

**Regents' Teaching Excellence Awards for Department or Program Nomination  
Geography and Geospatial Sciences Program**

**Kennesaw State University**



**December 2024**

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November 24, 2024

Dr. Denise Domizi  
Director, Teaching and Learning Excellence  
University System of Georgia

Dear Dr. Domizi and Awards Selection Committee:

I am pleased to nominate the Geography and Geospatial Sciences program in the Radow College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Kennesaw State University for the Regents' Teaching Excellence Award for Department or Program. This program impacts over 6,000 students annually by emphasizing four strategic initiatives aligned with systemwide priorities: undergraduate research experiences; experiential learning; service-learning; the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning; cultivating community and belonging; and their signature pedagogy, the Living Learning Lab (LLL) campus spaces.

The department's ambitious goals rely on several foundational pillars. First and foremost, the department prides itself on a culture of excellence. The faculty are committed to continuously updating the curriculum to reflect the latest technologies and developing student-centered pedagogy. They also engage in the Affordable Learning Georgia initiative to make the curriculum more affordable. This commitment to academic excellence is matched by a commitment to student success, with regularly updated student learning outcomes to ensure graduates are well-prepared.

This approach is effective, as evidenced by the success of our students. They conduct research, present at conferences, co-author research papers with faculty, and secure internships that open professional opportunities. Alumni offer humbling praise, such as Ms. Chanice Brown: "I gained valuable skills, a new perspective, and an appreciation of the world around me, which ultimately pushed me to grow as both a student and a researcher and contributed to my personal development. [...] The department's dedication to developing students and encouraging academic excellence is unparalleled."

Beyond the numerous awards received by individual faculty members, the program has been repeatedly recognized at the national level, including the 2021 American Association of Geographers Award for Bachelor Program Excellence in Geography. In addition, the online BS in Geospatial Sciences was ranked #2 by Forbes this year. The application expands on these and many other points of excellence. I am proud of the Geography and Geospatial Sciences program, and I confidently submit it for consideration for the Regents' Teaching Excellence Award for Department or Program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ivan Pulinkala', written over a light blue rectangular background.

Ivan Pulinkala, Ed.D.  
Provost and Executive Vice President of Academic Affairs

OFFICE OF THE PROVOST

## Narrative Statement

The Geography & Geospatial Sciences (GSS) program at KSU began with the undergraduate Geographic Information Sciences (GIS) Certificate program in 1997. This certificate was soon followed by the creation of the GIS BS in 2001, a first for the state of Georgia (updated in 2020 as Geospatial Sciences BS after the merger with the BS in Surveying and Mapping from SPSU, with a [top ranked](#) fully online GSS BS option added in 2024). The program also grew to include a Geography BA in 2008 (with a [top ranked](#) fully online option added in 2015), a Geography Minor, an Environmental Studies Minor, and a Certificate in Land Surveying. The Geography and GSS degree programs integrate various geospatial technologies and skills-based learning with applied research to produce high caliber graduates who are trained in geographic theory and the application of geospatial technologies (GIS, remote sensing, and land surveying). As a result, students are well-prepared to address significant problems in the areas of urban and regional planning, marketing and industrial location, transportation, precision agriculture, forestry, environmental systems, emergency services, epidemiology, crime analysis, utilities, and sustainability. Our students learn to apply their knowledge of patterns, distributions, allocations, and circulations toward solving problems in their chosen field of endeavor, whether in the public, private, or nonprofit sectors, or the academy. The quality of the Geography and GSS program has been recognized at the university (via this nomination) and national levels. In 2021, the program received the *American Association of Geographers' (AAG) Award for Bachelor Program Excellence in Geography*. With over 10,000 members representing nearly 100 countries, the AAG is the largest geographic association in the world. The Geography and GSS programs have followed an intentional path, developing goals and strategies to enhance student success, and making reflective improvements based on student and peer feedback.

**Individual and collaborative faculty efforts to improve teaching and student learning:** In response to many pressing local, national, and global challenges, our [Geography](#) and [Geospatial Sciences](#) (GSS) faculty work together to critically examine every aspect of our program with the help of outside mentorship from the American Association of Geographers (AAG) and National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE) colleagues. We have redefined our role to focus on critical challenges, cultivating workforce- and career-readiness skill sets, and preparing a diverse student body for global citizenship by educating them to conceptualize, articulate, and influence the forces that are changing the human and environmental landscape. We revamped our curriculum, adding five general education course offerings that embrace the new Core IMPACTS with embedded career-ready competencies in Technology, Mathematics & Sciences (e.g., inquiry and analysis; problem-solving; teamwork) and Social Sciences (e.g., intercultural competence; perspective-taking; persuasion), expanded our student and community engagement, piloted faculty-led student research initiatives, and promoted more experiential learning and study abroad experiences. This led to increased course enrollment, providing a geographic liberal arts perspective to more students from across the university, more major and minor students, new faculty hires, and new collaborations with other colleges and community partners. In less than a decade, our Geography and GSS program has come to serve roughly 6,000 students a year, with approximately 1 out of every 5 students at Kennesaw State University taking a geography class before graduating. We provide students with extensive opportunities for experiential learning, including field and lab classes, independent research, and study abroad.

**Evidence of supported classroom & experiential teaching pedagogies and reflective teaching assessment:** Because we serve so many students across the university, our faculty emphasize high-impact innovative pedagogies in a variety of teaching formats and experiential

learning situations: large and small face-to-face, hybrid, fully online, field-based, lab-based, co-curricular, directed applied research, practicums, internships, co-ops, teaching assistantships, and study abroad courses. We provide dynamic and accessible coursework for all majors. We offer five general education classes (1 social sciences and 4 sciences)—Introduction to Human Geography, the Digital Earth, Weather and Climate, Introduction to Landforms, and Resources, Society & the Environment—that bring both human and physical geography to a significant portion of KSU students (4,736 in 2024). The labs for Weather and Climate and Introduction to Landforms are taught fully online using interactive ESRI StoryMaps and lab manuals created and updated annually by department faculty, creating more extensive, accessible, and cost-effective learning opportunities for a broader range of students. Although science gen-eds in other disciplines maintain high DFWI rates (as noted by our faculty in their peer-reviewed “[Comparing effectiveness of teaching interventions in online lab-based physical geography general education courses](#)” in *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*), we have reduced ours significantly by investing in paid peer-tutors who provide extra assistance to struggling students.

Geography and GSS provide engagement for students beyond individual classes, including program alignment and collaboration with other campus units, employers, and community partners. In addition to our general education courses, we embedded multiple classes into other majors. For example, World Regional Geography is required for Criminal Justice and several Education degree programs and serves as an elective for History. Cultural Geography is a requirement for History Education. Our curriculum is nimble enough to respond to current trends and global issues as they emerge, and we frequently offer tailored and timely Special Topics classes. For example, in spring 2021 we created Special Topics: Health Geography to allow students to study the pandemic in depth with ArcGIS Online, while previous Special Topics included Population Geography & Migration, Field Methods in Appalachia, and Project GIS.

Our faculty use innovative instructional techniques, including class assignments and teaching pedagogies that help students discover purpose in coursework, develop constructive responses to academic challenges, and cultivate career readiness skills and a sense of belonging. There is also active support of faculty implementing innovative high-impact practices, including capstone courses and projects, collaborative assignments and problem-based learning, common intellectual experiences and learning communities, diversity and global learning through study abroad, ePortfolios, first-year experiences, internships, service learning, undergraduate research, and active career exploration. Such examples, as illustrated in the evidence section, have been supported through successful applications to fund this work to the RCHSS Student Success program, Intradepartmental research grants, Affordable Learning Georgia OER grants, and the National Council for Geographic Education Miller Geography Education Grant.

**Clear assessment methods of student learning:** Our programs include specific goals and student learning outcomes (SLOs) that articulate how quality is defined, promoted, and assessed. Assessment methods of student learning also extend beyond traditional evaluations and include IRB-approved assessments that result in Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) findings used to inform and refine teaching practices and curriculum development, ensuring that academic excellence and the needs of all students remain top priorities. Faculty assess and amend the curriculum every six years after a rigorous internal and external review process to best meet the ever-changing needs and expectations of the geography and geospatial communities.

**Evidence of recognition of good teaching:** Our faculty and program are regularly recognized for excellence in teaching. Faculty awardees include Dr. Slinger-Friedman (2023 Keep Cobb Beautiful Environmental Education [Award](#), 2019 KSU Outstanding Teaching

[Award](#), 2018 NCGE's Distinguished Teacher-Higher Education [Award](#), 2016 Georgia Regents SoTL [Award](#), Dr. McDaniel (2024 RCHSS Outstanding Online Teaching [Award](#), 2020 AAG Ethnic Geography Specialty Group Early Career [Award](#) for Scholarship, Teaching, & Service), and Drs. Patterson and Hoalst-Pullen for integrating community engagement into watershed assessment classes (2014 Georgia Adopt-A-Stream [Award](#)). The online BA in Geography was [ranked first](#) in 2019 by Best Colleges, and *Forbes* [ranked](#) the online BS in GSS 2nd in 2024. National recognition of the Geography & GSS program was received via the **2021 American Association of Geographers [Award for Bachelor Program Excellence in Geography](#)**. To be considered for this national award, our program was first nominated to AAG by the Southeastern Division of AAG, which, spanning 10 states, is one of the largest AAG regional divisions.

**Policies that encourage collaborative faculty efforts:** Addressing the needs of the diverse student body is central to our program's mission and we have policies in place that encourage collaborative faculty efforts. In 2021, faculty created a department Teaching Circle, with an associated D2L site and regular meetings, to discuss pedagogy best practices and classroom issues encountered. Many of our students are first generation and many hold full-time jobs to pay for their education. Faculty have developed courses in multiple modalities (face-to-face, hybrid, online, study abroad) for more options for students. Our faculty have [co-developed](#) 5 open-source textbooks. These OER texts allow students to take classes with [no additional cost](#) for course materials. Faculty have also served on the President's Diversity Council.

**Success of the Department's or Program's students:** Geography and GSS students and organizations have also been recognized for their excellence. Our students have placed well in several conference competitions, including first place and second place finishes at the annual Georgia Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (URISA) Conference. Our students are active on campus, and participate in the service-centered geography club, the sustainability-centered OwlSwap, the Sustainability Film Series & Book Club, and Gamma Theta Upsilon international geographical honor society. In 2023, [OwlSwap](#), a geography sustainability outreach program, earned national recognition as an Association for Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education [Award Finalist](#). Geography graduate Artis Trice won the 2019 Newman Civic [Fellowship](#), the 2020 Taco Bell Foundation Live Más national [scholarship](#), and the 2021 Emerson National Hunger [Fellowship](#), for his sustainability work, which he [presented](#) at the Georgia State Capitol. In Spring 2024, geography graduate Chanice Brown was accepted to the prestigious NASA DEVELOP Program to fulfill a GIS practicum requirement. She completed this program in March 2024, having collaborated with a 4-person team to research the feasibility of using NASA Earth Observations for flood preparedness and emergency management. Chanice was awarded the 2024 Gamma Theta Upsilon (GTU) International Geographical Honor Society's Buzzard Undergraduate Scholarship. This scholarship is awarded to an outstanding college senior to be used for graduate school expenses. GSS students have presented Diplomacy Lab projects to top US State Department officials and are using 3D printing to put braille on 3D printed campus maps. Our strong internship programs place students in local and national businesses, non-profits, and government settings, such as the CDC, EPA, and NASA. Our alumni have secured jobs at institutions like ESRI (one of the world's leaders in GIS software), Apple (Maps Team), Volkswagen, and local governments and institutions. Our alumni pursue graduate degrees around the world, including at the Sorbonne in Paris, University College London, King's College, Rutgers, Georgia Tech, University of Florida, and Florida State University. Our students even won on *Jeopardy!* GSS graduate Raymond Goslow advanced to the final round of the 2022 *Jeopardy!* National College [Championship](#).

### Fact Profile - KSU Geography and Geospatial Sciences (GSS) Program

- 1997: Undergraduate Geographic Information Sciences (GIS) Certificate created at KSU.
- 1998: BS in Surveying & Mapping first offered at SPSU (surveying program started in 1948).
- 2001: BS in Geographic Information Science (GIS), a first for Georgia, added.
- 2008: BA in Geography and minors in Geography and Environmental Studies added.
- 2015: A fully online BA in Geography option added.
- 2020: BS in Surveying & Mapping merged with BS in GIS to become BS in Geospatial Sciences (GSS) (fully online option added in 2024); Certificate in Land Surveying added.

### Curricular Role, Instructional Team, & Student and Program Highlights

- 2021: Geography & GSS provides science & social science general education courses to 4,500+ students/year and provides courses to 6,000 students/year with all course offerings.
- 2024 (Fall): Geography & GSS supported by 17 full-time faculty (5 professors, 3 associate, 2 assistant, 3 lecturers, 4 senior lecturers), 2 limited term, and 12 part-time faculty.
- Our program and faculty are regularly recognized for excellence in teaching including:  
**Program:** 2024 Online GSS degree [ranked 2nd](#) by *Forbes*; 2021 AAG [Award](#) for Bachelor Program Excellence in Geography; 2019 Online Geography BA [ranked first](#) by Best Colleges.  
**Faculty:** 2024 RCHSS Outstanding Online Teaching [Award](#); 2023 Keep Cobb Beautiful Environmental Education [Award](#); 2020 AAG Ethnic Geography Specialty Group Early Career [Award](#) for Scholarship, Teaching, & Service; 2019 KSU Outstanding Teaching [Award](#); 2018 NCGE's Distinguished Teacher-Higher Education [Award](#); 2016 Georgia Regents Scholarship of Teaching & Learning [Award](#); 2014 Georgia Adopt-A-Stream [Award](#).
- Undergraduate Research & Lab Spaces: 3D Printing Lab, Biogeography Inventory Research and Dendrology Studies (BIRDS), KSU Food Forest at the Field Station, Forest Inventory and Research Plots (FIRPs), Geomorphology Lab, Geospatial Sciences/GIS Lab, Student Research Lab, Tree Ring Lab, Weather Monitoring Station.
- Partnerships: ESRI, GeoSurvey, Interdev, Langan, Atlas Surveying Inc, Ernst & Young.
- 2023: 186 students in BA & BS degrees; 447 graduates since 2019, continuous growth.
- 2024: Women compose over 30% of current Geography and GSS students.
- 2024 (Fall): 100% of Geography and GSS faculty submitted midterm course grades as part of KSU's midterm course grade student success initiative project.
- 2024 (Fall): 15 Geog/GSS faculty recognized by KSU Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning [Expanding the NEST](#) initiative on 25 evidence-based practices for student success.
- 2023: Updated Student Learning Outcomes for program quality assessment:

**Geography BA.** SLO1. Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of principles of place and space through the application of geospatial techniques such as map reading, coordinate systems, and satellite & aerial photo imagery. SLO2. Students will be able to describe and classify a variety of spatial and environmental research approaches, methods, and techniques utilized in scientific research, resulting in geographic information literacy. SLO3. Students will relate their acquired spatial knowledge and skills in a research project and a post-graduation plan.

**Geospatial Sciences BS.** SLO 1: Demonstrate knowledge at an appropriate and effective level of expertise in geospatial techniques in GIS and/or remote sensing. SLO 2: Demonstrate communication skills effectively in written, oral, graphic/visual and interpersonal forms using correct terminology as well as appropriate cartography and graphicacy in the form of maps. SLO 3: Demonstrate analytical skills that employ appropriate methodologies to address theoretical and practical issues that are solved using geospatial technologies.

## Data Showing Student Success

*Student Research and Co-Authorship.* All Geography/GSS students are required to complete either a Directed Applied Research (DAR) experience or an internship; from 2019 to 2023, 146 students have participated in a DAR. During this time, Geography/GSS faculty co-authored with students on 6 publications, 1 grant, and 20 conference presentations. Faculty also regularly work with first-year scholars through the KSU Office of Undergraduate Research.

*Student Conference Presentations.* Conference presentations allow students to share their work with a wider audience, receive feedback from peers and experts, and network with professionals in their field, further preparing them for graduate studies and careers. Between 2020 – 2024, 130 Geography and GSS students presented at the KSU Symposium of Student Scholars. Other scholarly venues where our students have presented include, the Georgia Academy of Sciences, the Southeastern Division of the American Association of Geographers, the National Conference on Undergraduate Research, and at the highly competitive Posters at the Georgia State Capitol. Our students have placed well in conference competitions, including 1st place and 2nd place finishes at the annual Georgia URISA Conference.

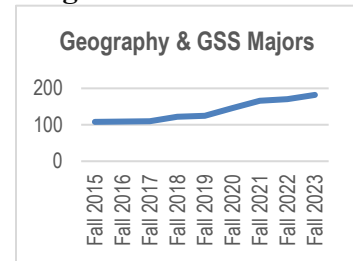
*Student Awards.* Awards and recognition recently earned by KSU's Geography/GSS students: 2019 Newman Civic [Fellowship](#); 2020 Taco Bell Foundation Live Más national [scholarship](#) (\$10,000); 2021 Emerson National Hunger [Fellowship](#); 2021 undergraduate research [presentation](#) at Posters at the Georgia State Capitol and Honorable Mention for Posters on the Hill; Spring 2024 NASA DEVELOP Program Internship; 2024 Gamma Theta Upsilon (GTU) International Geographical Honor Society's Buzzard Undergraduate Scholarship; 2nd place in 2024 Georgia Geospatial Association Virtual Map Competition. GSS student Raymond Goslow advanced to the final round of the 2022 *Jeopardy!* National College [Championship](#). The Geography/GSS programs also award the following memorial and endowed scholarships to Geography/GSS/Land surveying students: the Rebecca Mattord Memorial Scholarship, GeoSurvey Endowed Scholarship, the John C. Gaskins Endowed Scholarship, the B. Keith Rochester Jr. Memorial Scholarship, and Daniel R. Silver Memorial Scholarship.

