



2026

TERRA FIRMA

Dear alums,

Greetings from Ely Hall! We hope this note finds you and your families happy and healthy. It's been three years since our last edition of Terra Firma, and a lot has happened in the department in that time. Jeff Walker retired at the end of the 2023-2024 academic year, Brian Godfrey is retiring this year, and both Jill Schneiderman and Joe Nevins are starting phased retirement next year. Our departmental assistant and glue who holds everything together, Lenore Hart, is also retiring at the end of this year. Together, they have served the department and the College for 62 years, and it's hard to imagine how things can go on without them! At the other end of the career ladder, we've recently been joined by new faculty member John Zayac, a volcanologist who replaced Jeff on the tenure track after several years as a visiting instructor and adjunct. Next fall, we welcome John Stehlin (Vassar alum of the class of 2004), an urban geographer, who replaces Brian Godfrey. We have also been very happy to have John Elrick as a visiting assistant professor of Geography and Michelle Tebolt as a visiting assistant professor of Earth Science for the last couple of years. It's wonderful to have so much youthful energy in the department even as the changing of the guard is very bittersweet.

The addition of new faculty over the past six years has brought a lot of vibrant research to the department, and students have worked on projects related to volcanic eruption hazards and ocean alkalinity enhancement with our new scanning electron microscope as well as greenhouse gas inventories for local municipalities. Our department continues to supply about half of the courses taken in the Environmental Studies program and sends students on to exceptional graduate programs and careers, of which we are quite proud. In the summer of 2027, the College will be carrying out significant renovations to our Earth Science teaching lab, Ely 204, so that we can continue to provide state of the art educational experiences for future generations of students.

Below, you will find notes about what individual faculty members have been doing the past three years as well as updates from your fellow alums. We hope that you will come back and visit as we love seeing you and hearing about what you are up to. We miss you and want you to know that Ely's doors are always open to you!

Warmly,

Kirsten Menking

Field Trips

In addition to local forays in the Hudson Valley and New York City, Earth Science and Geography students traveled the globe over the past three years to learn about renewable energy, plastic pollution, invasive species impacts, sustainable agriculture, and carbon sequestration, among other topics. Nothing beats learning in the field, and we are grateful to our alums, whose donations have made these travels possible! Local trips: 2024, 2025, and 2026 – Brian Godfrey led Geography seminars on urban renewal to Main Street in Poughkeepsie, the renovated “Old Underwear Factory,” and to the Museum of the City of New York for two intensive classes on recent literature on non-fiction NYC and criteria for Landscape Preservation. Yu Zhou and Joe Nevins also led trips to Poughkeepsie and Beacon for Global Geography.

Iceland - 2023 - Laura Haynes and co-instructor Elizabeth Lastra from the art department brought 8 Earth Science and Art History students (including one who majored in both!) to Iceland over fall break. Their goal was to investigate the history of mysterious human-made caves that dot the southern coastline of the island. The origin of these caves is hotly debated. The accepted history of Iceland states that Vikings first settled the island in the 9th century, and many argue they must have carved the caves. However, some posit that these caves and other lines of evidence suggest earlier settlement by Irish monks. In the class they explored how methods from both disciplines, such as lake coring and advanced 3D imaging, could help us piece together this hidden history. Along the way, they learned about volcanism, glaciation, and modern sedimentary processes.



Clockwise from upper left:

One of the cave entrances, conducting photogrammetry in the caves, enjoying the view after collecting sediments.



Iceland - 2024 - Kirsten Menking and co-instructor Alison Keimowitz from the chemistry department took 16 students on a two week excursion to Iceland in late May and early June of 2024. There, they studied volcanism and volcanic rocks, glaciers and glacial outburst floods, geysers and other geothermal features, the impact of sea birds and invasive plants on soil chemistry, ecological succession on a suite of glacial moraines, Iceland's geothermally-heated greenhouse agriculture and hydropowered aluminum smelting industries, and the country's CarbFix plant, where carbon dioxide is sequestered in deep boreholes previously used for geothermal heat extraction. It was an amazing trip that was capped off by a volcanic eruption that began just as the group was headed to the airport to return home to New York!



*Left: Suited up with ice axes and crampons to explore a moulin on the Falljökull glacier.
Right: Processing soil samples for nutrient assays at the Skalanes field station.*



Planting native birches to combat soil erosion and offset the group's carbon emissions.



Above, left: Visiting the Friðheimar geothermal greenhouse where Iceland grows a large portion of its tomatoes.

Above, right: Inside the CarbFix carbon sequestration facility at the Hellisheiði geothermal power plant.

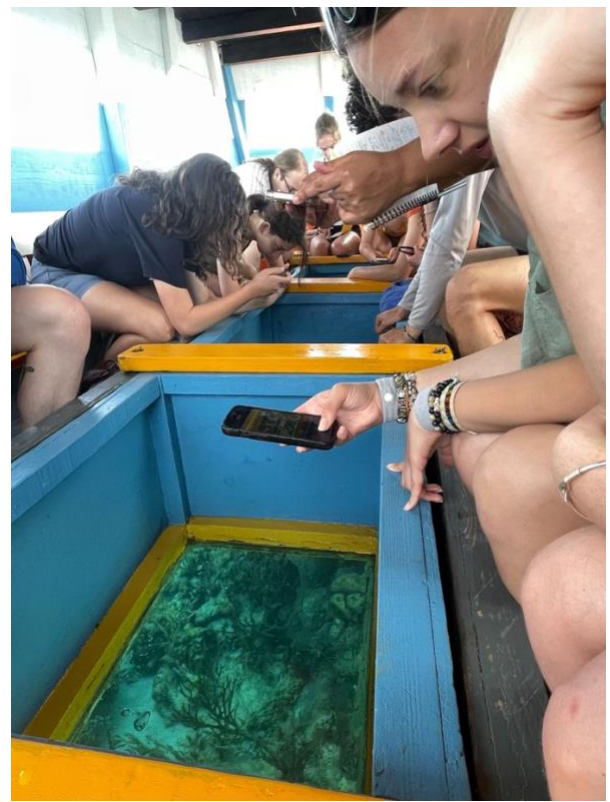
Below: The whole group at the SkalanesField Station.



Trinidad and Tobago - 2025 - Deon Knights and Jill Schneiderman took 14 students on a 10-day study trip to the Caribbean twin-island nation of Trinidad and Tobago during spring study break 2025. The course, ESCI 321 (Environmental Geology of Trinidad and Tobago), was generously funded by the Dean of the Faculty office, the Environmental Studies Program, and the Department of Earth Science and Geography.

What made this trip distinctive was its explicit grounding in the framework of anti-parachute science. Parachute science is the practice by which foreign researchers swoop into a country, sideline local scientists and collaborators, collect data, and publish without giving proper credit to those with on-the-ground expertise, and was a central object of critical study and something the instructors actively worked to avoid. The group partnered with Drs. Stanton Belford, a biologist at the University of Tennessee Southern, Shivonne Peters, a marine scientist at the University of Trinidad and Tobago, and Xavier Moonan, a geologist at Touchstone Energy, as local collaborators.

Students conducted original field research during the trip. Topics included coral reef ecology, macroplastics audits, and environmental data collection at sites that included Toco (on Trinidad's rugged northeastern coast) and the Bucco Reef in Tobago. Back on campus, students synthesized their field data in working groups, wrote individual scientific reports, and collaboratively produced a public blog about the trip hosted on Vassar's WordPress platform.



Above, left: Julia Hale and Robin Auwaerter conduct a micro-plastic audit on a Mayaro beach in Southern Trinidad. Above, right: Coral observation at Bucco Reef, Tobago.

It was an ambitious and intellectually rich trip and one that combined rigorous fieldwork in a beautiful and ecologically complex place with a commitment to doing science collaboratively, ethically, and in genuine partnership with local researchers and communities. For more information see the class blog at <https://pages.vassar.edu/trinidad-fieldtrip25/>



Above, Left: Collaborating on a biodiversity survey at Taco Reef with students from the University of Trinidad and Tobago. Above, Right: Class members at a natural gas processing site in southern Trinidad.

Below, Left: Examining stratification in relation to natural gas production with Trinidadian field geologist Xavier Moonan. Below, Right: Tour of Trinidad's Pitch Lake in La Brea, an enormous deposit of asphalt.



China - 2024 - In March 2004, Yu Zhou led a group of 15 students in her Environmental China class and 6 faculty members on an Environmental Studies-sponsored trip along the middle reaches of the Yangtze River in China. The purpose was to learn about different dimensions of human/environmental interactions in China. They visited Wuhan, the Three Gorges Dam area, Enshi Grand Canyon, Chongqing, and returned through Beijing. Along the way, they stopped in many small river towns and mountain villages. During the trip, students and faculty observed and discussed China's multi-cropping agricultural systems and massive infrastructure from the Three Gorges Dam — the largest hydroelectric dam in the world — to highways and the high speed rail system. The group encountered several ethnic minority cultures and played games with local residents in public spaces, all in addition to visiting historical sites and attending lectures on topics ranging from agriculture to urban planning. In many places, they were among the first foreign visitors people had seen since COVID. People were excited to see them, and they were equally excited to experience parts of China that few foreigners visit.



