming an educational partner for the developing Humphrey Nature Center. Working with the Park to help make the Nature Center a reality, the College signed an MOU in March 2015, integrated work at the Center into the college strategic plan and civic engagement plan, and now helps to provide enhanced opportunities for park visitors, volunteers, researchers, and students to explore the geological, ecological and cultural wealth of the Letchworth environment. Dr. Kernan and his students undertake research projects with park staff and have helped to expand and enrich interpretive and learning opportunities for all who visit the park. The partnership has been praised by the Commissioner of New York State Parks, Rose Harvey, and is looked to by Governor Andrew Cuomo as a model for nature centers at other parks.

In their contributions to student learning, to research, to the prominence and understanding of geography as a field of study, and to the larger community, the Geneseo Department of Geography stands out as an exemplary academic unit. It has been my great pleasure to be a small contributor to their work and to see the benefits of their engagement reflected in the lives of their students. If there is any further information I can provide in support of their nomination, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Best regards,

Dr. Carol S. Long
Senior Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs
clong@willamette.edu
503-375-5496
November 25, 2017

Dear Awards Committee:

It is with great enthusiasm that I write to support SUNY Geneseo Department of Geography’s nomination for the AAG Program Excellence Award. I write this letter as a graduate of the department (B.A. Geography, 2007). Since my time at Geneseo, I have been a student in two Geography graduate programs (M.S. University of Tennessee; Ph.D. Ohio State University) and am now an Assistant Professor in Geography at the University of Washington. The undergraduate experience offered by Geneseo Geography is simply unparalleled in its emphasis on research and field experience and culture of sustained student mentorship.

Geneseo Geography faculty are committed to engaging undergraduates in research and fieldwork. Fieldwork is integrated into the curriculum at every level, and my own undergraduate experience exemplifies Geneseo’s success in training students in a variety of research methods and using field experiences to illustrate abstract concepts. Examples from my own experience abound: In a lower-level urban geography and planning course (taught by Dr. Jen Rogalsky), we surveyed local architecture and landscape architecture, looking for evidence of particular course concepts and trends in urban design and development. In an upper-level course on Pyrogeography, Dr. James Kernan introduced students to the US Forest Service’s Forest Inventory and Analysis methods, which we then used to analyze local forest composition and structure. In an advanced cultural geography course (taught by Dr. David Robertson), classmates and I researched the evolution of the Town of Geneseo and examined the unique landscape features shared by many college towns. And in a course on field methods (taught by Dr. David Aagesen), students performed research on issues of both intellectual and practical significance, from the politics of local wind farm development to geographies of educational opportunities and attainment in Western New York. My own classmates and I ultimately published our research on wind power politics, begun in Geneseo’s Field Methods course, in The Pennsylvania Geographer.

In addition, all Geography students are required to complete a course titled Field Experience, in which a small group of students and faculty research various aspects of a particular region and then travel to that region to continue their research. I took part in a Field Experience course that culminated in a trip to Pennsylvania’s anthracite coal region. From this experience I developed a long-term research interest in the socioecological dimensions of extractive landscapes and gained a deep appreciation of the Geneseo faculty’s commitment to providing meaningful, structured, and innovative field experiences for all students. At the time (and I believe this is still the case), all expenses for the field course were covered through Geneseo’s Lisa M. Kuligowski Memorial Geography Fund. This has meant that students who might otherwise face financial obstacles to participation are able to participate without incurring any expenses; more broadly, this reflects Geneseo Geography’s commitment to serving all students and cultivating a community that strives for equity and justice.

Finally, the program’s culture of mentoring means that students not only interact with faculty in the classroom but also mentored through collaborative research, fieldwork, and through formal and informal mentoring practices. Such mentorship does not end when a student graduates but often continues for years to come. As a junior faculty member myself, I continue to benefit from the relationships I established at Geneseo. Over the past several years, Geneseo faculty have continued to support my career development, for example by sharing teaching materials and offering valuable feedback on my research.

In sum, SUNY Geneseo’s Department of Geography is highly deserving of the AAG Program Excellence Award.