*Job Placement in Prestigious Organizations.* All Geography and GSS students are required to complete either a Directed Applied Research (DAR) experience or an internship; from 2019 to 2023, 165 students have participated in an internship. Alumni have interned and secured jobs at AmeriCorps, Apple (Maps Team), Atlanta Airport, Atlanta Botanical Gardens, Atlanta Gas Light, Atlanta Regional Commission, Byers Engineering, CDC, City Governments (e.g., Atlanta, Chamblee, Johns Creek, Marietta, Roswell, Villa Rica), County Governments (e.g., Cherokee, Cobb, Dawson, DeKalb, Douglas, Forsyth, Fulton, Gwinnett, Paulding), Colonial Pipeline, Delta Air Lines, EPA, ESRI, FEMA, Fernbank Museum, Futura Systems, Georgia Aquarium, GA Dept. of Natural Resources, GA Dept. of Transportation, Georgia Power Company, Greenpeace, Jacobs Engineering, Library of Congress, Lockheed Martin, National Geographic, National Park Service, National Weather Service, Norfolk Southern, Peace Corps, Pike Engineering, Sandy Springs PD, Sierra Club, Southern Company, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, U.S. Green Build, Volkswagen, Zoo Atlanta.

*Acceptance to Graduate Programs.* With the strong research skills they cultivate during their time in our programs, Geography and GSS graduates have pursued graduate degrees at such institutions as University College London, King's College, Georgia Tech, University of Florida, Florida State University, West Virginia University, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. For instance, one student, Raymond Jennings, completed an MA in Geography at the Sorbonne in Paris and is currently a PhD Candidate in Geography at Rutgers.

## Evidence of Good Teaching and Student Learning

*Program, Course and Curriculum Revisions.* Geography and GSS faculty regularly review and revise curriculum to ensure it meets the needs of students and reflects current trends in the field. Recent additions include new courses added to our science general education offerings. Curricular revisions include all our online courses being reviewed through KSU’s online course review process for accessibility and digital learning best practices. We regularly review and revise our student learning outcomes (SLOs) to ensure that they are aligned with program goals and meet the needs of our students. From 2021 to 2023, we modified our SLOs to focus on the application of geospatial techniques and career readiness through development of a strong post-graduation plan and the addition of an e-portfolio assignment in the Senior Seminar course.



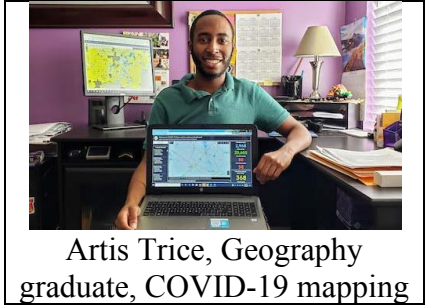
*Digital Graduation ePortfolios.* Instituted in Fall 2023, the graduation portfolio in capstone GEOG 4499 is based on feedback from a university in North Carolina that reported a greater than 90% job placement rate within 6 months of graduation, attributing much of this success from the students creating an e-portfolio [website](#) they then use in job applications. The portfolio is a culmination of work that Geog/GSS students completed throughout their undergraduate course work, relevant internship(s), and job(s), showcasing accomplishments with key samples of their work, skills, and experiences related to their career development ([example](#)).

*Career Preparation and Workforce Readiness.* The Geography and GSS programs have implemented several initiatives to prepare our students for the workforce, including career counseling, internship programs, and industry partnerships. These initiatives help students develop the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in their careers. All KSU Geography and GSS students are required to complete either a Directed Applied Research (DAR) experience or an internship. From 2019 to 2023, 146 students have participated in a DAR (GEOG/GIS 4100) and 165 students have participated in an internship (GEOG/GIS 3398).

*Undergraduate Research Experiences.* The Geography and GSS program offers many opportunities for undergraduate research, including independent and collaborative projects, faculty-mentored research, and participation in labs. These experiences provide students with opportunities for hands-on learning, critical thinking, problem-solving, and prepare them for graduate studies or careers. Several lab spaces and research networks have been supported by the administration and developed by Geography/GSS faculty, including: the Geomorphology lab, the [Georgia Immigration Research Network](#), [OwlSwap](#), the [KSU Food Forest](#), the KSU Field Station Workshop, the Forest Inventory and Research Plots (FIRPs), and the Tree Ring Lab.

*Experiential and Service-Learning.* Geography and GSS offers many experiential and service-learning opportunities, including field trips, internships, community projects, and study abroad programs. These experiences help students apply their knowledge to real-world problems, develop civic and community engagement skills, and gain valuable workforce readiness experience. For instance, Biogeography students assessed the composition of the campus arboretum, collected data on 5 rapid assessment Forest Inventory Research Plots, and established two long term plots at the Field station; Health and urban geography students used geospatial technology to [assess](#) public health and urban planning issues; Undergraduate researchers collected field





Artis Trice, Geography graduate, COVID-19 mapping

data about the physical and human geography of the Atlanta Beltline, and sedimentation in [Frey Lake](#). Amid the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, [students](#) volunteered to assist the URISA GISCorps program in maintaining an online map of testing locations. GIS alumnus Tammy Eifler said it fit her career goals in emergency operations and disaster management. GIS alumnus Tim Poe, who works in GIS at ESRI, said he was drawn to the COVID-19 mapping effort as part of his commitment to furthering the profession through

targeted volunteer efforts. Geography and GSS undergraduate students spent Fall 2021 determining locations for the U.S. Department of State to build future embassies. The project was one of 3 nationally selected to be [presented](#) to top State Department officials. The research, led by Prof. Ingram, was part of the Diplomacy Lab program, a public-private partnership where the State Department accepts bids from universities to research a variety of foreign policy challenges. KSU is 1 of only 43 universities participating each semester. The students presented their findings to the Bureau of Overseas Building Operations (OBO). In early 2022, they were 1 of only 3 groups selected to present at Diplomacy Lab Demo Day, a unique opportunity to present their work to a larger group of State Department officials. During the presentation, Thomas Debass, managing director for the Office of Global Partnership, [said](#), “American leadership can only be maintained if students like you continue to engage with us, and hopefully you can join our ranks.” When asked if KSU students were interested in pursuing this type of work, MaKenna Chambers [said](#), “I would love to...I do plan on going into a geospatial-related field...really enhanced my interest in this type of work.”

