

Summer 2026

Geography Newsletter

University of South Carolina Department of Geography



Dr. April Hiscox (left) and geography master's graduate and incoming Ph.D. student Madison Nordberg (right) attended the University of South Carolina's spring commencement ceremony.

From the Chair's Desk

Dear Students, Colleagues, Alumni, and Friends,

As incoming Chair of the Department of Geography I'm pleased to welcome you to our summer newsletter. The transition from spring to summer is always a bittersweet season of change. With each celebration of graduation and retirement we say goodbye to students and colleagues whose presence in Callcott will be missed. At the same time, we enjoy the excitement of welcoming new members to the department. This year seems particularly poignant as we also transition department and college leadership.

It is an honor and privilege to serve as the department's next chair, and I am grateful for the opportunity to work alongside such an accomplished and engaged community. Dr. Jerry Mitchell has been a steadfast leader for the last six years, and we wish him well as he takes a much-deserved sabbatical. Look for updates on his scholarly work in future newsletters!

In this edition, we highlight the many accomplishments of Geography students and faculty during the past year. It has been another year filled with awards, research, and teaching that continue to show the importance of geographic thinking in the world today. We hope you find these updates inspiring as they reflect the creativity, dedication, and impact of our department, and they give us much to look forward to in the coming year.

As I begin this role, I look forward to supporting our students, faculty, and staff while building on the department's strengths in teaching, research, and community engagement. As always, thank you for being part of our community.

Best wishes for an enjoyable summer,

April Hiscox

Professor and Incoming Chair, Department of Geography

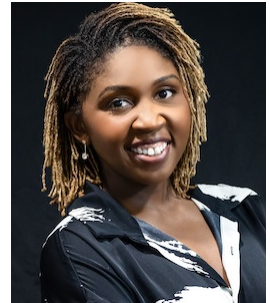
Faculty and Staff Highlights

Dr. Austin Crane received an internal grant to continue his research on how humanitarian organizations in Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands support migrants and asylum-seekers amid policy changes introduced by the European Union's Pact on Migration and Asylum.

Dr. Shadya Davis was selected for the 2026 NSF-funded Enabling the Next Generation of Hazards and Disasters Researchers program and continues to expand her research on community risk perception and communication related to prescribed fire and coastal flooding.

Dr. Michael Hodgson, now retired, remains active in geography research in the United States and northern Italy. He continues collaborating on geospatial risk mapping of unexploded ordnance associated with World War I and World War II in Italy's Veneto region.

Top row: Austin Crane,
Shadya Davis;
bottom row:
Michael Hodgson,
Robert Kopack,
Susan Wang.



Dr. Robert Kopack conducted two research trips this summer. In June, he traveled to Stepnogorsk, Kazakhstan, to interview residents and local officials about plans for a rare-earth processing facility and other mining ventures. In July, he returned to Boca Chica, Texas, to examine how SpaceX expansion is affecting public policy, residential property markets, and access to open space on the Gulf Coast.

Dr. Susan Wang leads the U.S. Geospatial Intelligence Foundation (USGIF) GEOINT Certificate Program at USC. In Spring 2026, seven students completed the program and earned GEOINT Digital Badges. As a member of the USGIF Education Working Group, she continues to advance geospatial intelligence education in higher education.

Faculty Spotlight — Mr. Kevin Haynes

Kevin Haynes has built a career at the intersection of geography, ethics, public administration, and geographic information science (GIS), using spatial thinking to help organizations make better, more informed decisions.

A 2014 graduate of Western Michigan University with a bachelor's degree in Philosophy, a concentration in Applied and Professional Ethics, and a minor in Global Studies, Haynes later earned master's degrees in Public Administration and Geography, specializing in Geographic Information Science.



Kevin Haynes (right) is pictured with his wife and daughter.

Today, Haynes serves as the University of South Carolina's first Geospatial Information Officer and teaches GIS as a part-time faculty member. He has led the implementation of enterprise ArcGIS across campus, established USC's first geospatial data governance framework, and secured recurring institutional funding to expand geospatial initiatives.

