The Geographical Bulletin of Gamma Theta Upsilon

The Geographical Bulletin is the publication of the international professional geographical organization, Gamma Theta Upsilon. The organization was founded in 1928 as a professional geography fraternity. Since its inception in 1970 The Geographical Bulletin has been an outlet for student work. Indeed many who have gone on through graduate training in geography have had the opportunity to see their first professional publication appear in this periodical. In the past few years the Bulletin has expanded to two issues per year reflecting an increased interest and contributions of both undergraduate and graduate students.

Editorial Policy

All manuscripts must be in acceptable form for peer review. Contributions to The Geographical Bulletin of Gamma Theta Upsilon should follow the general specifications noted below:

1. All manuscripts should be double spaced on 8 1/2" x 11" paper with 1 1/2" margins on all sides. Type on one side only. Submit two copies.

2. References are to be listed on separate pages in alphabetical order by author and double spaced. References should include date, title, journal, volume number and pages. Footnotes are to be avoided.

3. All tables and figures must be typed on separate pages, double spaced and referenced by Arabic numerals. Include a list of double-spaced table and figure captions.

4. All line drawings and tables must be in finished form ready for reproduction. Maps must have scales and patterns which will tolerate reduction. All graphics and photographs must include titles, and figure and table numbers.

5. An abstract up to 150 words double spaced followed by up to five key words must be included on a separate page.

6. It is advisable, but not required to prepare your manuscript on a word processor so that corrections can be made accurately and rapidly.

7. It is suggested that student manuscripts be reviewed by a faculty member for editorial comments prior to submission.

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# The Geographical Bulletin

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Editorial Comments</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating Field Research. H. J. de Blij (Professor, University of Miami)</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| A Comparison of Regional Drought Patterns in the Contiguous United States Using Four Measures of Drought Severity. Peter T. Soule (Professor, University of Alabama) | 72 |

| The Geography of Rockfall Hazards in Glacier National Park, Montana. David R. Butler (Professor, University of Georgia) | 81 |

| Interstate Migration of Students to Professional Schools. James F. Fryman (Professor, University of Northern Iowa) | 89 |

| Spatial Patterns of Visitor Behavior: A Case Study of the North Carolina Zoological Park. Maurice L. McKenzie (Undergraduate Student, University of North Carolina-Greensboro) and Keith G. Debbage (Professor, University of North Carolina-Greensboro) | 100 |

| Factors Controlling Ground Water Flow to Wells in Crystalline Rocks Based on a Principal Components Analysis. Joseph E. Garcia (Graduate Student, University of Georgia) and George A. Brook (Professor, University of Georgia) | 110 |

| Notch Formation Due to Freeze-Thaw Action in the North-facing Valley Cliff of the Asama Volcano Region. Yukinori Matsukura (Professor, University of Tsukuba) | 118 |
THE GEOGRAPHICAL BULLETIN

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All of us remember the favorite sayings of some of our teachers. When I was a first-year student at the University of the Witwatersrand, Professor J. H. Wellington would start many a lecture by stating “Geography is a field science. What I am about to tell you comes from my field notes. When you go on to graduate school, your success or failure will depend on your ability to do original field research.” When I was in the Master’s degree program at Northwestern University, a visiting professor, A. E. Moodie, liked to say that “If you cannot map it, it isn’t geography.” Later, in a required class that was part of the doctoral program, I began to hear a phrase that was to loom large in years to come: “If you cannot measure it, it is not geography.”

One should, of course, not take one’s professors too seriously—at least not all the time. The last of these quotes underscores this; it is nonsense. But I have often reflected on Wellington’s constant insistence on field work as the *sine qua non* of geography. At Northwestern University in the 1950s, it was not a question of whether you did field work toward your dissertation, but where. One of my contemporaries went to Ghana, another to Uruguay; others worked in France, Uganda, Puerto Rico, and Indonesia. The Department was enlivened by the preparations, departures, overseas contacts, and returning of students from abroad.

Field research is expensive. Many graduate students in those days managed to secure partial support for their field season (often as long as a year), but lack of grant support was no excuse for changing a dissertation proposal. If it was necessary to borrow funds, this was part of the price to be paid for the highest degree in geography.

As we all know, field work of the kind Wellington had in mind has ceased to be a normal ingredient of graduate study in geography. These days, it is possible to use extant “data bases” or, at a higher level of originality, to analyze “responses” from questionnaires sent to certain audiences from the zip code of the aspiring graduate. Recently my De-
partment advertised positions for two Assistant Professors, one with a South American regional specialization, the other with a Soviet one. Several of the leading candidates had never been in their respective regions nor spoke any of the relevant languages. When I asked why this should be so, the cost factor figured prominently. The inability to secure grant funds turned would-be field-workers into computer-screen analysts. So, at least, the faculty committee was asked to believe.