*Active & Applied Living Learning Lab (LLL)*

*“Being involved in this project has confirmed for me that I found the right career path...It is an amazing feeling to know that I can help people who may be suffering and really need it.” – Tammy Eifler, GIS graduate ([link](#))*

*Campus Spaces Created by Geography Faculty.* The application of theoretical concepts learned in the classroom to real-world issues is a pedagogical focus for many of KSU’s geography and GSS faculty. Born out of the desire of students in Dr. Rhodes’ Geography of Clothing course to address the negative impacts of fast fashion, [OwlSwap](#), a sustainable textiles and apparels



OwlSwap [event](#)

initiative, has become a KSU institution that serves both internal and external community members through its two [free clothing closets](#) and participation at all Career Fairs so no student is turned away from meeting prospective employers due to lack of appropriate clothing. Measurable impacts [include](#) giving free clothing items from the campus closet valued at more than \$73,830 since 2021; redirecting 4,898 clothing items to local partners such as MUST

Ministries and Hope Through Soap; and collecting 2,089 pounds of university textiles for [upcycling](#) between August 2020 and June 2022. An OwlSwap research collaboration emerged between KSU Geography of Clothing students and a university in Bangladesh to study the challenges faced by garment workers as they produce “fast fashion” clothing. [OwlSwap](#) was [spotlighted](#) as an exemplary university sustainability [initiative](#) in Cline’s *The Conscious Closet: A Revolutionary Guide to Looking Good by Doing Good*. In 2023, OwlSwap earned national recognition as an Association for Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education [Award Finalist](#). The [KSU Food Forest](#) (housed at the [KSU Field Station](#)), is another official KSU living-

learning lab (LLL) for sustainability created by Dr. Slinger-Friedman and Dr. Rhodes. The KSU Food Forest serves as a model of sustainable urban cultivation, demonstrating the potential of food forest systems to mitigate climate change while promoting food security and health. Classes, like the Geographies of Sustainable Agriculture and Local and Global Sustainability, are taught in these LLL spaces for students to gain valuable hands-on experiences.



KSU Food Forest

*Study Abroad Opportunities.* As another example of high-impact practices that help students explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own, we offer study abroad opportunities to students. In a Geography of Beer program in Belgium, Ireland, and the Netherlands led by Drs. Hoalst-Pullen and Patterson



Madrid study abroad in 2019

(authors of the [National Geographic Atlas of Beer](#)), students learned the geography, history, culture, and economics of beer by meeting individuals in the brewing industry and participating in a research project on sustainability. On a program in China with Dr. Tu, students undertook practical field activities and applied geographic concepts. Urban geography students gained international field experience on multiple study abroad programs with Dr. McDaniel in [France](#), [Italy](#), and [Spain](#), exploring the urban geography of such cities as Paris, Rome, Florence, and Madrid.

and participating

individuals in the brewing industry and participating

*“Studying abroad opens the eyes of students and allows them to learn more about themselves as well...It has given me a better insight and a better understanding of how interconnected all of geography really is...a larger appreciation for my geography major and the world in itself.” - Kathleen Smith, Geography graduate ([link](#))*

*Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL).* Geography/GSS faculty conduct research on teaching and learning and have authored 7 SoTL publications in scholarly peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes since 2019. This research has informed their teaching practices and helped to improve student learning outcomes, further contributing to student success and workforce readiness. Examples of faculty SoTL publication titles include: “Fieldtrips as Active and Applied Pedagogies at Higher Education Institutions;” “Using active and applied pedagogies to develop sustainably minded citizens in geography;” [“Teaching, Learning, and Exploring the Geography of North America with Virtual Globes and Geovisual Narratives”](#); [“Integrating ArcGIS Online and Digital Story Mapping for Active Learning in Systematic Geography Courses”](#); [“The Immediate Impact of COVID-19 on Post-Secondary Teaching and Learning”](#); [“Beyond COVID Chaos: What Post-Secondary Educators Learned from the Online Pivot”](#); and [“Comparing effectiveness of teaching interventions in online lab-based physical geography general education courses”](#). Since 2019, faculty also made 33 SoTL presentations at the AAG, the AAG’s Geography Faculty Development Alliance, National Council for Geographic Education, and others, mentoring educators on innovative teaching strategies.

*Curricular Innovation through Teaching-Related Grants.* Our faculty receive grants to support high-impact practice experiences for student success. Examples include 5 Affordable Learning Georgia (ALG) (a USG initiative) [grants](#) to co-develop 5 open educational resource (OER) textbooks. These grants contributed to cost savings and student success in Earth from Above (GEOG 1102) and World Regional Geography (GEOG 1130) in 2018; Intro to Cartography (GEOG 3305) in 2019; Intro to GIS (GEOG 3315) in [2020](#); and Earth from Above

(GEOG 1102) in [2021](#). The introduction of OER resources led to a measurable reduction in DFWI rates and an increase in student learning outcomes. One student said, “Besides the price (which is ideal - especially for an intro course), I liked that many of the resources were up to date with the current technology and topics. This will better prepare me for my career.” All the GEOG/GSS ALG grants combined provided funding for KSU of \$80,800, with cost savings to students from 2018 to 2023 of \$480,136. Faculty also receive internal

*“I come back to KSU to help inspire prospective students about GIS. The relationships I gained in class played an important role in finding jobs in geography.” – Kat Tucker, Senior GIS Analyst, GIS Graduate ([link](#))*

grants for improving teaching experiences for greater student success and engagement. Examples include grants for field trips to the Atlanta BeltLine for Urban Geography; field trips to the CDC Museum for Health Geography; and bringing *Spaces & Places* [map exhibit](#) to KSU’s campus.

*Student Clubs & Organizations.* Geography/GSS supports student clubs and initiatives, including the Geography Club, the Mu Upsilon Chapter of Gamma Theta Upsilon (GTU) International Geographical Honor Society, EcoOwls Sustainability Club, and OwlSwap (averages 160 students a month). These organizations provide opportunities for students to connect with peers, develop leadership skills, and engage in extracurricular activities.