*On the banks of the Yangtze River:
Left in Wuhan, Below at the Three
Gorges dam.*

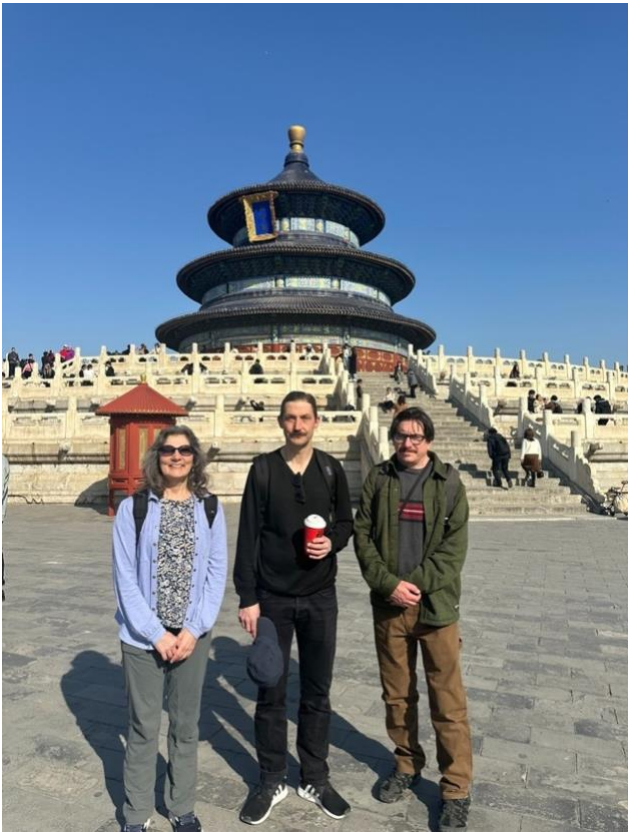




Above: The left is an ethnic village in the Minor Three Gorges area. The right is at a tea house in a Dong ethnic minority village with two kids. China is undergoing rapid change, and even Yu Zhou was stunned by how much the rural areas along the Yangtze had transformed in just a few years. In 2003, she took a Vassar group to the Three Gorges region right before the Dam was completed. At the time, the area was deeply impoverished, and young children begged the group for money. This time, they passed beautifully designed cliffside restaurants that felt elegant and Zen-like, while river towns glowed at night with waterfront parks and lights.



Both of these images are taken at Enshi Grand Canyon, at right is the famous 'Candlestick.'



Left: The Temple of Heaven, Beijing. This is the place where the Chinese emperors pray annually for good harvests. The Chinese concept of Heaven represents the ultimate moral code for the rulers. This building embodies the Mandate of Heaven, which is the most enduring political principle in Chinese civilization. It hold rulers responsible to maintain the balance between humans and the environment.

Denmark and Sweden - 2026 - Mary Ann Cunningham, Renewable Energy in Scandinavia

Our goal was to see a complete ecosystem of sustainability-oriented planning and implementation in two countries with leading innovations and long experience. We visited Copenhagen, Gothenburg, Lund, and Malmo, including tours of the Middelgrunden wind cooperative (below right), and observed sustainable housing districts, electric ferries, public transit, district heating, and many, many bicycles.

Left: Visiting Copenhill (District heat incinerator)

Right: Up-close tour of offshore wind turbines



Class project: Can you count the bicycles at the Norreport Station in Copenhagen?



Freiburg and Munich, Germany - 2024 - Mary Ann Cunningham, Renewable Energy in Germany. Co-taught with Jenny Magnes (Physics and Environmental Studies); students on this trip studied sustainable and renewably-powered housing, transport, and planning. Freiburg has been called Europe's green capital, and Munich is developing the world's largest geothermal city heating system. Students also got first-hand experience with cooperative living and cooking in German hostels.



Learning about cooperative wind power and sustainable housing (in Vauban), Freiburg.



Around the Hudson Valley

Above, left: The Stone Church at Dover, NY.

Above, right: A calcium encrusted valve at the Poughkeepsie Water Treatment Plant.

Left: A Visit to the Poughkeepsie Sewage Treatment Plant.



Above: Brian Godfrey and his class walking the streets of Newburgh, NY.
Below: Jill Schneiderman with her Earth Science 151 class at the frosty shore of Lake Minnewaska.



Theses

Students in both Geography and Earth Science wrote theses on a vast array of topics, befitting a department that spans the natural science and social science divisions.

2024

Chiara Castaneda - Does the Sun Only Shine for Homeowners? Unveiling underserved groups in New York City's solar energy transition. How can promoting fair and inclusive access to solar energy benefits alleviate symptoms of income inequality?

Zarina Guefack - Does every step count? Soil weathering edition, Vassar College

Claire McHarg - Delight in the World: Reimagining Earth Science Education in New York State

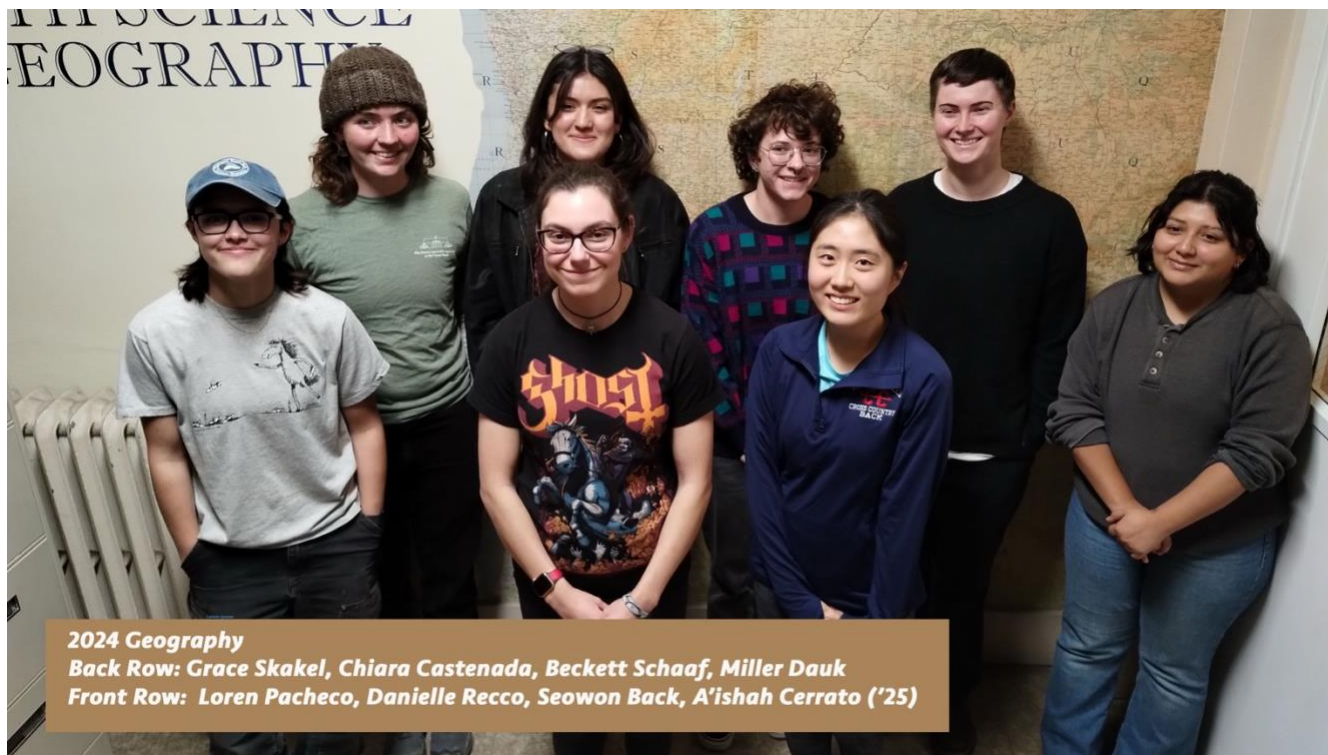
Loren Pacheco - The Dirt on Invasive Plants: Erosion, Extractivist Fixes, and the U.S. Soil Conservation Service

Abigail Smith - A day at the beach in Cumberland, Kentucky: The influence of tidal channel deposition on the geology of the Warix Run Member of the Slade Formation

Monika Sweeney - Navigating Minds: Exploring the Spatial Thinking Abilities of College Students

Yidan Xu 徐一丹 - Caves of Hella: Visual and Environmental Clues for the Early Medieval Christian Settlement in Southern Iceland





2025

A'ishah Cerrato - Who Deserves a Burial: Remembering the Dutchess and Putnam County Poorhouses' Paupers

Julia Colon - The Illusion of Choice: Segregated Landscapes, School Vouchers, and the Neoliberal Assault on Public Education in Milwaukee

Julia Hale - Analysis of Crystal and Vesicle Textures to Investigate Eruption Triggers at Volcán Cosigüina, Nicaragua

Anna Kaigle - Agency in Active Transportation Advocacy Work Successes and limitations of community-oriented approaches to improving networks of biking, walking, and rolling in Vermont.

