

Vilas and Faculty

GEOGRAPHY DEPARTMENT OFFERS AN ALTERNATIVE

By Amy Raitér

The Geography Department at St. Lawrence University offers courses that provide a basis for a strong liberal arts education.

Many people think that geography is only useful for knowing how to locate where each of the 50 states are and what each of their capitals are. But the geography department at St. Lawrence University, is here to prove that theory wrong.

According to Bill Elberty, professor of geography, the study of geography is actually related to many career fields, like "earth sciences, social sciences, journalism, business, political science, law, medicine, language, literature, and art." Almost everything we do can benefit from geographical studies.

The geography department was founded in 1983, although formerly, geography courses were offered through the geology department.

There was some indication that the department might not survive recent cutbacks, but those fears are unfounded according to Elberty, who is the only full time professor this year and who is also the acting chair for '91-92. He is a graduate of SLU and has taught here for about 33 years. He says the department will continue to offer courses.

Elberty said that the geography department serves a useful purpose in a lot of the dimensions for the school and that it seems counterproductive to terminate the geography department and push international programs.

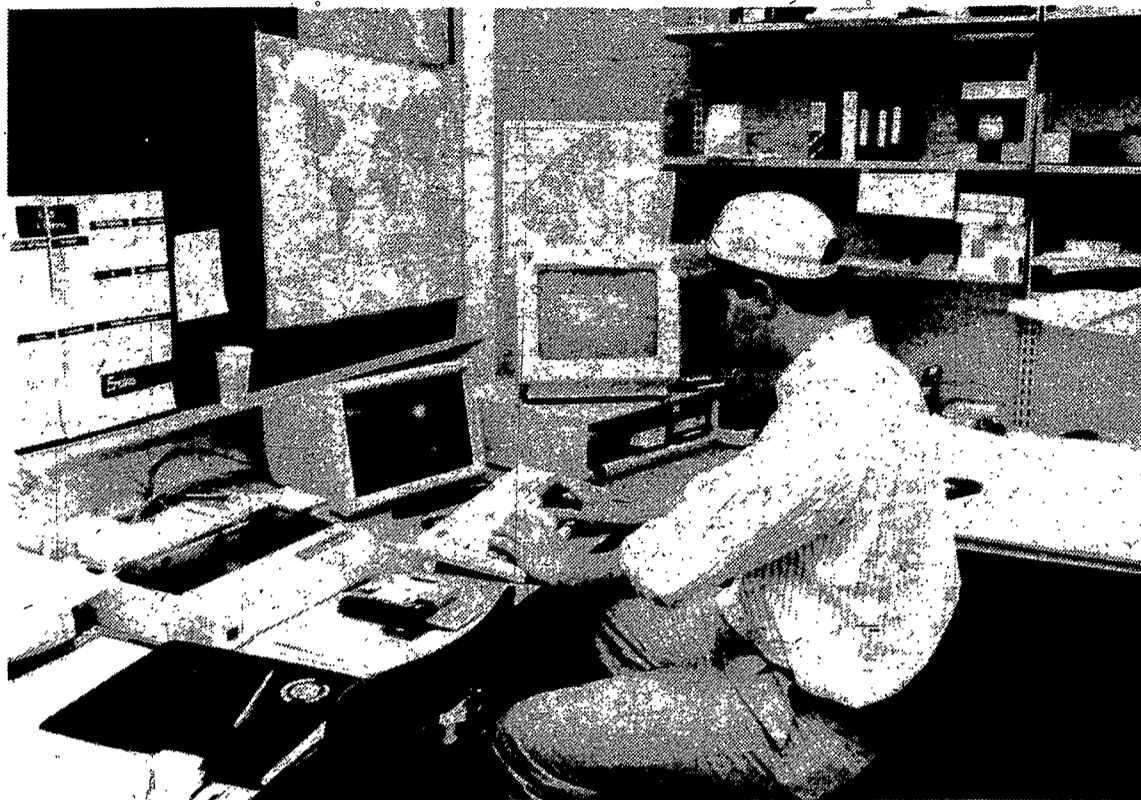
Although the department does not offer a major in geography, a minor program is offered. Students wishing to minor in geography must take a minimum of five courses in geography.

The geography department is also connected with programs abroad. Students involved in a minor program are encouraged to take part in some of these programs because courses are offered to help satisfy the requirements.

