Our Geography Alumni

Where are they now?
Mark Bigelow (BA, 2008)
Compost Operations Crew Leader,
Windy City Harvest Program, Chicago, IL

Mark is Compost Operations Crew Leader for the Windy City Harvest Program at the Chicago Botanic Gardens. He manages a crew of formerly incarcerated youth as they develop a vacant lot into a productive site which converts several tons of organic waste each week into a rich soil amendment to be used by community gardens throughout the city.

Not the Windy City. Mark doing volunteer work on a farm in Laos.
Allison Kleine (BA, 2010)
Editor, *ENDANGERED: Journey to Survival*, Los Angeles, CA

Allison works as an editor of a new endangered species book, which will feature leading conservationists, passionate advocates, educators (including UW's Prof. Lisa Naughton and Prof. Cal DeWitt), and activists – each sharing an experience with a specific endangered species.

"Get on LinkedIn! Market yourself well, connect with as many people and groups as possible, and start reaching out. You will be amazed at the possibilities."
Steve Benson (BA, 2001)
Regional Sales Manager, Google
San Francisco, CA

Steve works with businesses in the Western US helping them organize and use spatial data with Google Maps.

Steve was Google Enterprise's Top Sales Executive in 2009

“Pick a career path that can grow with you over the next couple decades. Avoid things that can be done from anywhere in the world, and don't require unique or difficult to acquire skills...those roles will have a lot of competition. Look for ways to carve out a unique specialization that is useful to many organizations.”
Anne Sayers (BA, 1999)
Program Director, Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters, Madison, WI

Anne oversees WLCV’s policy and field work, serves as communications manager, and heads up the electoral programs. Anne previously worked with the State Environmental Resource Center and The Nature Conservancy.

“Internships, internships, internships! Get real-world exposure while you are still a student. It not only will give you good experience, it will show prospective employers that you are a go-getter! Also, do what you love and the jobs will follow!”
Colter Sikora (BS, 2010)
GIS Analyst, St. Charles County
@St. Louis, Missouri

After an internship with National Geographic in Washington D.C., Colter found a permanent position as a GIS Analyst. His work is focused on maintaining the county’s geographic data and helping the public and county employees with use of that data. Colter also works with fellow staff to develop a mapping application to present data in an efficient and visually-appealing manner.

“If you are looking for GIS work in particular places (ie. Illinois, St. Louis, etc.), seek out professional GIS associations focused on those places. All states and many metro areas have them and many have updated local job listings.”
Laura McCormick (BA, 1992)

Owner, XNR Productions

Madison, WI

Laura launched XNR in 1995 built the company into the full-service cartography shop it is today. She is grateful for the opportunity to work with some of the most talented cartographers in the field. Laura enjoys being involved in all aspects of the business, from helping out on research and creative details to overall planning and decision-making.

“Do as many hands-on projects as you can, including ones outside of the classroom. Keep a portfolio and update it continually. Having work to show and discuss are the best things you can bring to a job interview (along with your enthusiasm!). ”
Andrew Crane (BA, 1994)

Teacher, Green Bay Southwest High School
Green Bay, WI

With a Geography degree and a teaching certificate, Andrew teaches 9th grade social studies (geography, economics, civics), sociology, and AP economics.

Andrew developed the curriculum for the Green Bay Area Public School District’s AP Human Geography course, and today (2013) he is teaching a section of AP Human Geography at Southwest for the first time.

“My experiences at Science Hall fostered a love of geography I share with young people every day, and my degree from the University of Wisconsin helped me gain employment in a fun and highly rewarding career.”
Aaron Schuck (BS, 2009)
Network Specialist/Outside Plant Engineer, TDS Telecom, Madison, WI

Aaron is helping the company to transition to an ESRI Geography Information System (GIS) for infrastructure management and also makes maps on demand. Additionally, he prices out estimates for fiber optic builds.

Aaron worked in the call center at TDS to help pay the bills while he went to school and believes that was a big help when he applied his current job after graduation.