Elinor Kops - Investigating the Effects of Cascades and Seasonality on Nitrogen Solute Cycling in Beaver Dams on the Vassar College Ecological Preserve

Keila Mercedes - It involves all of us: Anti-Haitian xenophobia and the militarization of the Dominican-Haitian Border

Ava Monello - Using the Geochemistry of Late Pleistocene-Early Holocene Tephra from a Marine Sediment Core to Interpret Magmatic Processes in the Katla Volcanic System

Alex Murphy - Exploratory Imaging and Analysis of Vassar's Meteorites

Ezra Potts - Optimization of Fluorescent Confocal Microscopy for use in Understanding Foraminiferal Shell Calcification

Carl Webster - Selling Sun, Sand, and Stories: Heritage and Twenty-first Century Urban Development in Kingston, Jamaica

Kira Wheeler - Estimating Magma Storage Conditions from Vesicularity: A Quantitative Modeling Approach



Geography 2025: Back row: Keila Mercedes Ferrara, Jerry Simons, Sebastian DiPirro, Louisa Baldwin, Julia Colon, Becca Weinstein, Carl Webster.
Front Row: Wyatt Kern, Ellie Sheik, Anna Kaigle

Earth Science 2025: Julia Hale, Sophia Henderson, Elinor Kops, Sebastian Montanez, Alex Murphy, Dorie Polish, Ezra Potts, Narra Pucci, Kira Wheeler, Katherine Wu

2026

Jordan Alch - Oh Dam! Examining the Effects of Manmade and Beaver Dams on Nutrient Processing Rates in the Hudson Valley.

Robin Auwaerter - Textural Evidence of Pre-Eruptive Magmatic Processes at Volcán Cosigüina, Northwestern Nicaragua.

Sitota Blomquist - Complicating the “Crisis”: The Historical Production and Contestations of Anglophone Space in Cameroon circa 1800 - 2026.

Louisa Braun - Made in the Museum: The Production of Indigeneity, Place, and Identity in Vermont.

Hunter Harris - Observing the Impacts of Storms on the Hudson River’s Morphology Using Structure From Motion with UAV Imagery.

Olivia Kahn - Pre-Eruptive Magma Storage Conditions of Malpaisillo Formation Rhyolites Investigated Using Thermodynamic Modeling.

Kathleen Langston - From the Lab Perspective: The Effects of Alkalinity Enhancing Minerals on Calcareous Coastal Benthic Foraminifera.

Iris Li - Tephrostratigraphic Reassessment of the Malpaisillo Formation in NW Nicaragua.

Henry Mueller - Building a Perilous Paradise: The 1920's Formation of the Pacific Palisades, California.

Chris Nelson-Pyne - Reviving the Public Realm Amid Neoliberalism's legacy: Public Housing Redevelopment at the West Park Apartments.

Arlo Rucker - How Will Foraminiferal Calcification Respond to Ocean Alkalinity Enhancement? A Modelling Based Approach.

Sofia Slavonia - Impacts of Olivine-Based Ocean Alkalinity Enhancement on Intertidal Benthic Foraminifera: Assemblage Shifts, Morphological Change, and Growth Responses in a Microcosm Setting.

Bridget Villamarin - Seeking Asylum in a "Spaceless" City: The Randall's Island HERRC Controversy, 2023-2025.

Harrison Walker - Decrypting the Depths: Analyzing the Morphology of Silica Gel Fluid Films Surrounding Diamond Inclusions with Raman Spectroscopy.





Students inducted into Sigma Xi, the undergraduate research society, in 2026.

From left to right:

Dr. Laura Haynes, Harrison Walker, Jordan Alch, Iris Li, Arlo Rucker, and Robin Auwaerter.

Faculty and Staff



Susan also got to cycle in Girona for the first time, and absolutely loved it!

Susan Blickstein has taught several well received classes in Social Movements and in Environment and Urban Planning in the past 3 years. Her urban planning courses have focused on projects in Poughkeepsie, including re-envisioning the Dutchess Plaza and Dutchess Turnpike and redesigning Raymond Avenue for users of all ages and abilities. She has recently retired from her professional planning practice, where she worked primarily on complete streets (policy, research and redesign projects), trail studies (including the recent work by the Open Space Institute on the O & W trail), and on affordable housing.

She especially enjoys hearing from past students who have gone on to advanced degrees in planning and who are working in the field.



Mary Ann Cunningham (shown here with last month's "Hug a Tree" photo contest entry, in the flowering apple orchard above Sunset Lake) continues to enjoy teaching GIS and mapping, and lately, in response to student climate anxiety, she has been teaching regularly about renewable energy and climate solutions. This means projects and field trips in New York, as well as farther afield. She has published a couple of recent papers on solar and greenhouse gas cost accounting, and she has several others in the works. She continues to update her Environmental Science textbooks, which give an opportunity to learn more about climate strategies and environmental issues. She has enjoyed returning to the college Climate Action and Sustainability Committee, as well as serving on the county climate task force. Leading projects coming up include finishing up some of those papers, exploring some new data sets for next year's classes, watching birds, and some fun time in the other Ely (in Minnesota).

Neil Curri (pictured with another volunteer and bags of invasive water chestnut pulled from Chodikee Lake in Lloyd) completed his third year as Vassar's full-time Academic Computing Consultant for GIS, transitioning from a part time contractual role in 2023. Alongside alternating teaching duties with Prof. Mary Ann Cunningham, for Spatial Analysis and Cartography and Data Visualization, his full-time status allows him to provide more robust support for workshops, advanced courses, thesis projects and internships.



One of Neil's recent efforts is expanding Vassar's drone and remote sensing capabilities. In Spring 2025, he secured funds to acquire a new drone with an upgraded camera and GNSS receiver. Neil coordinated with Professor Michelle Tebolt to plan and execute a drone flight over the Shawangunk Ridge for her Spring 2026 course, Remote Sensing of Planetary Bodies. He then supported students through processing the imagery on Vassar's "Hopper" high-performance computing cluster to create orthomosaic maps and 3D visualizations. Additionally, he supported student Hunter Harris ('26) in utilizing this new drone for her Hudson River shoreline thesis project.

In Fall 2026, Neil is partnering with Professor Deon Knights to acquire another drone equipped with thermal sensing capabilities for a new research-oriented Community Engaged Learning course. In coordination with the Town of Lloyd Environmental Conservation Council and a parallel water quality study in the Black Creek, students will analyze the thermal imagery to detect groundwater infiltration zones in this local Hudson River tributary.

John Elrick completed his fourth year as a visiting assistant professor in the Geography Department. He taught a full load of geography and urban studies courses this past year, including popular ones on planning history, cultural landscapes, housing justice, water and cities and the politics of technology. He especially enjoyed serving as an advisor for several stellar student thesis projects. John also served on the urban Studies Program's Steering Committee, Vassar's Campus Investor Responsibility Committee, and the Town of Poughkeepsie's Committee on Affordable Housing. In addition to working on his book about the politics of planning in San Francisco, John published papers on the civic role of interactive museums, and the financialization of planning.



Lenore Hart- After 24 years at Vassar, I decided to retire June 25, 2026. I worked in the Registrar's Office for 16 years, before I became the Earth Science and Geography Office Specialist. I have really enjoyed working in the Earth Science and Geography department the last 8 years... it is hard to leave. The faculty and staff in the department are great. I have felt appreciated since I walked into Ely Hall. I will miss every single one of you. I have enjoyed working with so many different students over the past 8 years, and it was really great to know many of you. Now it's time for me to do the things in life that I want to do.

Brian Godfrey- After forty years of teaching, Brian has officially become a Professor Emeritus and been inducted into the Associated Emeritae/i of Vassar College (AEVC). In recent years, he has directed the Urban Studies program while teaching there and in Geography. His courses have included seminars in historic presentation and memory, urban renewal, and gentrification. In addition, he has enjoyed leading intensive research courses in the mid-Hudson Valley, Poughkeepsie, and New York City. Most recently, he focused on the debates over designating landmarks and historic districts in the city.

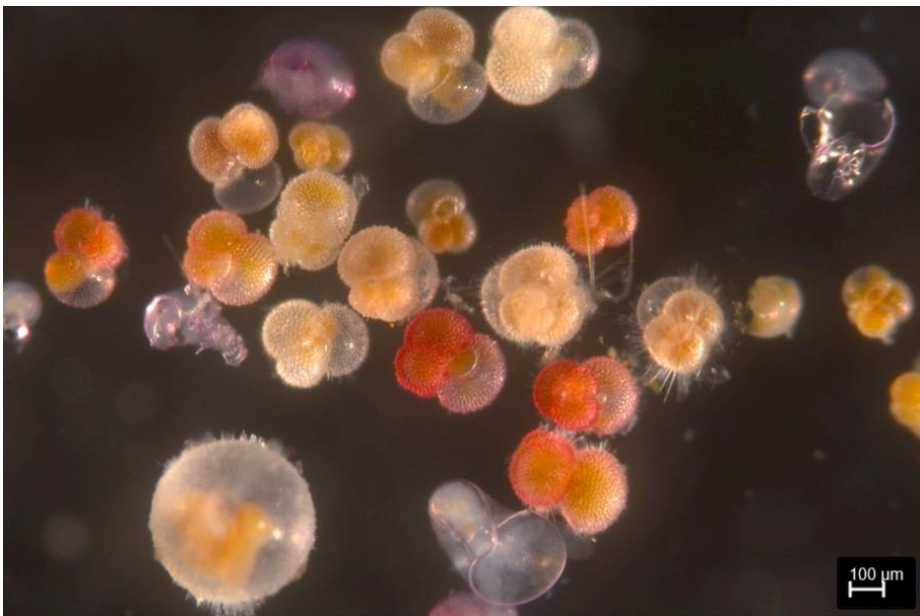


Above: Brian's colleagues, Mary Ann Cunningham, Joe Nevins and Yu Zhou.