Drawn to geography by a desire to understand how institutional decisions shape cities, landscapes, and communities, Haynes found that GIS provided a powerful way to connect policy, planning, and environmental challenges with actionable, data-driven solutions. His interdisciplinary

background allows him to bridge theory and practice while advancing responsible, evidence-based decision-making.

His work focuses on making GIS more accessible across USC by expanding software access through Single Sign-On, extending services to regional campuses, and developing clear documentation for new users. He has also positioned GIS as a shared institutional resource, supporting research, operations, emergency management, and cross-campus collaboration. Haynes believes that expanding access to geospatial technology strengthens education, research, and workforce development throughout South Carolina.

Beyond campus, Haynes serves on the Geospatial Professional Network's Professional Education Committee and Ethics Subcommittee, contributing to the advancement of the profession.

One of his current projects, in collaboration with Dr. Daniella Cook Sumpter in USC's College of Education, explores how GIS can strengthen teacher preparation through place-based learning. Using ArcGIS StoryMaps, pre-service teachers create community asset maps of the Lower Richland area, highlighting schools, cultural institutions, environmental features, and neighborhood resources. The project encourages future educators to view communities through an asset-based lens, helping them design more relevant, equitable, and locally responsive learning experiences.

Outside of work, Haynes enjoys spending time with his wife and young daughter, introducing his daughter to new places and experiences that foster curiosity, creativity, and a deeper appreciation for the world around her.

Through his leadership, research, and commitment to expanding access to geospatial technology, Haynes is helping make spatial thinking a routine, ethical, and accessible part of education and decision-making. His work continues to empower students, educators, and institutions to better understand the communities they serve and make more informed, sustainable decisions.

Undergraduate Studies

We had a successful year in the undergraduate program, with an emphasis on providing more opportunities for student interaction. Some of the best events included the Map-a-thon, the induction of students into the Gamma Theta Upsilon chapter in April and celebrating our graduating seniors. We are excited to watch these students as they move into the work force and graduate school!

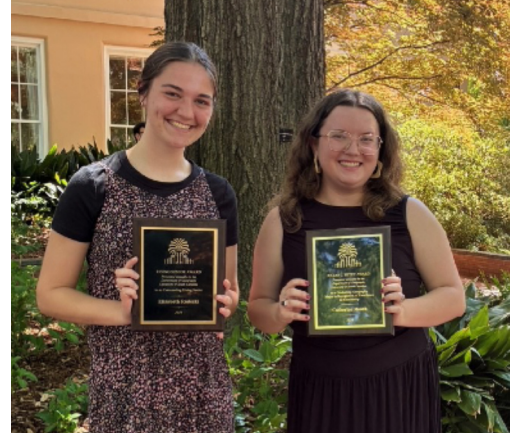
Members of the University of South Carolina Kappa Psi Chapter of Gamma Theta Upsilon, the International Geographical Honor Society. Pictured from left to right: Jack Jeffrey (recent alumnus, Class of 2025), Catherine Roach (senior), Regan Hill (senior), Eric Gomez (senior), and Caleb Podolski (senior).



Undergraduate Awards

We are proud to share that **Elizabeth Radecki** and **Catherine Roach** are this year's honorees of the Rising Senior Award and Julian Petty Award, respectively.

Elizabeth Radecki (left) and Catherine Roach (right), at this year's award ceremony.



Undergraduate Spotlight — Elizabeth Radecki

Elizabeth “Liz” Radecki is a junior double majoring in anthropology and geography, with a concentration in Geographic Information Sciences (GIS). She excels both academically and through her community involvement. This year, Liz was honored with the University of South Carolina Department of Geography's Rising Senior Award in recognition of her outstanding academic achievements.



Elizabeth Radecki, rising senior

Liz's passion for geography and anthropology allows her to thoughtfully integrate both disciplines. This interdisciplinary approach has fostered her strong interest in geographic techniques, human geography, and the study of people worldwide—particularly in understanding how environments and surroundings shape daily life.

