Wanted: Outstanding Teachers!

The Delaware Geographic Alliance wants to recognize excellence in geography teaching. The following awards are available to Alliance members in public and private schools, K-12. Awards will be given at the Alliance annual awards banquet in February, 2008. So if you know of an outstanding teacher of geography (no matter what their teaching assignment), please turn them in for a reward!

DGA Distinguished Teaching Award
The Distinguished Teaching Award will be offered annually to recognize demonstrated excellence in the craft of geography teaching among our membership. Teachers may be nominated by an administrator or a peer, and self-nominations are also accepted. To be considered, an applicant must submit a portfolio displaying evidence of effective geography teaching in the areas of curriculum and assessment, professional preparation for teaching geography, classroom environment, and collaboration with peers within the school community. Application deadline is January 15, 2008. The Distinguished Teaching Award will be presented to all applicants who meet the criteria established by the Alliance as judged by the DGA Professional Development Committee.

Delaware Geography Teacher of the Year
One Delaware Geography Teacher of the Year Award will be selected annually from the recipients of the Distinguished Teaching Award, recognizing excellence in the teaching of geography in the K-12 classroom. In addition to the award recognition, the Geography Teacher of the Year will receive a $500 grant from the Alliance for the purpose of supplementing geography instruction.

DGA Distinguished Service Award
The DGA Distinguished Service Award will be presented at the discretion of the Steering Committee to any Alliance member who has demonstrated exemplary service to the Alliance and the field of geographic education. Examples of contribution might include, but are not limited to, contributions to Alliance committees and projects, service on statewide curriculum and assessment projects in geography, development of geography materials, research in the field of geography education, and outreach activities. Members of the Alliance may submit nominations for this award to the Professional Development Committee by January 15 each year.
Delawhere?

By: Dr. Peter Mires, Contributing Editor
pmires@udel.edu

Athens, Rome, Memphis, and Syracuse are all ancient cities in the Mediterranean world, right? You probably know that they are also cities in the United States. Look up Athens in the index of your Goode’s World Atlas, for example, and you’ll see that in addition to that classic Greek metropolis named for the goddess Athena, it is a popular place-name in the United States; there is an Athens in Alabama, Georgia, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Texas.

Cultural geographers have long been fascinated with the spread of classical place-names in this country thanks to Penn State geographer Wilbur Zelinsky. His article on “classical town names” published in the Geographical Review forty years ago is now a classic in our discipline. He demonstrated that these toponyms belong to an American romantic movement of the nineteenth century, another component of which is the Greek Revival architectural style (1820-1860).

Although New York State is the epicenter of classical town names, Delaware has a couple of notable examples: Odessa and Smyrna. Their names changed from earlier settlements known as Cantwell’s Bridge and Duck Creek, respectively. Odessa, an ancient Greek colony, is an important Ukrainian port city on the Black Sea linked to the Mediterranean by the Dardanelles. Interest in the Crimean War (1853-1856) doubtless stimulated Delawareans to adopt the name Odessa in 1855. Smyrna, now the Turkish city of Izmir, was an important Greek port on the Aegean Coast. Most people know it for its Biblical association, and earlier as the reputed home of the author of the Iliad and the Odyssey.

Like Homer’s city of Troy, there are many communities with a palimpsest of place-names. Some of them are right here in Delaware.

Reference

GIS Day 2007

Over 50 students and their parents attended the annual 2007 GIS Day Event at Lake Forest High School on November 14th, 2007. A career expo by state and private agencies that use GIS everyday attracted older students, while interactive games and activities allowed younger children the to wet their feet with GIS! This year’s sponsors were the Delaware GIS Community (including DGA), GeoDecisions, 4H, and ESRI. Special thanks to the following Alliance members who participated in the evening’s success: Judy Purcell, Dom Zaffora, Dawn Willis, Mary Schoettinger, Barb Duffin, Tracy DeLiberty, Maggie Legates, and Rich Phifer. If you have any questions about GIS or would like to bring GIS to your classroom, contact Miriam Pomilio, DGDC Education Committee Chairperson, Pomilio@udel.edu, (302)831-8967, or Rich Phifer, Delaware Geographic Alliance, riphifer@udel.edu, (302)831-6783. The Delaware GIS Conference will be held at the Dover Sheraton on April 23, 2008.
Geographers At Work

UD geographer April Veness has always been interested in the idea of “Home”. Certainly for all of us, home is a very special place, and April has studied it from many angles. What are the physical and cultural conditions necessary for people to feel “at home”? Under what conditions will people feel compelled to leave home? April began her study with a research project that looked at homelessness and the experience of people without a permanent address. This led to a study of transient people and their efforts to establish a new home. For example, how does a person adjust the kitchen of a home or apartment to make it seem familiar? What details are considered most essential? To what degree do transients begin to integrate items from the new location into the surroundings? For such study, the keen eye of a trained observer is crucial. Also important is the geographer’s bent for speculation, for digging deeper.