Left: Yu Zhou presenting Brian with some gifts at his East Coast or West Coast? celebration in the Aula.



President Bradley and Dean Eudell hosted a retirement dinner for Brian, his colleagues in Geography, family and friends. A personal highlight of his experience at Vassar! Back Row: President Bradley, Dean Eudell, Joe Nevins, Yu Zhou, Mary Ann Cunningham and Marie Price. Front row: Maureen Hays-Mitchell, Susan Dunat Musgrave, BG, David Godfrey, Donna Godfrey and Stefan Murphy.



Beautiful Foraminifera!

Laura Haynes' last three years in the department have been a true delight, and she has enjoyed the time with students, colleagues, and family. Now in her sixth year in the department, she teaches the introductory Fluid Earth: Oceans and Atmospheres course, Biogeochemistry, Mass Extinctions, and has piloted a new course about Ocean-Based Climate solutions, primarily

focused on Carbon Dioxide Removal methods, or CDR. Her teaching and research are increasingly focused in this field, which is rapidly expanding due to commercial investment in CDR technologies. CDR aims to boost the planet's natural carbon storage capacity, directly removing CO₂ from the atmosphere. Laura is interested in all aspects of this field, including the questions: are these methodologies actually safe and effective? What would happen to marine organisms and the carbon cycle if they were deployed? Who will decide if they are implemented on a large scale? And, how can we ensure they are implemented in a way that benefits society?

To address the safety and efficacy side of the story, Laura received a grant in 2023 from NOAA to investigate how CDR methods would impact the calcification of foraminifera- tiny shell building organisms that greatly affect the ocean's carbon budget. Last summer she traveled with 4 Vassar students and colleagues from Oregon State University to the Bermuda Institute of Ocean Sciences for four weeks to grow foraminifera in the laboratory. She'll return with students this summer for a 6-week field season. She's been fortunate to be able to bring her family along on these excursions and hopes her son Gus, who joined the department (and the world) in 2024, will remember some of it! Next semester Laura is teaching Earth History, and she is excited to return to her paleo roots and also teach the class that turned her into a Geology major.



From Left, Jenn Fehrenbacher (OSU), Laura Haynes, baby Gus, Emmaline Miller (OSU), Arlo Rucker '26, Sean Baxter (OSU), Austin Shinzato (OSU), Kathleen Langston ('26), Acadia Helfand ('27), and Maddie Reed-Horn ('28).



Left: Arlo Rucker, '26, helping to take a plankton tow.

Deon Knights is part of the Environmental Studies Program as well as Earth Science and Geography. Over the past three years, he has taught in both the Program and the Department, including courses such as Essentials of Environmental Science, Global Change and Sustainability, Resource Extraction, and Water. He has also taught two ESCI intensives: GIS in Environmental Justice, and Environmental Geology. The latter included a trip to Trinidad and Tobago and was a wonderful experience, as Deon got to co-teach and work closely with Jill Schneiderman, who was the perfect colleague and mentor. The students had a productive time practicing science in the field while working with local scholars.

On the research front, Deon is wrapping up a project looking at how beaver impoundments impact water quality on the Casperkill Creek and another analysing the sensitivity of satellites in predicting flow through deltas. Over the past three years, Deon has welcomed two new babies into his family, both boys, and is looking forward to getting back to teaching this fall.





Rick Jones has been applying himself both on and off campus for the last three years. At Vassar, aside from managing the needs of the Earth Science and Geography Department, the Natural History Museum, and the Vassar College Artifacts Project, he has continued work at presenting Light Show collaborations with various groups and events, such as ModFest. In November the Vassar Light Collective collaborated with the Women's Treble Choir, and in April we created a Magic Lantern Slide Show to accompany the same choir, using hundreds of obsolete, but beautiful, glass slides from all over campus. From July 2024 to July 2025, he took a year leave to go teach in Denmark with his partner, Jodi Schwarz of the Biology Department. He taught Science Illustration, and a class entitled Art, Place and Mindful Practice. Every class, the students were out in the streets of Copenhagen, incorporating philosophy, observation, literature and art in a semester-long journaling project. Side trips for work included Berlin, Poznan, Rome and Dublin. It was a fantastic year of no car, no yard work, and SO many political conversations.

Kirsten Menking has had a busy past three years since the last edition of Terra Firma came out. She served as the Environmental Studies program director in 2023-2024, before handing over that responsibility to become chair of Earth Science and Geography in fall of 2024. She also continued her service as the vice-chair, chair, and now past-chair of the Geological Society of America's Limnogeology Division, which made her eligible to be elected a Fellow of that society in 2025 and which allowed her to work with alum Jeremiah Bernau (2013), who was elected the Secretary of the Division. In the classroom, she has continued to enjoy teaching her Modeling the Earth, Paleoclimatology, Structural Geology, Essentials of Environmental Science, and Solid Earth courses and enjoyed a terrific collaboration with Geographer John Elrick on Water and Cities that is the most cross-listed course at Vassar with 5 different program sponsorships! In the spring of 2024, she got to return to Iceland with co-instructor Alison Keimowitz from the chemistry department. They were joined by an absolutely outstanding group of students and had a perfect trip that was capped off by a volcanic eruption that started as they were on the way to the airport for their flight back to the Hudson Valley. It was a truly awesome sight to behold from a safe distance of about 5 kilometers and led to the students jumping up and down and running around in circles in excitement!

On the research front, Kirsten brought to completion a study of pollen, plant microfossils, diatoms, and sediment chemistry from two lakes on the Rensselaer Plateau of eastern New York that involved former student authors Ray Cagnetta, Savannah Cutler, Brendon Owczarek, and Lillian Tipton. The project was started before the Covid pandemic and the loss of Kirsten's partner, Roger Anderson, and it was nice to finally wrap it up with publications in the *Journal of Paleolimnology* and *Quaternary Research*. Kirsten's upcoming projects include trying to finish Roger's final paper that he was working on at the time of his death and returning to research in New Mexico's Estancia Basin that has been on hold while the New York work has taken priority.



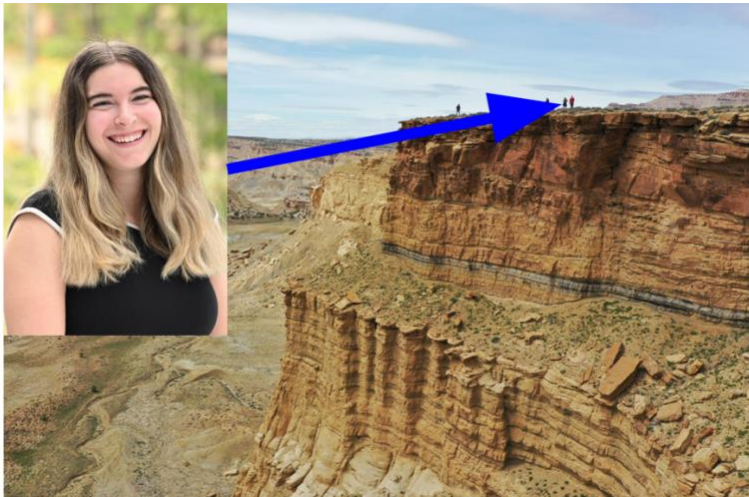
Joe Nevins struggles to recall what he has done over the last three years; it has been a blur of sorts. He still teaches courses such as “Geographies of Mass Violence” and “US-Mexico Border: Capital, Nation-State, and Nature,” in addition to the introductory course (“Global Geography”) and the senior seminar. In 2025-2026, his final full-time year before beginning phased retirement, he had the pleasure of working with a fabulous group of seniors on their thesis projects via the writing workshop. On the research and writing front, his work has focused on the United Fruit Company and other matters tied to Boston, as well as issues related to the US-Mexico border. Beyond Vassar, he continues to help coordinate the [Flying Less](#) initiative and [Livable Tarrytowns](#).



Jill Schneiderman finds it hard to believe that she joined the Vassar faculty 32 years ago. Like Joe Nevins, 2025-2026 was Jill's final full-time year as a faculty member. She will begin phased retirement in fall 2026. She contemplated that prospect for at least a year or two before making the decision because teaching in our department has been and continues to be a source of inspiration, hope, creativity, and gratification. The satisfaction of co-teaching a field trip course to Trinidad and Tobago in spring 2025 with her colleague Deon Knights made that decision more difficult!

