Geology Faculty Updates

Dr. Ian Williams

Since 2008, when I led the Semester Abroad: Europe class, I have been involved with several other off-campus academic activities. I taught Geology 101 in the Pyrenees for the International Traveling Classroom in 2010 and that same year I led the regional field trip to the Yellowstone region (where I received excellent and well-appreciated assistance from two of our graduates — Steve Koehler and Ward Olson). Over the summer of 2012, I taught Geology 101 in Dalkeith, Scotland, allowing me to return to some classic localities such as Siccar Point. Unfortunately that was the wettest summer Scotland had had for years!

In 2013, I took the trip to the Appalachians, visiting Mammoth Cave, Gettysburg, the Smoky Mountains, Drakes Well and the Smithsonian where Allison Gale arranged a behind-the-scenes tour for us. I was also fortunate to have Amy Nachbor (2009) along as my joint leader. She was particularly impressed by being able to hold a piece of the moon in one hand and Mars in the other the Smithsonian. We were able to visit some memorable sights like the folds on the banks of the Potomac River, and had great weather — for at least some of the time (well, OK, it rained).

Since then, I have been occupied with Semester Abroad: Europe, which I will be leading in the fall of 2015. We have had several of our geology students participate over the last few years (one studying volcanoes on Sicily and the other one focusing on Karts topography in Croatia) and I hope to have a few come along with me in 2015. I’m keen to show them the varied and classic geology in the Pyrenees, Alps and the UK.

My classes have undergone numerous changes, mostly connected to the advances in technology. I created and teach online versions of Geology 101 and 102. I also team-teach an online Sustainable Energy class each semester with Dr. Glenn Spiczak. Outside of teaching, I am involved with a research program with an old colleague Dr. Mike Fuller at the University of Hawaii. We will have a poster describing our interpretation of a geomagnetic Reversal Record at this fall’s AGU.

2014 was my last and 30th year as the adviser for the River Falls Geological Society. During my time as an adviser, I managed to maintain an average of just over five invited speakers per year.
Dr. Kerry Keen

Here’s a brief update on some highlights over the past year or two. After a very busy 2012-2013, in which, on top of “normal” duties, I was involved in two successful faculty searches in Environmental Science, I still was able to get away for a few days in early May 2013 with a van load of students to attend the GSA Section Meeting in Kalamazoo, MI. Students presented research posters and I gave a teaching-oriented talk. We also stopped at Warren Dunes and at geology alumnus Abby Cole’s lake cabin.

In summer-fall 2013 I started sabbatical. My activities included two projects with USGS colleagues on groundwater-lake interaction in northern Minnesota and at Lake Tahoe. The latter involved an interesting and beautiful solo drive in a USGS truck from Denver to Reno. After a hiatus of 16 years, I returned to work with Summit Envirosolutions, Inc. in St. Paul. Projects there included evaluating hydrogeologic resources and controls on crop production at a site in southwestern Minnesota; silica sand mine projects in Wisconsin; and writing a proposal to test a Continuous Groundwater Recharge Monitoring System (unfortunately unfunded).

Also during fall 2013, I helped organize UWRF’s 50th Anniversary Celebration of the Semester Abroad: Europe program. And I attended a two-day NASA-sponsored Faculty Institute at the AGU Meeting in San Francisco.

In May 2014, I was lucky to participate in the UWRF Regional Geology Trip to the Badlands and Black Hills, which was organized and led by UWRF alum Jay Gilbertson. It was a great trip! Enormous thanks to Jay! A highlight of summer 2014 was that I worked with 20 dancers and choreographed/presented five performances of a Minnesota Fringe Festival show, titled “Human-Nature,” which blended science and modern dance.

In September 2014 my sabbatical ended and I am back teaching again! This semester I have my largest Sedimentary Geology class, which includes four students from Brazil. It is great fun, with extra field trips, including touring the underground silica sand mine in Bay City, Wisconsin, where geology alumnus Andrew Murphy works. I also participated in a dye-dilution experiment on the Kinnickinnic River with Dr. Jill Coleman and hydrology students.

I still split my time between teaching/working in Geology and Environmental Science. While I may not be getting much sleep, this is still a wonderful and interesting life. I look forward to a semester in Europe in fall 2016.
Dr. Holly Dolliver

It’s hard to believe I am already in my eighth year at UW-River Falls! It seems strange to be introducing myself for the first time. I grew up on a small farm in central Minnesota and like many farm kids, I spent my summers picking rocks. Although the pay didn’t amount to much, it galvanized my curiosity and love of the outdoors. As an undergraduate at North Dakota State University, I quickly discovered the amazing world of soils and have been fascinated by their diversity and processes ever since. Along the way, an influential Quaternary geologist showed me the strong (but often overlooked) connection between soils and geology and my world was forever transformed. I finished up dual degrees in Soil Science and Geology and headed to the University of Minnesota for my Masters and PhD.

Throughout my journey, I have had the great fortune of accumulating a diversity of work and research experiences. I spent my early years mapping soils and Quaternary geology in central and southwestern Minnesota. Later, I did environmental consulting for a short period of time. At the University of Minnesota, I focused on researching landscape development, water movement and contaminant (antibiotics, carbon, and nutrients) transport. I excitedly started my position at UWRF in 2007 with a split appointment between the soil science and geology programs and have been loving teaching ever since. I currently teach Geomorphology, Geological Destinies of Nations, Soil Profile Descriptions, Soil Formation/Development and Soil Physics, along with the introductory courses in both areas. I am passionate about providing hands-on and experiential learning experiences for students. In 2011, I took the plunge and “flipped” my Geomorphology course. With the flipped classroom approach, all of our class time is devoted to assignments and activities, while lectures are completed as “homework” (online video) prior to class. The format has revolutionized my teaching and I have now implemented it in several of my upper division courses.

In addition to teaching I coach our (national championship!) Soil Judging team and do a significant amount of undergraduate research. Most of the projects have been collaborative applied field-based studies in western Wisconsin. Almost all of my projects involve some aspect of “change over time.” I currently have a five-year research project funded by Chippewa County to evaluate soil health pre- and post-frac sand mining as well as study land reclamation techniques. That is keeping me especially busy… but it is fun seeing students learn and grow professionally. When I am not working, my husband (Brett), daughter (Katelyn, 3 years old), dog (Dakota) and I can be found hiking, kayaking and simply enjoying nature.