*Cultivating Community and Belonging.* Our department is committed to creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for all. We implemented initiatives to cultivate community and belonging, such as monthly [e-newsletters](#) and frequent [social media posts](#) to inform students about events, opportunities, and career-preparation initiatives and to spotlight students and alumni and their various achievements and career interests. Regular events include a department welcome back cookout in the Fall, a Spring end-of-year cookout at the KSU Food Forest, [GIS/GSS Night](#) in November, which averages over 100 attendees each year (students, alumni, donors, faculty, staff), part of Geography Awareness Week, program open houses each semester, [KSU Food Forest](#) Fridays, [Drone Flight Day](#), and OwlSwap [Sustainability Film Series](#).

*Teaching & Mentoring Excellence Awards.* The department overall and Geography/GSS faculty members have received many awards within and beyond the university for teaching and mentoring excellence (listed earlier). These awards recognize the program’s commitment to student success, mentorship of students and other faculty, and contributions to the department, university, and geography education. The 2021 American Association of Geographers [Award for Bachelor Program Excellence in Geography](#) honors Geography departments and programs nationally that demonstrate a strong and engaged academic unit.

**Conclusion.** The evidence presented demonstrates the excellence of our growing Geography and Geospatial Sciences program. The remaining evidence includes 3 letters of support from: Dr. Gary Langham, Executive Director of the American Association of Geographers; Artis Trice (award-winning graduate of our program); and Chanice Brown (award-winning graduate of our program). Also included are examples of 3 support letters for the 2021 AAG Award for Program Excellence from: Dr. Kavita Pandit; Tiffany Reardon; and Dr. Jay Gatrell. Our commitment to student success and engagement, innovative teaching practices, emphasis on career preparation and workforce readiness, and strong administration and peer support for our award-winning faculty has resulted in a program that produces award-winning students and that is nationally recognized by the American Association of Geographers as a program of excellence for its quality and impact.



GSS graduate Raymond Goslow & Jeopardy! Host Mayim Bialik



# AAG

## AMERICAN ASSOCIATION of GEOGRAPHERS

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### Executive Director

Gary Langham

November 1, 2024

Dear University System of Georgia Award Committee:

I am writing to convey my strong support for Kennesaw State University's (KSU) Geography and Geospatial Sciences (GSS) program's nomination for the University System of Georgia's (USG) Regents' Teaching Excellence Award for Department or Program. I serve as the Executive Director of the American Association of Geographers (AAG), a scholarly, non-profit organization that seeks to advance professional studies in geography, and to encourage the application of geography in education, business, and government. Founded in 1904 and based in Washington, DC, the AAG is the largest and one of the leading geographical associations in the world with more than 10,000 members representing nearly 100 countries.

Through my role, I am familiar with many geography programs across the United States. KSU's program stands out as a geography program of excellence. Not only was their fully online BA program ranked as the top online geography program in the nation in 2019 by Best Colleges, in 2021 the AAG named KSU's Department of Geography and Anthropology as a recipient of the 2021 Award for Bachelor's Program Excellence in Geography. The annual award is one of three subcategories in AAG's Program Excellence Awards, honoring Geography departments and programs within blended departments that have significantly enhanced the prominence and reputation of Geography as a discipline and demonstrated the characteristics of a strong and engaged academic unit. We commend the Geography and GSS program at KSU for its innovation in attracting and engaging students.

The AAG Award Committee considered many criteria in selecting KSU as a Geography program of excellence, including but not limited to: Excellence in instruction, student mentorship, and pedagogical innovation, and curriculum development; Successful student placement with employers, graduate school, or other opportunities; Engagement with local to global communities (including alumni and other program stakeholders); and Enthusiastic promotion of geography on and off campus. KSU's Geography and GSS program excels with respect to these and other criteria and stands out in its pursuit of opening doors to students, preparing them for careers in every sector and virtually every imaginable field.

AAG Presidents and university administrators also praised KSU's Geography and GSS program. In a letter of support for the 2021 AAG Award, AAG Fellow and former AAG President Dr. Kavita Pandit, who has served in administrative roles at USG institutions, noted that "the faculty had the foresight to launch the state's first GIS major two decades ago, and then use that success to introduce additional majors and minors. Similarly, the department added a fully online options for key programs in 2015, long before online education became fashionable...Programs such as the OwlSwap Sustainability Initiative, Sustainability Film Series, KSU Food Forest...all address the pressing issue of environmental and social sustainability in the region...a textbook example of how undergraduate programs can, through innovative and strategic decisions, build to become regional powerhouses."

As the discipline of geography has already recognized KSU's Geography and Geospatial Sciences program as a program of excellence via the 2021 AAG Award for Bachelor's Program Excellence, I convey my utmost support for their nomination and consideration for the University System of Georgia's Regents' Teaching Excellence Award for Department or Program. Please reach out if you have questions.

Sincerely,

**Gary M. Langham, PhD**  
Executive Director

(he/him)



Dear Regents' Teaching Excellence Awards Committee Members:

I am writing this letter in full support of the nomination of Kennesaw State University's Geography and Geospatial Science (GSS) program for the Regents' Teaching Excellence Awards for Department/Program. As a student with a major in geography (2021), a minor in environmental studies, and a certificate in Geographic Information Sciences, I took an array of courses, held positions of leadership in the Geography Club, participated in internships, and presented research with the support of KSU's Geography and GSS faculty and staff. Looking back at the support faculty gave students and the university community, I firmly believe that this program has earned well-deserved praise and recognition for the faculty's commitment to excellence in teaching and student success. I am a beneficiary of that continued commitment years after graduation. In 2021, I applied my experiences in local sustainability, food, and agriculture to a year-long Emerson National Hunger fellowship through the Congressional Hunger Center in Washington, D.C. Afterwards, I returned to Atlanta to support local energy justice advocacy with the non-profit Southface Institute. Currently, I am a fully funded first-year Latin American Studies graduate student at the University of Florida. The Geography and GSS faculty's dedication to students was evident from my first day of class at KSU and has extended well beyond graduation and into my professional career.