“Try to work part-time with a company you want to work with after graduation if you can. Even if it's doing something menial. That can be the difference that gets you hired for that career job!”
Marie Peppler (BS, ‘03, MS, ‘06)
Physical Scientist & Program Developer
USGS Wisconsin Water Science Center
Middleton, WI

Marie works on projects that include sediment studies, agricultural impacts studies (edge-of-field runoff and cattle impacts on riparian bank erosion), flood mapping and hazards analysis. She also works with scientists to help display their data in an Web Mapping Application in a way the intended audience can utilize the data.

“The most important thing to creating professional opportunities is relationships. You never know where the next project or program will come from. Listening to people and making connections is critical. As a scientist it is important to develop your communications skills. Writing and speaking are paramount to communicating the research you conduct.”
Devon Piernot (BS, 2009)
GIS Coordinator, Southwestern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SWRPC), Platteville, WI

As GIS Coordinator, my primary role is to support the organization’s planning projects with print maps, interactive maps, geographic data, and design. We have a small staff, so I also conduct land use planning meetings and coordinate our marketing and outreach efforts.
Katie Lyniger (BA, 2008)
Program & Research Assistant
(Tropical Forest and Climate Initiative)
Union of Concerned Scientists,
Washington D.C.

After graduation, Katie moved to D.C. to intern with the National Geographic Society through their geography internship program. She then took a research internship at the Union of Concerned Scientists, in their Scientific Integrity program which led to her current position there. She works on national and international policies to reduce emissions from tropical deforestation.
Matt Forrest (BS, 2009)
Vice President and Designer,
Carticulate Maps, LLC., Madison, WI

Matt co-founded the company Carticulate right out of school. He works on everything from cartographic design (print maps, custom dynamic web-maps and mashups) to business operations and developing partnerships.

“Geography is important in any job whether the employer knows it or not. It's a very strong asset so make sure to showcase the breadth of your geographic knowledge at any job interview in any industry."
Genevieve Schaad (BS, 2010)
Visual Data Specialist, Google
Seattle, WA

Top Secret: I get to "examine data" for Google Maps and make use of it with their really nice software. That's about all I get to say on the matter at this time!

“Define the attributes and personal skills you will need to do your ultimate "dream job" instead of focusing on the job titles needed to get there. And have confidence in yourself!”
Larry Stice (BS, 1973)
Urban Planner, City of Kansas City
Kansas City, MO

Larry went on to get a Master’s degree in Public Administration from the University of MO. As an urban planner, he reviews proposed developments for compliance with ordinances, adopted policies and good planning practices, and make recommendations to the City Plan Commission and City Council.

“Don't be afraid to take a job that doesn't seem perfect at the time. I've worn many hats in my planning career, and it's amazing what you can grow to like, and even if you don't, it can open up roads to other things. Do not give up. It WILL happen.”
Kevin McGrath (BS, 2010)
Cartographer, U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, Washington D.C.

As a GIS/Cartography undergraduate student, Kevin gained valuable professional experience working in the UW Cartographic laboratory, part of the Geography department. He landed a job as a cartographer for the CIA right before graduation. At the CIA he works on a variety of projects that inform the President and members of Congress on security issues. This includes daily presidential briefings.
Maggie Strassman (BS, 2009)
Program Coordinator, National Geographic Student Travel Expeditions, Washington, DC

Maggie writes curriculum and activities for National Geographic's Student Summit program. She network with museums, universities, parks, non-profits, and communities to create high-caliber programming and promotes program via information sessions, web, and print material. She coordinate logistics for all programming.
Heidi Banfi (BA, ‘06, GIS Cert ‘08)
Geographic Specialist, US Census Bureau,
Chicago, IL

Heidi got her BA degree in Human Geography but returned for a GIS Certificate. She’s now in charge of all GIS mapping and analysis for the Partnership Branch of the Chicago Regional Census Center, covering IL, IN, & WI. She produces maps and support documents using cutting edge Census data for a variety of audiences to support all Census 2010 efforts.

“Having a technical skill like GIS in addition to a social science degree will make you more marketable and open more career options to you!”