One of Liz's primary academic interests is urban planning. She is currently researching ways Southern cities in the United States can create more accessible and walkable community spaces. Her global perspective has also led her to explore urban planning beyond the U.S. While studying abroad in Berlin, Liz gained valuable insight into urban governance, observing how transportation systems can support diverse transit options while prioritizing walkability and accessibility for residents.

In addition to her research, Liz interns with the Congaree Land Trust, assisting in the creation of mini-maps for small projects across central South

Carolina to support the conservation of the region's natural and scenic lands. She is also collaborating with a local church in Chapin, South Carolina, to map its burial grounds and produce publishable maps for congregants and other interested parties.

Outside of academics, Liz is an active member of Omega Phi Alpha, serving as Service Director in Fall 2025. She enjoys spending time with family and friends, reading, and taking walks. Liz is set to graduate in May 2027.

Graduate Studies

We are pleased to announce that we have eight incoming graduate students for the 2025–2026 school year. These students, their degree programs, former institutions, and advisors are:

- **Christian Bevilacqua**, Ph.D., Syracuse University, New York, Caroline Nagel
- **Jory Fleming**, Ph.D., University of Oxford, England, John Kupfer
- **Madison (Maddie) Nordberg**, Ph.D., University of South Carolina–Columbia, South Carolina, April Hiscox
- **Andrew Price**, master's, University of North Carolina–Asheville, North Carolina, April Hiscox
- **Wesley Smith**, master's, University of Kentucky, Conor Harrison
- **Rehinat Usman**, Ph.D., East Carolina University, North Carolina, Alex Greer
- **Yu Yang**, Ph.D., Anhui Normal University, China, Sicheng Wang
- **Hannah Cambre**, master's, Wofford College, South Carolina, Jessica Barnes

Bianca Malkoc,
Ph.D. student.
Research interests
include political
ecology, legal and
political geography,
and coastal
infrastructure.
Anticipated
graduation: Spring
2028.



Graduate Student Receives Fulbright for Research in Serbia

Doctoral student **Bianca Malkoc** was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to conduct her dissertation research on Chinese mining investments in Serbia.

Graduate Spotlight — Haofeng Tan

Graduate student **Haofeng Tan** has always been fascinated by location—where people live, how they interact with their environments, and how those environments shape human behavior. “I find it fascinating how people perceive and interact with their surroundings,” he says. This curiosity inspired him to pursue geography and continues to guide his academic and research career.

Haofeng is pursuing a doctorate in geography at the University of South Carolina, where his research focuses on Geospatial Artificial Intelligence (GeoAI), urban informatics, geospatial analysis, and remote sensing. His interest in geography began during his undergraduate studies at Chongqing University in China, where he earned a bachelor's degree in Geoinformatics. Through hands-on experience with surveying, mapping, and GPS technologies, he developed an appreciation for understanding the world through location-based data. He later earned a Master of Science in Geographic Information Science and Cartography from Wuhan University, expanding his expertise in geospatial technologies.

Haofeng Tan, Ph.D. student (right), and Dr. Jerry Mitchell, Professor (left), pose with their awards at the 2026 American Association of Geographers (AAG) Annual Meeting in San Francisco.



Haofeng’s recent work has received recognition for bringing geography, urban studies, and artificial intelligence together. One of his notable accomplishments to date is receiving the American Association of Geographers (AAG) International Geographic Information Funds for Graduate Research Award. His award-winning research uses GeoAI and geospatial analysis to examine how people experience and evaluate different urban environments. His research

has also reached audiences beyond geography. One of his recent studies was published at the IEEE/CVF Conference on Computer Vision and Pattern Recognition (CVPR), one of the leading conferences in artificial intelligence. This work explores how GenAI can learn relationships between visual and acoustic environments, opening new possibilities for

understanding and representing multimodal urban environments. This research has been supported by the Grace and Allan Davis Scholarship from the University of South Carolina Department of Geography and the National Artificial Intelligence Research Resource (NAIRR) Pilot.