Another member of the department, William Romey, is the chairperson of the department. He is away this year running a program in France. Steven Metzger is the lab coordinator for geography and Douglas McDonald is the visiting lecturer. Louis Dupont also teaches courses in cultural geography.

Although the departmental faculty are few, the geography courses are popular among the students. According to Elberty, there has been enormous pressure from the students for enrollment in geography courses.

The department has been developing a fascinating lab



Chris Shepherd ('93) takes advantage of computers in geography lab.

Photo by Kirk Kringel

set up, said Metzger. A lot of new equipment which enables students to work with new geographical systems and powerful technology has been acquired.

In the lab sections the students are able to do hands on work with the equipment and the computers. Every student works a great deal with maps; weather maps, 3-D maps, computerized maps, and navigational maps.

Elberty said that geography is important as a discipline to SLU and that students should have access and be aware of the technology in

the department. He said geography "will touch every aspect of our lives, if it hasn't already."

Geography is concerned with the meaning of place and spatial patterns, the "it" is not important, but where is it and why is it there is important to the study of geography, according to Elberty.

Scott Green, '92, is a geography minor and said that he has taken at least one course in geography each semester that he has been here. Green said that the geography department has a lot to offer.

Green said he really likes

the style of teaching used by Elberty and Romey and that their style of teaching is not just giving a standardized test, something that a student could pass, but not remember. Green said that "the things that I've learned here I have definitely remembered."

Elberty said that "geographic illiteracy is alive" and that it is important that people realize the dimensions of our world.

Do you think that every faculty member and student on this campus could rattle off the name of each state and its capital anyway?

FACULTY FORUM APPLAUDS ABROAD EXPERIENCE

By Ty Little

Professors who have recently been to Kenya spoke on Thursday, November 7, about some of their best times there, and also about the effect the trip had on their teaching.

Ahmed Samatar, associate professor of government, the first speaker, named the three things he felt were most memorable. The first two were the readings that faculty did with each other on Kenya and the field trips that faculty took. His greatest part, he said, was his new respect and honor for the other faculty members. He said: "I always suspected there was some sort of latent energy here."

Patricia Alden, associate professor of English, also enjoyed some of the reading the faculty had to read. She said the readings on Kenya "chal-

lenged the assumption in disciplines." She said the biggest highlight for her was the "eight days of intense delegation" in which the faculty members listened and delegated with three Kenyan speakers.

Betsy Rezelman, associate dean of faculty affairs, said it was "good to get away from the easy life" in the U.S. She said it was her first trip to Kenya and she enjoyed being in a society where you didn't have all the modernization that we have here in the U.S.

The highlight for Celia Nyamweru, associate professor of anthropology, was her visit to some of the cities in Kenya. She said: "This level of contact with an extremely different culture is something really valuable." She said it was good to have the chance to be right along side with a different culture instead of

experiencing it by "looking from a window."

"One long field trip" was the opinion Alice Pomponio, associate professor of anthropology, had of the whole trip. She talked about some of the show and tell, and guessing games they played with the Kenyan faculty. She said that one of her fondest moments was when someone made one faculty member, with a blindfold on, try to guess what something was by touching it. She described the object that they touched as "elephant dung".

The final speaker was David Lloyd, associate professor of history. He said that some of his fondest moments were experiencing first hand the architecture and modern art which are some of the things he teaches. He said that he could sense what it was like to be an artist for

the first time.

All the faculty had their own opinions about how their trip to Kenya helped them think of ways to make their own teaching styles at SLU better.

Samatar said that his experiences in Kenya will help him and other professors teach African Studies better because they have now been there. He said that he finds himself teaching subjects more clearly by relating things to Kenyan culture.

Rezelman said she experienced some things she could bring back to her classroom to help her in her lectures. She said, "we are only just touching a few, of the many benefits there are."

Pomponio said "you can't learn the things we learned without being there." She said that the trip will greatly help her in class also. She

said that like Samatar and Rezelman, she can now draw comparisons in the classroom with subjects related to Kenya.

Lloyd talked more about the overall effects of St. Lawrence faculty members going to Kenya. He said that "it was good for the professors to go to Kenya because it could add voices to the goals of future African Studies." He hopes that the faculty can now help on establishing some new objectives of the African Studies program abroad.

The majority of the students present at the discussion had already traveled to Kenya. Student reactions ranged from problems such as the possible restructuring of the whole Kenyan program to student excitement for faculty participating in the Kenya program.