Study of the concept of home led April Veness and her students to refine a method of geographic fieldwork based on observation and interviews, with an emphasis on keeping in contact so that data is collected over time. Use of a videocamera allows review of the scenes, gives the professor insights into the thinking of the student researchers, and often encourages the people being studied to open up and share their thinking and attitudes more fully. Themes emerge and additional questions arise as the field data is evaluated. Undergraduate student Jennifer Koppenhaver posed this question: How do the homes established by Guatemalan immigrants in Georgetown compare with the villages they left behind? To help her students find out, Dr. Veness organized a study trip to the San Marcos region of Guatemala. It proved to be the beginning of an ongoing study for Veness, who tries to involve her students in fieldwork and analysis wherever possible.

What will be the end result of this study? Dr. Veness plans a book detailing her insights on the Guatemalan immigrant experience, a project that will require several years of work. Beyond that, April Veness hopes to facilitate a greater understanding and connection between the villages in Guatemala and their new-if temporary- homes in Georgetown, DE.

April Veness (above), associate professor geography, and UD graduate Sarah Archbald speak at the official inauguration of the new water system in the mountain village of San Isidro, Guatemala.
Get Out There!
Travel opportunities for teachers

Fulbright to Japan

The JFMF Teacher Program, sponsored by the Government of Japan, provides U.S. teachers and administrators in grades 1-12 with the opportunity to participate in fully-funded three-week study visits to Japan. You’ll have to hurry! This year’s application deadline is December 10, 2007. The online application is available at: http://www.iie.org/jfmf. Or for more information, visit www.iie.org/jfmf

Phone: 1-888-527-2636, Email: jfmf@iie.org

Germany Teacher Program

Alliance member Joel Glazier is soliciting interest for a week-long study tour of the Berlin Germany area in July 2008. The land costs are covered by the hosts, and organizers, Checkpoint Charlie Foundation of Berlin, Germany. Costs to Delaware teachers would be for the airfare from Newark NJ to Berlin. The focus of the tour would be on "Germany--Its Past, Present and Future". Contact Joel Glazier (DGA alumni, if interested at jglazie@aol.com)

Mark Your New 2008 Calendars!

January:
7th - DGA Steering Committee Meets
15th - Deadline for Distinguished Teaching Award applications

February:
21st - DGA Awards Dinner, Dover Sheraton
29th - Middle States Conference, Wilmington

April:
4th - State Geographic Bee, Newark

Teacher at Sea

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is now accepting applications for its Teacher at Sea program. Since 1990, NOAA's Teacher at Sea Program has enabled more than 500 teachers to gain first-hand experience of science and life at sea.

Teachers may select a cruise aboard one of NOAA's 19 ships, of which there are three main types. Fisheries research vessels perform biological and physical science studies in support of fisheries research; oceanographic and coastal research vessels perform physical science studies in support of physical oceanography, atmospheric studies, and bathymetric mapping; and hydrographic survey vessels scan the coastal sea floor with side-scan sonar and sophisticated bottom sounding systems to locate submerged obstructions and navigational hazards for the creation or update of the nation's nautical charts.

Open to currently employed K-12 teachers, college teachers, or museum or aquarium educators, both American and International. Not for student or pre-service teachers.

Teachers can expect to be at sea anywhere from one week to a month. Most teachers take advantage of cruises offered during the summer, but cruises take place throughout the year. All necessary travel costs are paid for by the NOAA Teacher at Sea Program. While airfare is paid for up-front by the government, all other necessary travel costs are reimbursed.

Applications must be postmarked by Monday, December 31 2007. For further information, please go to: http://teacheratsea.noaa.gov.
Travel Writing in the Classroom
By: Dr. Peter Mires, Contributing Editor
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Are you looking for another way to get geography into the classroom? Try travel writing. You may know that travel writing, specifically the travel essay, is increasingly popular as a literary genre. Students are drawn to travel literature because it’s authentic; it’s generally written using first person pronouns (“I did this.” “We saw that.”), which allows them to share vicariously in the experience.

English teachers have been using travel literature for some time, as illustrated by a recent volume on the subject. This book, which is Volume 8 in the “Travel Writing Across the Disciplines: Theory and Pedagogy” series published by Peter Lang, is a little gem that I recommend to geography teachers. It promotes the study of geography in a somewhat unconventional way, and addresses wider concerns about reading and writing.