Nonetheless, she will have the great pleasure of teaching her two favorite courses for the rest of her duration at VC— “The Solid Earth”, and “Feminism, Science, and Technology, a course offered in the programs of Science, Technology and Society and Women's, Feminist and Queer Studies.

A major development in both courses has been her incorporation of 3-minute [guided meditations \(UCLA Semel Institute\)](#) to begin each class session as she sees that the practice helps focus the attention of teacher and students alike so that they can be truly present for the precious time they share in the class and field. She has also shifted the focus of “The Solid Earth” from confronting bad news about the state of Earth and the injustices that play out when humans live carelessly on the planet to helping students see the grandeur of Earth’s processes and resulting formations along with Earth’s resilience over a vast time scale. She thrills at the calming sense of humility and feelings of awe that the students seem to develop as a result of this approach over the course of the semester. Finally, she has watched with joy and admiration over the last three years as her newer colleagues bring their stupendous intelligence, vision, dedication and capabilities to our department. She feels grateful that they seem to be happy to have her hang around a bit longer!



Michelle Tebolt joined as a visiting professor in fall 2024 after receiving her PhD in Geosciences from the Jackson School of Geosciences at UT Austin. She will continue to work with the department for the upcoming 2026-2027 academic year. Michelle’s research focuses on sedimentology and stratigraphy of planetary surfaces with an emphasis on sedimentary fans such as deltas and alluvial fans.

She’s a planetary scientist with a special interest in Mars, and some career highlights have included working and publishing with Mars 2020 Perseverance rover team at NASA from 2022-2025 as well as using drones as a remote-pilot-in-command to create 3D models of field sites in the Bookcliff Mountains of Utah.

Since joining Vassar, Michelle has taught Sedimentology, Geomorphology, Earth History, and Solid Earth as well as two upper level seminar-style intensive classes. The first, Planetary Geology, has a major focus on discussing academic papers, learning how NASA missions are proposed and selected, and developing science communication techniques. The second, Remote Sensing of Terrestrial Bodies, focuses on the methodologies planetary scientists use to collect and analyze data with an emphasis on figure making. She is currently working with Vassar student Hunter Harris '26 to perform drone flights along the Hudson River in order to study how major storms impact local bank erosion. She is also collaborating with Neil Curri to continue to improve the department’s drone capabilities and was awarded the Putnam Summer Fellowship and Fergusson Award in 2025 to develop this technology for use in the classroom.

Yu Zhou I had a wonderful three years at Vassar and abroad. I had a great study trip in 2024 with 15 students and faculty to China (fieldtrip section) which is the last trip funded by Luce Grant. In the year 2024-spring 25, I took a one-year leave. During that time, I worked on a textbook on Environmental China with my co-author Alana Boland at the University of Toronto, and we received a contract from Taylor & Francis. In Spring 2025, I also received a scholarship from Taiwan’s National Science Council to spend a semester at National Taiwan University. I taught a seminar on capitalism and truly enjoyed the experience. The students were lovely, hardworking, and sincere. I also learned a great deal from them about how they think about China–Taiwan relations and political activism. It was also wonderful to teach in my native language — something I had never experienced before.



At the same time, watching the United States from afar during the first months of Trump's return to office felt deeply disorienting. During the semester, I also took advantage of Taiwan's location to visit Vietnam, Cambodia, Palau and mainland China several times.

I was glad to return home to the United States in the summer and finally feel settled again teaching in a Vassar classroom. In January 2026, I made a brief visit to Jordan and met my daughter, who flew in from London. We had originally planned the trip several years earlier but had to cancel because of the war between Israel and Hamas. Visiting Jordan gave me a glimpse of what a peaceful Middle east could look like. Unfortunately, only a few months later, the middle east fell into war again.

I am glad Vassar remains a wonderful and serene place to be in a world of turmoil. I hope to see more alumni visiting us. Geography has hired a new tenure track professor John Stehlin, who we are delighted to have join us as a member of the department.



John Zayac has kept busy over the last three years. During that time, he defended his PhD dissertation focused on volcanism in northwestern Nicaragua at the City University of New York Graduate Center and transitioned from a visiting to a tenure-track position here in the department. John is a volcanologist who is interested in the eruptive history of explosive volcanic systems, deciphering the architecture of their magma plumbing, and documenting the physiochemical processes that immediately precede eruption initiation. This work involves working on scales ranging from the nanometer to the kilometer scale, and the application of field, laboratory, and computational methods. This past year was spent expanding the Rock Analysis lab in Ely Hall to include new instrumentation, with the installation of a gas pycnometer to study the vesicularity of pumice and scoria and an infrared microscope to allow us to study the amount of water and carbon dioxide dissolved in silicate glasses. This summer, John is starting a new project investigating the magmatic processes that have led to the eruption of compositionally zoned magma at Newberry Volcano, Oregon with the help of a couple URSI students.

Vassar students who collaborate with John can frequently be found in the labs on the second floor of Ely Hall. In addition, the classes that John teaches at Vassar are mainly those that ask students to think about the planet beneath their feet. Since joining the faculty in the spring of 2020, John has taught Field Geology of the Hudson Valley, Geohazards, a first year writing seminar about Volcanoes and Civilization, Earth History, Sedimentology, Global Geophysics and Tectonics, and Volcanology. John has also taken the helm of Earth Materials, our combined mineralogy and petrology course required of all ESCI majors. This coming fall, students in the volcanology seminar will have the opportunity to travel to central Oregon over October break to explore active volcanic systems and to collect field data and samples for their term project. Thank you for the welcome over the past several years to colleagues, alums, and family. I look forward to updating y'all in the next Terra Firma!

Emeriti News!



Jeff Walker – Since retiring in Summer 2024, I have been doing long overdue maintenance work on our farm (still more to do) and helping Kathy train for the different ultramarathons she does each year. We are playing lots of music together, watching Met Opera broadcasts, and reading books to each other. We did a lot of skiing this past winter bot around our property (almost 2 full months of skiable snow in January and February), and at the Viking Nordic Center in Vermont where our daughter Rachel was a manager. This Spring, we are working on a large pile of compost, pruning our blueberries, and getting ready to put in new strawberry plants. All in all, we keep busy and that keeps us happy.

Harvey Flad

My years since retiring and my life as an emeritus professor of geography in 2004 have been quite busy professionally. Most recently, this year 2026 I have published the second edition of *Main Street and Mainframes: Landscape and Social Change in Poughkeepsie*, whose first edition was co-authored with professor of history Clyde Griffen (SUNY Press, 2009). This was followed by a video version of a tour of the city “[A Digital Tour of Poughkeepsie](#)” in 2006 and 2010 for Vassar College’s Urban Studies Program and available on YouTube. Poughkeepsie continues to be my residence and sense of place. I have served as a 30-plus year member of the city’s Waterfront Advisory Committee (WAC), creating the city’s Local Waterfront Development Program, and as an historian for the city’s Natural Resource Inventory. As an environmental consultant I have worked with various community organizations as an expert witness on visual impact assessment in DEIS review proceedings in 2015, 2021 and 2023, which have established “community character” as a significant review under NYS SEQRA. The Hudson valley’s historical and cultural landscape has remained my primary focus; for example, as senior curator at the New York Historical Society’s exhibit “Hudson Rising” in 2019. Meanwhile, I have published articles on landscape design history in *The Hudson River Valley Review* in 2022, and on the roles of Andrew Jackson Downing and Calvert Vaux in designing Matthew Vassar’s estate in the film *Beautiful & Picturesque: Andrew Jackson Downing and the Springside Landscape*” in 2024. For information on Poughkeepsie over the years 2005-20026, see the second edition of *Main Street to Mainframes: Landscape and Social Change in Poughkeepsie* on my WordPress account harvey.flad@wordpress.com.

My wife and I have moved from our big old Victorian in the Academy Street historic district to an apartment complex on the city's waterfront just north of the Walkway Over the Hudson. The views are wonderful and the walking trail along the river towards the Vassar, Marist and rowing club is enjoyable. Mary continues to create and exhibit her woven tapestries, while I remain busy with historical, cultural and environmental affairs in Poughkeepsie and the Hudson Valley region.



Hudson River on an October Morning

Alumni notes:

1960s

Laurel Bybell '67 Geology - I've been retired from the USGS for 18 years, but I'm still serving as a Scientist Emeritus. I'm not doing much research, but I'm still reviewing paleontology papers, editing international scientific meetings abstract volumes (International Nannoplankton Association, Climatic and Biotic Events of the Paleogene), helping coordinate the USGS Emeritus Program (there are almost 500 USGS Emeriti), and doing a little fieldwork. This summer I'm giving my "Fascinating Fossils" presentation to eight of the Prince William County Public Libraries as part of their student summer program. In addition to paleontology, I spend the rest of my time bird watching, sewing, knitting, crocheting, gardening, taking care of my six chickens, and making an N scale train layout.