Beyond his research, Haofeng serves as a peer reviewer for journals related to GeoAI, human perception, and geospatial analysis, and as Publicist for the University of South Carolina's Geography Graduate Student Association (GGSa). Since 2024, he has also served as the instructor for Digital Earth. Teaching has reinforced his goal of pursuing a tenure-track faculty position that combines research with mentoring future geographers.

Outside of academics, Haofeng enjoys hiking, traveling, and photography. He hopes people recognize that geography is woven into everyday life and that spatial awareness can help address challenges ranging from crime perception and urban planning to census analysis and redistricting. Through research and teaching, he aims to advance geospatial technologies that help planners and communities better understand human-environment relationships and support safer, more accessible, and more equitable urban environments.

Alumni

We want to keep up with our University of South Carolina Geography graduates and we know that you do too! Stay connected with us and our program's current events by joining our Alumni mailing list. Send an email with your name and the year you graduated to Student Services Coordinator, **Sena Nickles**, at nickless@mailbox.sc.edu.

Undergraduate Mentors Wanted!

We are seeking mentors to support and encourage our undergraduate students. As a mentor, you'll act as a friendly guide offering guidance and encouragement as students navigate their geography degree. If you're interested, please complete the [Mentorship Opportunity form](#) and we will reach out to you for the next steps.

Alumni Spotlight — Caroline Sampa

A 2016 graduate of the University of South Carolina with bachelor's degrees in political science and geography, Caroline Sampa has built a career helping

others use geographic information systems (GIS) to solve real-world problems. Her passion for geospatial technology began as a student, leading to an internship with ESRI that evolved into a decade-long career with the company. Today, she serves as Senior Learning and Development Lead, creating learning experiences that empower organizations to apply GIS to challenges ranging from wildlife conservation to social justice and equity.



Caroline Sampa

While Caroline isn't the one collecting data in the field, her work enables others to make the most of geospatial technology. She develops and delivers training that gives customers, colleagues, and organizations the knowledge and confidence to use GIS effectively. Whether supporting emergency response, conservation efforts, or data-driven decision-making, the impact of her work reaches industries and communities around the world.

"My professional journey has allowed me to connect with others and support them as they develop their skills, learn to listen, drive change, and have fun along the way," Caroline says. "I find the greatest joy in hearing that a colleague has reached their next goal and knowing I played a small part in helping them get there."

Caroline's career at ESRI reflects her commitment to continuous learning and leadership. She began as a Support Analyst, partnering with customers to troubleshoot software issues related to Enterprise technologies, data management, and desktop GIS. As one of the inaugural members of the ArcGIS analyst team, she also helped shape product improvements by sharing customer feedback with development teams.

She later became a Support Specialist, working with strategic customers as they adopted emerging GIS technologies. During that time, she also developed GIS curriculum for Advanced Placement high school students, helping introduce the next generation to the possibilities of geospatial technology.

In 2018, Caroline transitioned into Learning and Development, where she found the ideal intersection of education, technology, and leadership. Today, she combines instructional design, adult learning theory, project management, and change management to create engaging educational experiences that help learners build skills and advance their careers.

Her commitment to supporting others has earned industry recognition, including being named one of *xyHt* magazine's "22 Young Geospatial Professionals to Watch" in 2022. She also serves on ESRI's Young Professionals Network Advisory Board, helping early-career GIS professionals connect, grow, and thrive.

Outside of work, Caroline enjoys spending time with her toddler, cheering on the Gamecocks, exploring local coffee shops, and investing in her community. Those priorities have also shaped the advice she shares with students and fellow alumni.

"Your job is just one part of your life," she says. "It doesn't define who you are."

Rather than chasing the "perfect job," Caroline encourages others to stay curious, embrace new opportunities, and invest in meaningful relationships both inside and outside the workplace.

Looking ahead, she hopes to be remembered not for the titles she's held, but for being inclusive, trustworthy, and always willing to help others succeed — a legacy that reflects the impact she continues to make through education, leadership, and service.

Around Callcott and Campus

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.

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.

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.](#)

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.