I entered Kennesaw as an international affairs (IA) major with a minor in environmental studies. As a lower-division requirement, I took Human Geography (taught by Prof. Doran) in my first semester, which was my introduction to geography. I then took Geography of Sub-Saharan Africa (taught by Dr. Smith, retired) for an upper-division IA requirement, solidifying my interest in studying diasporic Blackness, food, and culture. I felt lost in IA and thought back to those two geography courses that challenged me to think deeply about the world around me. Remembering my love for those courses, I changed my major to geography two years into my undergraduate career.

I was exposed to many different branches of geography through the program, such as Economic Geography taught by Dr. Mitchelson, where he presented the trade of goods through place-based economic theory. In Advanced GIS, Prof. Ingram utilized video lectures and tutorials to teach students the ArcGIS suite of apps in an accessible format to online learners. In Local and Global Sustainability lead by Dr. Slinger-Friedman, we engaged in service-learning projects to see sustainability in action around Atlanta. As a result of my final project proposal to construct a braille trail, I was awarded a 2019 Newman Civic Fellowship. I also earned an internship with the KSU Office of Sustainability to plan a sensory garden, which became a grant-winning project through the American Institute of Architects with the College of Architecture and Construction Management. In the Geography and GSS program, we received unparalleled mentorship from our professors, who guided us to seek opportunities to implement projects and present research. I presented a poster on community gardens supported by Dr. McDaniel at the Posters at the Georgia State Capitol and was a semi-finalist for the Posters on the Hill competition to present to lawmakers in Congress.

The faculty's commitment to student success was evident in their restructuring of coursework after transitioning to virtual instruction during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Biogeography, a fieldwork-based course taught by Dr. Hoalst-Pullen, we conducted a census of tree growth in our campus Arboretum. Despite the interruption of our class due to COVID-19, Dr. Hoalst-Pullen ensured that we could practice virtual tree identification and catalog data at home. In Geographies of Sustainable Agriculture, Dr. Jason Rhodes' class virtually designed permaculture guilds, which were incorporated into the KSU Food Forest.

As a Black student in geography, the national *#ShutDownAcademia* reflection on racism in 2020 sparked me to voice my concerns regarding our discipline and its role in perpetuating anti-Blackness. The faculty responded with compassion and pledged that geography would continue to be an inclusive discipline for Black students and other students of color. My professors included reading lists of works by Black geographers and discussed the implications of race in courses such as Introduction to Cartography (taught by Dr. Hoalst-Pullen) and Research Methods (taught by Dr. McDaniel). The faculty strengthened their commitment to promoting geographic thought and making space for students to challenge traditional narratives.

Given all the above, I wholeheartedly believe that KSU's Geography and Geospatial Sciences program deserves the Regents' Teaching Excellence Award for a Department/Program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Artis Trice".

Artis Trice, BA '21

October 25, 2024

USG Regent's Teaching  
Excellence Award Committee

Dear Regent's Teaching Excellence Award Committee Members,

It is with great enthusiasm that I write this letter supporting the nomination of Kennesaw State University's Geography and Geospatial Sciences program for the University System of Georgia's Regents' Teaching Excellence Awards for Department or Program. I graduated from the Geography and Geospatial Sciences program in the spring of 2024, with a Bachelor's in Geography and a Certificate in Geographic Information Sciences. As a proud alumna, I can attest to the program's outstanding quality of instruction, remarkable mentorship, and the exceptional opportunities it provides its students.

One of the major cornerstones of this program is its faculty. Not only are they knowledgeable about various subjects in both the geographic and geospatial fields, but they are committed to creating an engaging environment that allows students to develop as creative and critical thinkers. For example, throughout his Population Geography course, Dr. Paul McDaniel encouraged using ArcGIS StoryMaps to explore connections between different demographic trends across the United States. Similarly, in her Advanced Geographic Information Systems course, Professor Uli Ingram actively challenged us to use GIS software to explore the spatial relationships behind every day phenomena occurring in our community. In both instances, I found that I had gained valuable skills, a new perspective, and an appreciation of the world around me, which ultimately pushed me to grow as both a student and a researcher, and contributed to my personal development.

Another cornerstone of the program is its emphasis on gaining practical, real-world experience. Early in my studies, I discussed my desire to work with GIS mapping for natural hazard research with Dr. McDaniel and Dr. Allen Roberts. Both professors encouraged me to pursue educational opportunities in the field and were incredibly supportive when I applied to - and was accepted into - NASA's DEVELOP program. Because of their guidance and the skills that I gained throughout my academic journey, I gained an invaluable hands-on experience that not only helped lay the foundation for my career as a GIS analyst but also prepared me to pursue graduate studies in Geographic Information Science at Florida State University. Additionally, with support from faculty in KSU's Geography and GSS program, I was recently awarded the 2024 Gamma Theta Upsilon (GTU) International Geographical Honor Society's Buzzard Undergraduate Scholarship, which I am using toward graduate school expenses.

I wholeheartedly believe that the Geography and Geospatial Sciences program at Kennesaw State University is deserving of the Regents' Teaching Excellence Awards for Department or Program. The department's dedication to developing students and encouraging academic excellence is unparalleled, and I have no doubt that it will continue its unwavering commitment to student success.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact me if you require any additional information.

Sincerely,



Chanice A. Brown



DEPARTMENT OF GEOSCIENCES  
College of Arts and Sciences

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December 9, 2020

Dear Members of the AAG Program Excellence Award Committee:

I am writing to provide my strong support for the nomination of Kennesaw State University's Geography Department for the AAG Program Excellence Award for undergraduate programs. Having spent 30 years in KSU's "sister programs" within the University System of Georgia, I have watched this program grow from its fledgling roots to where it is now – a strong and flourishing stand-alone undergraduate program whose impact is being felt throughout the state and beyond.

It is notable that the KSU program has had a vibrant growth over the same period that all too many geography programs have struggled or shrunk as a result of underfunding or severe budget cuts. While some of this may have been the good fortune of being part of a university that is in a region that is growing rapidly, I also give considerable credit to how the department has strategically built on its strengths and small successes to move to the next level. For example, the faculty had the foresight to launch the state's first GIS major two decades ago, and then use that success to introduce additional majors and minors. Similarly, the department added a fully online options for key programs in 2015, long before online education became fashionable – another example of foresight and innovation that is serving them well.