Janet Swan Hill (Janet Swan) '67 - I am long since retired (in 2010) as Professor and Associate Director of the University of Colorado Libraries in Boulder. I am a figure skating judge, and am actively judging figure skating tests, and competitions, and still figure skating, but no longer competing in synchronized skating. My husband of 57 years died in 2025, and I have begun to fill the hole left by exploring new social circles (beyond skating).

Jane Deane Clark '67 Geography - had the wonderful opportunity to study with Jack Humphrey, Elaine Bjorklund, Scott Warthin, and John Johnson. They were outstanding professors! Following Vassar, I received my MA from Columbia in 1981 and a PhD in medical geography from Michigan State University in 1988. I worked for the Michigan and Connecticut Hospital Associations using small area analysis geographic techniques to study patterns of hospital care with an eye for quality improvement, marketing, and identifying underserved populations. To do this, my team integrated GIS into a preexisting multi-million population clinical database. It was exciting and ground-breaking at the time. I also held positions monitoring and improving the quality of hospital care using Medicare and Medicaid databases for Blue Care Network, the Michigan Peer Review Organization, and a Robert Wood Johnson grantee.

My husband, Russ, and I met on a geology field trip in Boston and have been married almost 60 years. Russ graduated from Amherst ('66) and completed his PhD in geology from Dartmouth ('73). We lived in Albion, Michigan for 35 years where Russ taught earth sciences and GIS at Albion College and I commuted to various jobs. We raised our two children in Michigan. Ian is a geologist and teaches at The Hopkins School in CT while Amy is an animal scientist who is the Science Director for the Forest Stewardship Council ("FSC" on the back of paper products) which is an international forest management sustainability non-profit organization. We have three grandchildren; one teacher, one opera singer, and one in elementary school.

Russ and I enjoy traveling and have been lucky enough to visit 56 countries. They include being in Hungary in the spring of 1989 and in Siberia in the summer of 1991. Both places were on the cusp of monumental change. UNESCO sponsored the trips to developing countries to persuade (and teach) their geologists how to use a standardized petrological database.

My Vassar education has been a critical and positive factor throughout my life and career. I cannot begin to thank Vassar enough for the financial aid that made it possible for me to go to college and for the scholarship skills that I observed and learned while there.

Susan Rogers '68 Geology (but also took lots of Geography) - After living 40+ years in Alaska, we have decamped to the east coast, specifically Old Orchard Beach, Maine. Getting older, longer winters with ice/rain, steep access to the house....all those combined plus that our son and his family live in Portland, 20 minutes from our beachside condo. Additionally, we have had a family camp on Great Pond, Belgrade Lakes, and have traveled from Alaska to Maine each summer to do maintenance on the camp....Now we have collapsed the travel time, plus we hire someone else to help out!

Two and three years ago we encountered a very warm winter here when we arrived at the coast, even in the 70s in November and December. In contrast 2025-26 has been the coldest in 30 years! Enough snow this winter to xc ski on the beach, and no really severe storms, like those in 2023-24, which impacted the whole state, especially the coast. The dune in front of the building is accreting as a result of any winter storm, so the water is very shallow along this section of the 7 mile long sandy beach. Summer tourists inflate the winter time population of OOB, about 8,000, up to 80,000--many Canadians, in spite of Trudeau's caution not to visit OOB!

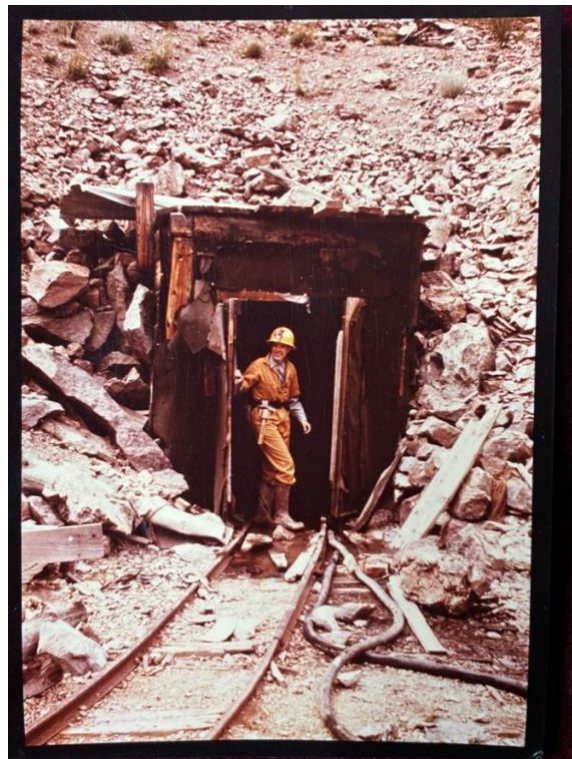
We have had fun exploring Maine's coast (hikes, lighthouses), even making a trip to Nova Scotia. Enjoying the lake and camp, visiting relatives and friends in Maine or New Hampshire and being tourists. Being grandparents means spending time with almost 5 yr old Vaughn, transporting to preschool or activities, walking the dog Roux (the kids are foodies) when parents go off to ski or visit friends for a week, and just having fun with a great kid!

1970s

Pamela "Penny" (Heald) Whitehouse-Vaux '71 Geology - I graduated from the Geology Department in 1971, one of two of us that year. Dr Warthin, Dr Johnson and Dr Regnier were all wonderful and inspiring. I went on to get my Masters degree from George Washington University whilst working for the U.S. Geological Survey. I first worked with the new EarthSat satellite images for two years, evaluating their use for structural studies and ore deposit identification. I then transferred to working on the geochemistry of silver/gold/lead/zinc epithermal deposits, with a focus on the San Juan Mountains and Creede, Colorado. I published a number of papers on my studies.

When I moved to London in the mid-1980s, it was obvious that there understandably wasn't much employment interest in the field of ore deposits, so I retrained for a gemology qualification from the Gemological Institute of America (GIA). I worked a little in that field whilst raising my children. I am enjoying being retired now, and still continuing my interest in geology that Vassar initiated. (I happily live a ten minute walk from the Museum of Natural History, which merged with the Geology Museum in 1996.)

PS Thought it would be fun to send a photo of me during field work in the summers. This is me in front of the Equity Mine, Creede Colorado. This particular mine had been closed for some time, but we were allowed to go in to study the old workings. Other days, we would take the man-train into the active workings and collect samples from the faces at the different levels of the working mine.



Doris (Dottie) Delaine Thach Wallingford '72 - After many years in the wine business in Napa and England, Dick (whom I met and married while getting an MBA from Dartmouth) and I retired to Florida. We get back to the West Coast to visit son Nick in southern California and daughter Karla in northern Washington. Nowadays, I enjoy watching the birds and butterflies in my native plant garden and playing bridge and golf. I also enjoy the geocentric online games from Teuteuf. I am currently reading "Prisoners of Geography" by Tim Marshall, which offers some interesting insights into how world leaders are influenced by geography.

Barbara Ulrich O'Grady '74 Geology - Despite having retired from my real job almost 20 years ago, I continue to work and remain active in my field. I earned a second MS from Montana State University in Bozeman in 2020, just as the pandemic was hitting full force. I was privileged to work with Cathy Whitlock, a paleoecologist of some renown, at least out West. That experience led to an opportunity to teach EARTH 212 Yellowstone Science, a class Cathy developed a decade or so ago, where I combine my 20 years as a

naturalist guide in the park and my new focus in paleoecology. It's a very popular class - I mean who wouldn't want to go hang out in the park and learn about the Yellowstone volcano?! I will teach it again in the fall semester. I love being on campus where I find the energy of the students to be so inspiring. I could have never imagined such a wonderful retirement!

When I'm not at MSU, I spend time in the Denver area where I have 3 daughters and 5 grandchildren and I do all the grandmother things. I enjoy whatever Colorado Ballet has going, wine tastings at the Alliance Francaise, and I branched out and took a nature journaling class at the Denver Art Museum this spring. I treated myself to 2 weeks in Paris over Christmas and New Years. My French is pretty darn good thanks to M. Pamplume and Mme. Arlyck. Merci.

My home sweet home is a little spot on the Yellowstone River just outside the park's north entrance. I love to sit on my deck in the summer and listen to the river slip by and hear the shrieks of rafters when they hit the riffle behind my garage. I regularly have bald eagles and osprey cruising along the river, elk and bison saunter by, a resident marmot scolds me when I disturb his sunbathing, and I enjoyed a visit from a black bear momma and her COY late last summer - just munching rose hips in the garden. You know, just the usual.

The Vassar Quarterly runs an ad for my little vacation rental. Vassar geology friends are always welcome.

1980s

Laura Joines '81 Geography - I was able to turn my undergraduate major into a career in architecture, and I've spent much of my professional life as a Professor of Architecture at California Polytechnic San Luis Obispo. I have very fond memories of hand-drawing maps as a geography major, and in many ways that was what first set me on the path toward architecture.

Allison Kozak '84 Geology - nothing much to report except maybe that I am splitting my time between NYC & San Francisco and am enjoying being back on the East Coast for the first time in almost 30 years!

David Rinn '85 Geology - I've been retired for about 10 years, after a career in finance. I live with my wife Laura in Port Townsend, WA on the Olympic Peninsula, where the geology (and geography) is epic and varied. (Port Townsend is where the Strait of Jaun de Fuca meets Admiralty Inlet / Puget Sound.) I serve on the Boards of Directors of two local non-profit organizations and also do a bunch of volunteer work in the local school district.

1990s

Jad Davenport '90 Geography - My career has morphed from travel writing and photography to leading Arctic and South Pacific expeditions. I spend part of each summer and winter with Churchill Wild leading wolf and polar bear citizen-science studies on the Hudson Bay and the rest of my time in Denver working on my dream of writing mystery novels (first draft done!). Once or twice a year, as a member of The Explorers Club, I speak onboard Ponant expedition ships in the South Pacific where I get to indulge in my passion for scuba diving. I would love to have any fellow Vassarites join me on the adventures. I can be reached at jad@jaddavenport.com

Gayle Levy Hartman '93 Geology - I was the lone geology major for class of '93. I went on to get a M.S. in paleontology/evolutionary biology from University of Georgia. In between, I taught myself HTML and Javascript and worked as a web developer. After I graduated with my master's, I worked at IRIS, a seismology consortium in Washington DC. However, the internet lured me back and I've been working in digital strategy in the DC area for the last 20+ years. For the past 7 years I've been at the Infectious Diseases Society of America as their head of digital and content strategy. The scientific and critical-thinking foundations I got from my time at Vassar and through my master's degree have set me up for success in my career field even though I have strayed from geology.

Craig Nelson '95 Geography - is managing a walking tour company in New York City called Bowery Boys Walks that focuses on urban history. The tours are a really fun way to explore the city! In his free time, he loves to travel to European cities.

Brad Fisher '95 Geology - Since graduating, I have been working in the environmental consulting and management business, and credit my time in the Geology Department for landing my first job and making a career in this business. After leaving the environmental consulting world in 2015, I started working with one of my primary clients (Getty Realty Corp.). Getty Realty Corp. is a publicly traded real estate investment firm (REIT) headquartered in Manhattan specializing in the acquisition, financing, and development of convenience, automotive, and other single tenant real estate with over 1,170 properties across the United States. I continue to work with Getty Realty Corp. as our Director of Environmental managing our historical environmental liability program, conducting acquisition due diligence, repositioning assets through divestment and redevelopment, and supporting our legal program. I look fondly back at my experiences at Vassar notably working with professors Walker and Dilek and can certainly credit my time at Vassar for my career in the environmental business.

Ben Escarcega '96 Geography - I was very happy to return to Vassar in April 2026 with my 11-year-old son Isaac. We were on our first father-son trip to New York City, and I didn't want to miss the opportunity to take a day trip on the train to Poughkeepsie. From the first moment we stepped on campus, all of the people received us very well. We walked the grounds and I could show him several of the old stomping grounds, plus a few new places. A highlight was meeting Lenore and seeing Prof. Zhou once again. She had just started when I was graduating in 1996, and it was great to see her still there. Personally, I have been married since 2010 and have three sons who are now 14, 11 and 7. We live in Queretaro, Mexico. Professionally, after obtaining an MBA from Thunderbird in 2004, I began a career in US-Mexico cross-border logistics and was based in Laredo, TX most of the time. Now I am a Partner at Kraus Development which is building two of the largest industrial parks in Laredo, TX to meet the infrastructure requirements of booming US-Mexico trade. Having a deeper understanding of Geography in all its forms has been a key part of my personal and professional success. Looking back, I am grateful that Vassar offered Geography as a major and have fond memories of the classes and colleagues that I had along the way.

Russell Dover '99 Geography - Working in Manhattan for a private equity-owned software company, living in Hudson County, where my daughter is in 7th grade. Always eager to hear from other geography majors. You can find me on LinkedIn.

2000S

Eliza Hotchkiss '01 Geology-Geography - I still have a job at the newly renamed National Laboratory of the Rockies (formerly NREL), which is now owned by the Department of Energy's office of Critical Minerals and Energy Innovation. A coworker joked last week that we now all suddenly need to be geologists and I told him "well, I was a geology major". It's funny how some things come full circle. I'm also still working on my PhD at the Colorado School of Mines and plan to defend in September (scheduling my committee has been quite the feat, since they all travel internationally on a regular basis).

Rachael Lizio Katzen Kuryunny '01 Geology - I'm still living in Sellwood, a neighborhood in inner-SE Portland (OR), and continue to enjoy my work as an adolescent executive function and communication coach. I'm delighted that one of my favorite students—a budding geologist and accomplished poet—will be applying to VC this fall, thanks in no small part to her recent lunch and tour of Ely with Kirsten.

I look forward to my annual trips to Seattle to catch up with Brooke (Densmore) Williams ('02) and her family, and to Golden to see Eliza Hotchkiss ('01) and hers. Last June, Eliza and her precocious son, Cooper, took me to the Morrison Natural History Museum where they introduced me to some of Colorado's many paleontological wonders.

Another highlight of these past few years was my late-winter 2025 trip to New Zealand during which I met up with a high school friend who works as a geologist in Dunedin. She treated us (my dad, my husband Justin, and me) to a spectacular, multi-day tour of Canterbury and the central West Coast, including the Punakaiki Pancake Rocks, Castle Hill, and the expansive alluvial plains of the glacial-blue Rakaia River.

A random aside, wholly unrelated to geology—During the pandemic, I returned full force to my first great love, reading. I gravitate towards contemporary lit, and have noticed that Vassar is referenced in this genre with unexpected frequency. At last count, 65 (!) of the books I've completed since 2020 explicitly name check VC. I'd be happy to compile and share the list should anyone be interested...

Brooke Crowley '02 Geology - I am still living in Cincinnati, Ohio and working as a professor at the University of Cincinnati. Work has kept me busy. I have my own research projects that I continue to pursue, and I have been mentoring a steady stream of graduate students for the past few years. I have also been helping a local nonprofit organization create a general interest book about Cincinnati's Mill Creek. This involves acting as general project manager and editing contributions from 18 different authors. I am glad to be part of the team, but I also look forward to the project wrapping up. I continue to travel as much as possible. My husband and I took advantage of my sabbatical last year and lived in Bordeaux in southwest France for several months last Spring. We also built a house on Mackinac Island in northern Michigan a few years ago, and we now spend our summers up north, enjoying the cooler weather, birds, lovely forest, and some interesting geology. I hope that 2026 is off to a good start for others as well.

Pulin Modi '02 - I had an independent major called Ecology of Social Change + 2 correlates including Political Ecology (Geography). This prompt made me think folks may find it interesting that aside from my job running the social media and digital campaigns team at the national AFT union, I have been spending a lot of time lately looking for Miocene fossils in Maryland and Virginia and late Cretaceous fossils in NJ. I've found everything from a giant 4" megalodon tooth to various fossilized shells, shark teeth, and marine mammal bones to a Miocene peccary tusk! It's a fun way to enjoy being outside exploring and getting a different perspective on the Earth's history.

Kyle Carey '04 Geology - I have been working at the EPA in the Underground Injection Control (UIC) Program for the last 13-ish years. These days the focus of my work are Class VI wells (wells used for Geologic Sequestration of Carbon Dioxide). I review state applications to take on permitting authority in place of the EPA for Class VI wells. This includes a review of the state statutes, regulations, and program documentation to ensure that the state program will be as protective of underground sources of drinking water as the federal standards. Additional information on this process can be found at: <https://www.epa.gov/uic/primary-enforcement-authority-underground-injection-control-program>



Nate Fuller '04 Geology - I'm doing great here in Wyoming, Just finished the warmest season of ski patrolling that anyone has ever seen. Kinda scary and sad but hard to say unexpected... This spring I'm heading down the Grand Canyon for a few weeks. Then back to slowly building a house at the Huidekoper Ranch in the summer. I'm desperately working on getting carbon 14 dates back from guano layers in the Fossil Mountain Ice Cave, but the process is taking longer than expected. See the attached photo of fellow Vassar alum Ethan Lobdall in front of said guano layers in hopes of finding someone interested in learning more. Last May, I managed another ascent of El Capitan via the New Dawn Wall. It is truly an amazing piece of rock. In conclusion, I am not working in the geology field in an academic sense, but I am exploring, learning about and appreciating our amazing planet.

Mike Mazik '04 Geology - I am still living in Freeport, ME and am enjoying the area as much as I can. I work at Casco Bay High School as a science/math aide, tutor, and sub, which works out on my end. I am going to be kayaking a lot this summer, again, in Casco Bay and have spent much of the winter months reading a variety of subjects; currently, it's a comprehensive history of rope, and was written by a local author. I am fighting fascism whenever I can, and am committed to ousting Susan Collins from any form of government.

Krysia Skorko '04 Geology - I've been working as a hydrologist for a non-profit (Trout Unlimited), where I contribute scientific support to our habitat restoration and water conservation projects. We work throughout California, from the coast to the Sierra Nevada mountains, to preserve native fish habitat. I live in Truckee, CA, with my husband and two kids.