The eleven chapters range topically from sample courses to study abroad programs. All agree on a definition of the subject that does not include the common perception of travel as a form of hedonism. We’re not talking about finding the best spa, wine, or cruise destination, as explained in Denise Comer’s contribution entitled “Negotiating Privilege in the Teaching of Travel Literature.” Several authors mention the oft-quoted distinction between travel and tourism, the latter having a pejorative connotation. Instead, the focus is on engaging students with great writing about other places and other people, or what geographers often call “land and life.”

A common thread in the book is that travel literature is inherently interesting. For example, the editor’s chapter entitled “Travel Literature, a Genre for Reluctant Readers” makes the point that most of her college students are technologically savvy “non-readers.” However, they soon discover that they actually enjoy reading travel books, something that Groom has capitalized on by using this material as a stimulating writing prompt.

To paraphrase the celebrated British Egyptologist, Sir Flinders Petrie, dull geography is some of the driest dust that blows. Textbook publishers know this and have responded by cutting word counts and increasing illustrations. I’m not suggesting that the textbook as we know it will go the way of the dinosaur, but teachers at every grade level are finding ancillary material to fit their lesson plans. This includes the use of travel writing in the classroom.

Please feel free to contact the DGA office for resources to help you incorporate travel writing in your classroom. Also, if you enjoyed my comments on Delaware’s classical town names (this issue), I’d recommend you read one of my favorite travel books, Paul Theroux’s The Pillars of Hercules.

References:


Sesame Street
Geographer
Visits Delaware!

Roger Downs is an expert on lots of topics, has contributed to important research, and has an extensive list of scholarly publications. But, he proudly admitted to a Friday seminar on the campus of the University of Delaware in Newark, of all the things he has done in his professional life, no project has broader or more lasting impact than his work as expert advisor on Sesame Street. The challenges of working within the format of the Children’s Television Workshop were many. (As an example, segments were limited to ten or twenty seconds.) Yet the opportunity to influence so many youngsters to think in geographic terms made the challenges worthwhile. Downs invited his fellow geographers to reach out and share their perspectives and the results of their research with a wider audience beyond the academic world. He also applauded the role of teaching, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

At a small Alliance gathering the night before, Dr. Downs talked with teachers about the importance of teaching geography. As a major contributor to Geography for Life, the national geography standards, and an advisor to the NAEP Geography Assessments, Downs has been involved in efforts to improve geography education for many years. He knows that the current educational climate with its emphasis on literacy and math has squeezed geography minutes out of the instructional day in many places. Yet he offered encouragement and advice on ways to effectively integrate geographic perspectives and thinking. To view the PowerPoint presentation used in Roger Downs’ Thursday evening presentation for teachers, go to www.degeog.org or www.ngsednet.org/dga.

The Delaware Geographic Alliance may be the answer to your questions. Contact us to help with your program. We would be glad to “tattoo” adults and/or children (temporarily, of course) with a thumbprint map. We can provide geography-based activities and hold mini-quizzes or competitions for ‘small’ prizes. We may even have a few prizes we can award to your geographically-gifted parents, students and staff. Contact the Delaware Geographic Alliance office or Dawn Willis for more information and to schedule a presentation. dlwillis@mail.milford.k12.de.us

Teachers:
- Is an Open House/Family Night planned for your school?
- Are you looking for a Staff/Department meeting program?
- Does the Parent/Teacher organization need an informational exhibit for their next meeting?

My Wonderful World
Delaware Schools Celebrate Geography

Geography Awareness Week 2007 highlighted the importance of geography education, and schools across Delaware participated in a variety of ways.

- At Phillis Wheatley Middle School in Bridgeville, teacher Dom Zaffora reports that the students mapped the courtyard including a new pond they will be using in studying ecology.

- The walls of Sussex Central Middle School in Georgetown were brightened by photos of landscapes from around the world, and students in Cindy Baker's classes constructed graphs, getting ready for topographical studies.

- At the Brandywine Community School in Wilmington, students welcomed Rich Phifer from DGA, who shared a variety of map activities with the students.

- Students at William Penn High School created Islamic Tile Art displays and participated in the t-shirt day contest!

Above: At W.T. Chipman Middle School in Harrington, Rodney Collins has his students working on a HUGE U.S. map. The finished project will be displayed on the cafeteria wall to be admired by all.

Below: Students from Welch Elementary in Caesar Rodney played geo-games at the GIS Day event while high school students and teachers learned about careers using GIS in the career expo section of the event.

Above & Right: Students at Brookside Elementary School in Newark pinpoint place names on their T-Shirts and places where they were manufactured.
High School Teachers: Arriving Spring 2008
Lesson: Geography of the Italian Renaissance