As an elected member of the National Geographic Society’s (NGS) Committee for Research and Exploration since 1980, I have come to understand another dimension of this situation. While the Committee awards grants mainly to established scholars, it also considers applications from graduate students. Funds are awarded specifically for field work. The Committee is multidisciplinary and includes anthropologists, biologists, a botanist, geologist, oceanographer, two archaeologists, and a geographer. Dr. B. C. Bishop, a geographer, chairs the Committee. Applications from graduate students in various disciplines enable the Committee members to compare levels of achievement when evaluating their proposals. To be successful, a graduate student must (1) write a strong proposal that is well connected to existing theory and substance, (2) have a record of publication and paper presentation, and (3) secure supportive reviews from referees nominated by the candidate as well as by members of the Committee.

Graduate students from geography very rarely receive NGS support. The reason is simple: they are at a disadvantage compared to those representing other field-work disciplines because their proposals, on average, lack evidence of previous work (and publication). Many an anthropology or biology student has participated in team research, has published results (alone or jointly), and can point to field experience (including language competence) as an added virtue for Committee consideration. On the page set aside for the listing of publications, a recent applicant from geography simply wrote: “I am just beginning my Ph.D. field work, so I naturally have no publications or presentations yet.” Asked Committee members: “This student has been a geography major and, since 1985, a graduate student, over a total of nine years. He has a Master’s degree and wrote a thesis. Has nothing publishable or reportable come from all this time in geography?”

While the answer is negative, it need not be so. If I have learned another frustrating lesson on that Committee, it is that the so-called “hard” sciences provide easier avenues to publication than geography does; a two-day observation of a beetle on a mound of sand sometimes seems to be enough to generate a “behavioral” study. But that is not true for anthropology or history or the other “softer” disciplines, and students from these fields also outproduce geographers. The lesson for all of us is simple but important: we must train ourselves to start our professional careers earlier. I have read many papers authored by first- or second-year graduate students, and even by some undergraduates, that were good enough to be considered by an editor—if not of the Annals or the Professional Geographer, or perhaps not even of a regional journal, then certainly of one of the several good state journals and semi-popular journals that publish geographic articles. But submitting the paper is a considerable job: preparing the copies in accordance with the instructions printed in the journal, organizing the illustrations, putting the maps in publishable form. That experience alone is valuable, because it tests, and improves, organizing skills. Next comes the review process. Whether or not the paper is accepted, the reviewers’ comments will reveal how others see the good points and the shortcomings of the narrative and analysis, which will be helpful in revision—and for the next submittal. This whole learning experience comes too late for many geography students. It should start, at the latest, toward the end of the first year of graduate school.

Two other practices would strengthen
our hand in the multidisciplinary com-
petition for grant support. One involves
early participation in ongoing research
projects. There is no better way to learn
about field research than by working on
a project already funded and under way.
Do not immediately expect to be paid for
this; a few hours of volunteer work for
the project of a faculty member can teach
as much as (or more than) the same
amount of time in the classroom. Un-
dergraduates who declare geography as
their major should investigate what is
going on in their Departments; begin-
nning graduate students should pursue
this on the first day on campus.

Second, we should gain earlier ex-
perience in proposal writing. Whether we
like it or not, grants from funding agen-
cies make possible field research that
would otherwise not be feasible. Con-
structing an effective, well-reasoned,
clearly focused research proposal is a
difficult task. Unlike some other funding
agencies, the NGS Research Commit-
tee's application form provides only two
pages for the project description. As 600
applications per year prove, it is difficult
for many scholars to describe their plans
concisely and succinctly. Other agencies
require lengthy narratives. To write grant
proposals in different formats is a chal-
lenge that should be addressed through-
out graduate school. Judging from the
applications read, many of us do not
know how to construct a sound budget
for the proposed field work. Our grad-
uate schools might establish proposal-
writing seminars, beginning at the
Master's level. They could then create
alliances with other graduate schools, so
that the seminar participants would ex-
change proposals. Thus the proposal
writers of one school would be the re-
viewers of proposals from another
school, and vice versa. In this way, an-
other skill—objective, constructive re-
viewing—also would be learned in a
formal setting.

Field research, the gathering of pri-
mary data, the on-site investigation of a
defined topic, may no longer be as es-
sential an ingredient of geography as it
once was. But, like regional geography,
it may make a comeback. True, some
areas of the world have become difficult
to work in; others are, for all intents and
purposes, closed. But still other areas of
the world are opening anew. The op-
portunities still beckon, and there is
nothing in geography like experiencing
the natural and social environments of
places and areas that drew us to the dis-
cipline in the first place.