Sincerely,

Christine Biermann
Assistant Professor of Geography, University of Washington
biermc@uw.edu
Letter of Support
2017 AAG Award for Program Excellence (BA/BS-granting)

I am pleased to write a letter of support for The Department of Geography at SUNY-Geneseo. The program is widely respected among geography departments across the northeast for both the quality of its undergraduate students and their undergraduate research. The Department is currently experiencing the ‘problems of success’, as seen in the doubling in the number of geography majors and environmental science minors since 2007-8. To meet the increasing demands of a successful department, the program has added five new courses including Environmental Stewardship and the Geography of Food. Faculty continue to strengthen its GISciences offerings with new applied courses focusing on conservation and spatial analyses. The department has acquired new field equipment in recent years which has allowed students to develop important skill-sets that will put them in a strong position, whether they choose to pursue jobs in industry or academia. With the move to new facilities the Department is well situated with regard to increasing infrastructural demands. In total, the department has positioned itself to take advantage of new technologies as well as changes in the broader job market through its internship program. Clearly, this will benefit current and future students.

While the department done a fantastic job of meeting student needs with regard to the job market or graduate degree preparation, perhaps their most important contribution to success is by engaging students one-on-one. Few universities within the Middle States region have this level of undergraduate student engagement or the degree of student-faculty interaction. Geneseo regularly sends more undergraduate students to the Middle States Division conferences than any other program, with a majority of these students either giving oral presentations or posters. In speaking with students at recent conferences I was taken by the level of knowledge that they had of the history and philosophy of the discipline, something that is often absent from non-graduate programs. Geneseo students are ‘active’ learners—they do not wait for learning, they pursue it. This is seen again and again in their conference presentations and student papers. Geneseo students consistently have high scores in our GeoBowl competitions, and the breadth of their knowledge should be motivating to other undergraduate programs. And while the classroom is fundamental to this level of success, it is the involvement of students in all aspects of faculty research that helps to solidify their understanding of the discipline. Recent faculty grants (including an NSF award) have a high level of student participation, and the excitement of the students as they pursue their research is inspiring.

Given the above, I believe that the Department of Geography at SUNY-Geneseo should receive the 2017 AAG Award for Program Excellence for Undergraduate Programs. This department is truly a standout within the discipline and should be a model for other programs.

Sincerely,

Dr. Paul Marr
Professor, Department of Geography-Earth Science
Shippensburg University
To whom it may concern

Date
November 3, 2017

Our reference

L.S.,

With this letter, I would like to express my support for the nomination of the Department of Geography of SUNY Geneseo for the 2017 AAG Award for Program Excellence. The basis for this support is to be found in the undergraduate student exchange program that our Faculty of Spatial Sciences (Geography, Planning and Demography) established with SUNY Geneseo’s Department of Geography in 1989. In the almost 30 years that this exchange program is in operation, we have exchanged dozens and dozens of students.

Our returning students in this exchange program have benefitted very much from their “Geography @ Geneseo” experience. Although the exchange semester is only 4 months, many of our students return as more mature students. On the one hand, our students have acquired knowledge and developed a deepened understanding of the geography of the United States and other regions in the world (for example in the courses “Geography of Northern America”, “The Geography of Islam”, “Sports Geography”). But, and perhaps just as important, they returned home from a very student-friendly environment, having been welcomed into a small community of students, professors and supporting staff, characterized by diversity in socioeconomic and ethnical backgrounds on the one hand but simultaneously demonstrating a large degree of togetherness and shared responsibilities in achieving the academic and related goals of the curriculum.

It has been my experience that the exchange students we hosted from Geography in Geneseo, seem to have had less to almost no adjustment problems when they enrolled in our courses. Their grades have been above average, when compared to undergraduate exchange students from other US partner universities. For me, this points at the educational quality of the courses they have taken at Geography in Geneseo; but also to the quality of preparation. Indeed, many, if not all, Geography faculty members are familiar with Groningen and many of them have actually visited Groningen. In a number of courses, these faculty members have included Dutch examples or case studies. This of course primarily serves to enrich the educational experience, but as a secondary effect many of the visiting students have demonstrated to be not that unfamiliar with the unique Dutch urban, environmental and infrastructural setting in comparison to exchange students from other partner universities.

All in all, I fully support the selection of SUNY Geneseo’s Department of Geography as a finalist for the AAG Award of Program Excellence. I will take this one step further – I do think that this Department of Geography, based on my knowledge of and familiarity with other similar Departments in North America, deserves to be selected as the Department with the most excellent Geography program.

Sincerely,

Paul J.M. van Steen

coordinator external educational cooperation / senior lecturer, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen