

“For whatever we lose (like a you or a me) it’s always ourselves we find in the sea” — e.e. cummings

It’s time to establish a geography department

BY SETH BAUM

“Climate change can act as a threat multiplier for instability in some of the most volatile regions of the world, and it presents significant national security challenges for the United States.” So concludes the 2007 report, National Security and the Threat of Climate Change, published by the Center for Naval Analyses. As the CNA report indicates, the challenges facing humanity in the 21st century are as complex as they are severe. But is UR preparing its graduates to lead on these challenges?

Perhaps, but I believe it could be doing more. During a recent visit, I was impressed to learn of UR’s new programs on sustainability and international relations. Clearly, programs such as these are vital for training graduates to rise to humanity’s new challenges. But as the case of climate change and national security illustrates, when such programs are merged, the result can be much greater than the sum of the parts. To benefit from the great synergies that exist across disciplines, UR should establish a program capable of performing broad synthesis of human knowledge. Geography is precisely such a program.

Geography as an academic discipline can be hard to define, but it generally revolves around two themes. The first theme is space and place, emphasizing local particularities of natural and social patterns and processes at different scales. The second theme is nature-society interactions, including both how society affects nature and how nature affects society. Through these broad themes, geographers conduct research and teaching that span the natural and social sciences and often includes engineering and the humanities as well.

Why geography? As I have learned as a Ph.D. student in geography at Penn State, geography is the rarest of breeds: a truly interdisciplinary field. In a geography department, you might find an ecologist, a sociologist and a computer scientist collaborating on methods for presenting deforestation data to local communities in ways they can relate to. Or you might find a climatologist and a political scientist collaborating to study — you

guessed it — climate change and conflict. Because they share some common training and interact so often, these seemingly disparate researchers gain the basic literacy in each others’ fields necessary for smooth collaboration. Likewise, geography education routinely presents students with these diverse perspectives and emphasizes the interconnections between them.

Society needs this ability to put the pieces together if it is to handle our complex challenges.

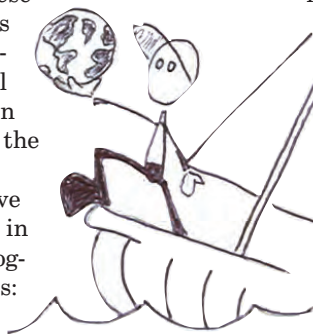
If you are unfamiliar with academic geography departments, it is likely because geography departments are uncommon in the United States. This is not the case in much of the rest of the world, where geography is often as common in universities as history or economics. But — and this is important — the U.S. does feature a modest and active geography community. The Association of American Geographers, now in its 105th year, features 10,000 members across over 200 universities and

colleges nationwide. UR could draw on this resource should it opt to open a geography department.

If UR is to launch a geography department, its timing couldn’t be better. Interest in the themes geography teaches and researches is strong and growing. Meanwhile, recent economic events leave many talented geographers searching for employment (staring down my own graduation, I am all too well aware of this). Thus, if UR can find the requisite resources, it would have an unusual opportunity to form a talented faculty.

Establishing a new department is no small undertaking. But through its programs on sustainability and international relations, UR has already demonstrated its willingness to push the University forward in order to meet major world challenges. Establishing a geography department would be another step in this most important of directions. Doing so would help position UR and its graduates as leaders on these challenges, benefiting the University and the planet alike.

Baum graduated as a member of the class of 2003.



JOSH HATCHER
STAFF ILLUSTRATOR

Mandatory 8 semesters of payment is unfair

BY REBECCA SILK

Upon entering UR as a freshman, I had a clear view of what I wanted to study. I was going to be a history and political science major and then go to law school. While my political science major has been replaced with religion, I have pretty much stayed on course. I took the requirements I needed, and I didn’t dawdle.

Now, as I reach the end of my junior year, I am finishing my requirements for my majors and have only eight credits left to fulfill my graduation credit requirements. Since the beginning of sophomore year, I carefully planned out my schedule so I would be able to graduate a semester early. Graduating a semester early would not only be a financial relief but it would also give me a mental break before graduate school.

However, the University seems to believe that it is absolutely necessary to pay for eight full semesters for students’ education. Re-

gardless of credits, if a full eight semesters have not been paid for, you cannot graduate. This is not only financially burdensome but also completely unethical.

Webster’s Dictionary defines extortion as “the offense committed by an officer who corruptly claims and takes, as his fee, money, or other thing of value, that is not due, or more than is due, or before it is due.” Paying for excessive credits seems to fall within this definition. The University is forcing on its students undue payments for requirements that have already been fulfilled. Regardless of the current economic situation, a need to fill a deficit should not be in hidden fees such as this requirement.

One of the University’s defenses of this practice is that they don’t want students rushing to complete their requirements. There are a couple of problems with this defense. First, if a student desires to graduate at a different time than initially scheduled,

that should be the student’s decision.

Second, many students take summer courses, AP classes or have other transfer credits, that were taken to enhance their education. For example, I took a summer program in Australia. This was not to rush my graduation but rather to gain a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Part of the Rochester curriculum’s philosophy is to study what you’re passionate about, to build a curriculum to fit your own unique strengths and interests. The Undergraduate Admissions Web site boasts, “Rochester is serious about academic freedom.” The requirement to pay for eight full semesters places an unnecessary burden on the student and thus contradicts one of the main philosophies the University takes such pride in.

For a school that has taken such measures to fit each student’s individual needs, this overarching policy does a disservice not only to the students but to the University

as well. If students are taken advantage of financially, it jeopardizes their faith and confidence that the University is a just and fair institution. If students cannot trust the morality of a university, it can only be damaging to one’s education.

For a University that has been so progressive in its educational philosophy, it is incredibly discouraging to discover that the bureaucratic machine seems to be placed before the welfare of the student body. If a student is treated as merely a source of income then that student will increasingly be treated purely as a number rather than as a contributing member to the community.

A progressive, constantly growing and improving institution cannot thrive on numbers and pay stubs. It must accommodate and change with their students, not against them.

Silk is a member of the class of 2010.

<p>webpoll</p> <p>What additions do you want to see on the River Campus?</p>	<p>Installing a monorail on campus from GLC to Phase.</p>	46%
	<p>Adding 10 stories to the Sage Art Building with a rotating restaurant on top.</p>	37%
	<p>Building large sun-lamps and painting buildings tie-dye colors.</p>	17%

Vote Online at
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Next week’s question:
Do you think Obama’s plan to begin negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program is a good idea?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Group networks misguided

The April 2 editorial “Group Networks” has good intentions but ultimately raises several points of concern. I think anyone can agree that all student groups can benefit from increased communication, and the idea of a Campus Club Connection events calendar would be an excellent idea. The idea of creating networks of group cooperation is good in theory, but those networks should be for communication only and should not be given control over how SA funds are allocated to the various member groups. More troubling, the editorial at times seems to be encouraging forced cooperation between student groups. It proposes a subcommittee system, suggesting, for example, that Engineers for a Sustainable World and Society of Women Engineers could be merged into two subcommittees operating under the same executive board. As any member of these clubs would know, the two groups have entirely different mission statements and sets of programming. Attempting to combine them against their

will just because they both have the word engineer in the name does nothing to benefit the University community.

Right now there is a significant amount of communication between groups, and this communication is always more productive when the relationships are not forced. When prospective students visit UR, one of the main selling points is that there are many student groups, and this allows students to find their niche on campus. There may indeed be a few isolated cases where previously healthy groups have descended into inactivity, and I believe those cases should be looked into. However, in most cases the proposed subcommittee system does more harm than good. It is extremely important for campus life that students groups be able to maintain their autonomy.

—ANDREW SPINK
Class of 2010

Correcting the record on dining
Dear Mr. Selonick,

In writing your opinion piece “An economic analysis of UR Dining Services”, in the March 26 edition of the *Campus Times*, you made a series of assumptions that are inaccurate. The University’s contract with ARAMARK provides incentives for increasing customer satisfaction scores and working to increase purchases through increasing customer traffic. Money generated by the dining program is money that can be invested in future dining renovations and improvements. The University sets standards for all food purchased, and I assure you that those high standards are being met. ARAMARK does not set employee pay rates. Dining Services employees are UR employees and are compensated at a rate that exceeds the rate for similar positions in the area. You speak of limiting students to four Clubs a day. That was the standard four years ago. Since that time we have raised that limit to six clubs per day and lowered the mandatory Club buy-in levels. All of that said, we do run out of items and need to improve on that. We also work hard

to respond to student concerns. Each year we increase the level of student involvement in our program. My dining team and I often meet with a variety of students, individually and in groups, to discuss various aspects of our program. I invite you to meet with me to discuss your concerns and to learn more about the goals and aspirations of the University’s dining program.

—CAM SCHAUF
Director of Campus Dining Services and Auxiliary Operations

Campus Times Blogs

An excerpt from “Call to Question.”
“APATHY IS RAMPANT: WHAT WILL YOU DO?”
Weissmann: Monthly SA activity e-mails and Fireside Chats. Students will be informed if it kills them!”
<http://blogs.campustimes.org>