I am also impressed by the KSU program's engagement with the community. Here too, the department has been most strategic and focused in their offerings. Programs such as the OwlSwap Sustainability Initiative, Sustainability Film Series, KSU Food Forest, and the Georgia Immigration Research Network, for example, all address the pressing issue of environmental and social sustainability in the region. Through this focus, the KSU geography department is able to showcase its expertise and carving out a unique niche within the university and beyond.

As a faculty member and administrator at University of Georgia and Georgia State University and a former President of the AAG, I have a deep interest in seeing geography departments in the state and the country grow and flourish. The Kennesaw State University Geography department offers a textbook example of how undergraduate programs can, through innovative and strategic decisions, build to become regional powerhouses. I give this nomination my strongest support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kavita Pandit".

Kavita Pandit  
Professor of Geosciences  
Senior Advisor to the Provost



Dear AAG Award for Program Excellence Committee:

I am pleased to recommend Kennesaw State University’s BA in Geography program for the 2021 AAG Award for Bachelors Program Excellence. As the former instructional designer designated to this department, and as the Program Manager for the University System of Georgia’s affordability efforts and grant programs, I have had the pleasure of working with the faculty of KSU’s Geography program through their pursuit of academic excellence and innovation for online courses and course affordability.

The KSU Geography program’s efforts to maintain high quality courses is evidenced in its faculty members’ consistent participation in the Build a Web Course Workshop, an award-winning program for developing the College of Humanities and Social Sciences’ online courses and programs. Their participation has resulted in Quality Matters certified courses throughout the program’s online offerings, and the online version of the program was even [ranked by Best Colleges as the top online geography degree program in the United States for 2019](#), under the guidance Dr. Garrett Smith. Having evaluated a large majority of the online courses in KSU’s Geography program, and having worked with Dr. Vanessa Slinger-Friedman, whose research in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) has contributed greatly to her department’s academic rigor and active learning, I am happy to designate this program as one of the most engaging and interactive programs I have had the pleasure of working with.

As a member of several Affordable Learning Georgia grant teams coming out of KSU’s Geography department, I’ve had the opportunity to witness first-hand the initiatives for course materials affordability in the program. Four faculty (Ulrike Ingram, Dr. Jason Rhodes, Dr. Vanessa Slinger-Friedman, and Dr. Mark Patterson) have been awarded [Affordable Materials Grants](#), resulting in five new no-cost courses with an estimated \$100,000 accumulated savings among students annually. [One of these grants](#) is a collaborative project with geography faculty at the University of North Georgia, currently underway to replace the commercial textbook currently used with no-cost materials, including the development of a new openly-licensed Geographic Information Systems lab manual. [Another grant](#), recently finished, resulted in a [new, interactive, openly-licensed textbook for Cartography](#) using ArcGIS StoryMaps as a development tool. These affordability projects are part of a state-wide effort to reduce the cost of education, but they also foster the development of unique, engaging, and interactive learning experiences for students, all of which contribute to higher student success rates.

I could easily go on for pages about the exciting work being done in KSU’s Geography program, but in summary, it is my pleasure to recommend them for the 2021 AAG Award for Bachelors Program Excellence. The team of faculty in this program are dedicated instructors with a passion for pedagogical innovation and student success, and I can’t say enough how much they deserve this award. If the committee has any questions about anything in this letter, please feel free to contact me at [Redacted].

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:  
*Tiffani Reardon*  
4933A6DBD8224E9...

Tiffani Reardon  
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November 12, 2020

Dear Members of the Review Committee,

In the following paragraphs, I provide an overview of program excellence at Kennesaw State University (KSU) and I fully support the department's designation as an AAG "Program of Excellence."

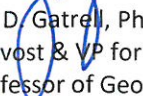
**Criteria 1, 2 & 3.** A learner-centered mission has fueled KSU's growth over the past 25 years. And, this compelling vision of putting the student first has translated into an academic milieu that responds to the needs of the region, prepares students for applied careers, and propels graduates on to advance study. This success is derived from a(n): engaged faculty, rigorous curriculum and outstanding classroom instruction that is complemented by fieldwork and study abroad. The programs pivot around an integrated curriculum that builds on a robust traditional B.A. in Geography, which also includes online delivery. The department also offers a B.S. in Geospatial Sciences, as well as minors in Geography and Environmental Studies and certificates in GIS and Land Surveying. In short, the program emphasizes excellence, is innovative, and extends from a vision that resonates with the region, employers, and students.

**Criteria 7 & 8.** KSU geographers are actively engaged in scholarship and recognized for their contributions in the broad areas of human geography, physical geography, and geospatial techniques. Over the past decade, faculty have published monographs, edited collections, texts, chapters, and peer reviewed articles in many of the discipline's most prominent journals including *Annals of GIS*, *Applied Geography*, *Environmental Management*, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, *The Professional Geographer*, *Urban Geography*, *Journal of Urban Affairs*, and *The Southeastern Geographer*. Currently, the department houses the editorship of Elsevier's *Applied Geography*.

**Criteria 9, 11, 12 & 13.** As the curriculum implies, the faculty are closely connected to industry and engage in substantial community outreach above and beyond GIS Day and Geography Awareness Week. Indeed, the faculty have developed a highly successful internship program that benefits from extensive community outreach and the placement of graduates across the metropolitan region. To that end, KSU alumni have become the program's strongest advocates for the internship program and often serve as mentors to current students. The program provides students with opportunities to engage in real world projects as part of their classroom experience. As examples, students worked with local governments and not-for-profits to assess and analyze points of contamination within a metro Atlanta watershed, while others created online historical maps for Etowah Valley Historical Society that were integrated into middle school classrooms.

In closing, I fully support the designation of KSU as a "Program of Excellence." As a geographer and administrator, I can assure you any university would consider the KSU geography program, their faculty, and students a prominent point of pride—and signature academic program on their campus.

Respectfully,

  
Jay D. Gatrell, Ph.D.  
Provost & VP for Academic Affairs  
Professor of Geography