Justin Minder '04 Geology - I'm still faculty in Atmospheric and Environmental Sciences here at UAlbany. I was promoted to Full Professor back at the start of 2025. I'm currently doing research on climate change over the Andes Mountains, precipitation type in winter storms, and hydrometeorology over the Catskill Mountains.

Charles Bolduc '05 Geology - is living the dream in rural Sutton, New Hampshire, where he and his wife Emilie '05 and daughter Helen (12) enjoy getting outside, renovating their 1800s farmhouse, and working remotely. Professionally, he runs Anorthosite Geospatial, a GIS and data science consulting practice drawing on his background in geology and spatial analysis. Recent projects have focused on wildfire risk modeling and fire protection planning. He is also a licensed geologist in Oregon. In the community, Chuck serves as Chair of Sutton's Conservation Commission, volunteers with Ausbon Sargent Land Preservation Trust, and sits on the Planning Board. When he's not wrestling with old plaster or spatial datasets, he can be found nordic skiing, paddling the Adirondacks, or out cycling.

Caitlin Crouch '05 Geology - Along with rowing on the Hudson River, Earth Science and Geography was the heart of my Vassar experience, and I continue to stay engaged with the curiosity and field-based learning that first drew me to the department.

Since graduating, I earned an MS in Environmental Studies and Hydrologic Science from the University of Colorado at Boulder and worked for several years in environmental consulting before becoming a full-time homemaker. For about a decade, while my three kids were still young, I hosted weekly toddler-led hikes where curiosity set the pace - lots of exploring dirt, rocks, mud, water, and ice. It was a really rewarding way to watch early connections to the natural world take shape while building relationships between kids and community among caregivers.

These days, I'm carrying the themes of relationship and belonging as a volunteer scout leader in three separate units, helping youth in grades K-12 build outdoor skills and confidence through backpacking, canoeing, and hands-on learning. It's been especially meaningful to bring an earth science perspective into those experiences. For example, last year I led an Environmental Science merit badge class at Flaming Gorge, Utah, using the dam and reservoir as a case study for hands-on learning and just this past week I shared my knowledge of fluvial geomorphology with my fellow adventurers as we backpacked canyons in Utah.

Joel Dashnaw '05 Geology - Joel recently moved to the Burlington, VT area from the Boston, MA area with his wife and son to be closer to family and the mountains. He is currently enjoying being a part-time stay at home dad, and part-time consultant in the field of waste management and recycling. In Boston, Joel worked for the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection in the Solid Waste Division doing regulatory compliance work related to commercial solid waste.

Bridget Martin '05 Geography - earned a PhD in Geography at the University of California Berkeley and is currently Croft Assistant Professor of Anthropology and International Studies at the University of Mississippi. With the support of a Fulbright Scholar Award (2025-26), she is currently on research leave in Korea working on a book about militarism and urban development in Korea.

Roger Putnam '06 Geology - is a tenured professor of Geology at Truckee Meadows Community College in Reno. During Spring 2026, he got to teach Field Methods (the capstone class of the degree) and take 19 students on trips through the Great Basin to train them in geologic mapping and measuring stratigraphic sections, a highlight of his career. When not at work, he explores the mountains of Nevada with his friends and family and runs ultramarathons.

Jeff Werner '06 Geology - I am still living in the Roaring Fork Valley where I have been since graduating in 2006. I finally moved off the mountain where I worked as a caretaker for the Merry-Go-Round restaurant (mid-way up Aspen Highlands Ski Area) and now live in Glenwood Springs. After starting as a seasonal trail crew member for Pitkin County Open Space and Trails in 2012, I have been able to slowly climb the ladder and currently work as the Resource and Stewardship Manager. We manage 85+ miles of trails and over 30,000 acres of land (a combination of fee-owned land and conservation easements) for recreational, wildlife, agricultural, and scenic purposes. In my free time, I continue to enjoy the wild that has kept me here nearly 20 years - camping, hiking, skiing, and mountain biking. I am looking forward to being back on campus in a couple of months for reunion.

Colin Wilson '06 Geology - After working for Southern Illinois University for many years, Colin Wilson relocated back to western Massachusetts in 2022. Working now as the Science Commons Director at Berkshire Community College, Colin lives in Pittsfield with his three kids and he's getting out skiing, hiking, and taking in all the cultural sights of the Berkshires. At work he manages a variety of things from a mechatronics lab, campus beehives, and a fleet of 3D printers. He also continually disappoints people who bring in what they think are meteorites, only to tell them they are iron concretions.

Adam Jost '08 Geology - lives in Boston with his partner, Anna Payne-Tobin Jost (Biology '08), and their daughter, Phoebe. He continues to work as a research scientist at MIT. While his heart remains in the Paleozoic, his main focus has shifted much closer to the present. These days, his primary role is managing MIT's U-Th geochronology lab and working with students and researchers to develop age models for paleoclimate data from the past half million years. Outside of work, he enjoys birding and traveling with his family. His beloved cat, Smow, passed away in 2024 after 15 years of companionship; since then, his family has adopted a bonded pair of cats, Ravioli and Lasagna.

Libby (Murphy) Zemaitis '08 Geology - I'm in New Paltz, NY with my partner, twin boys, Duke and Will, who just turned 8, and grumpy tabby cat Rhaegar. We're doing our best to be self-sufficient and joyous in this wild world, with help from our community, home garden, and instruments. For work, I'm leading a regional climate resilience accelerator that advances cross-sector partnerships and federal policy, at a "think and do tank" called the Center for Climate and Energy Solutions (C2ES). For fun, I get to hang with local '09 alumnus Emily Vail, Nate Kimball, and Wilson Salls from time to time. I especially enjoy visiting Wilson in Troy and exploring the city's restaurant and live music scene. We enjoy an annual holiday visit from Seattle-based Jared Siegel.

Nate Kimball '09 Earth Science - I'm still living in Stanfordville with my partner Tim and kids Christina (5) and Caroline (almost 3). In late 2024, I started a role as a Sustainability Advisor at Watershed. Watershed is the leading software platform driving corporate decarbonization, with 800+ customers using our software to manage climate and ESG data and reduce their emissions. As a sustainability advisor, I help our customers leverage their climate data to develop long term decarbonization strategy, align with regulatory requirements, and respond to investor and customer demands.

2010S

Sarah Ledford '10 Earth Science - I was tenured and promoted two years ago, so I'm now an Associate Professor of Geosciences at Georgia State University. I've been doing a lot of work with a big collaborative grant over the past three years to better build a learning ecosystem where geoscientists in the academy can work with communities in non-extractive ways. Folks can read about it here: <https://csaw47.wixstudio.com/csaw!>

Katie Gilligan (Interlichia) '11 Earth Science - Jerry and I are still in Boston, living right near Tufts University in Medford, MA. Our smart and spunky daughter is 2.5 and we're expecting #2 this spring (update - second daughter was born shortly after Katie wrote this and everyone is doing well!). I finished a master's degree in management at Harvard Extension School in Spring '23 and have been working as a project manager at the Broad Institute since 2022. I love my job, though I wish I had deigned to take at least one non-ESCI-related biology class in college...oops! :) My projects span cancer diagnostics, early drug development, and technology development. My time at Vassar kindled a deep love for team-based science; even though I'm not working in geology, I'm grateful to still be in STEM and to use all that I learned to make a difference in the lives of patients. I hope to reconnect with the department and alums at Reunion 2026!

Jenica Law '11 Earth Science - I've been well, but I am also entering a new phase! After working as a Family Practice PA in Mammoth Lakes, CA for the last 5 and a half years, I am soon moving down to Encinitas, CA to start a position in Cardiology. Trading over a decade in the mountains for the beach, it will be a big change, but I am very excited! Professionally, I am eager to specialize after such a broad practice, and I have always found Cardiology not only intellectually engaging but an incredibly rewarding way to help patients. I am still carrying on with my athletic endeavors, running, cycling, rock climbing, and recently started surfing. Four years ago, I adopted a dog, Palisade, and he has been the best adventure and cuddle buddy. He has climbed mountains with me and has ridden in a backpack mountain biking down trails! Fortunately, he loves the beach just as much as me, and we've decided that the Del Mar dog beach might just be the happiest place on earth.

Sam Thypin-Bermeo '11 Geography - is living in New York City, working as a civil rights and criminal defense lawyer. He loves running into Vassar alumni!

Alison Denn '12 Earth Science - I'm still in Austin, TX, working as a senior environmental geologist/consultant with an amazing team at INTERA Incorporated. Most of my work is on developing, active, and abandoned mining projects in New Mexico and the desert West, especially abandoned uranium mine cleanup. And big news—my husband Mark and I are expecting our first baby in July 2026, it's a boy. Smooth sailing so far. Wish me luck!

Jeremiah Bernau '13 Earth Science - I now work for Chevron in a role where I mediate between engineers, earth scientists, developers, and IT. It's a space that requires constant communication and coordination—very liberal arts in practice! Outside of work, I'm still logging miles on the pavement and continue being creative in the kitchen. I also stay active in the geosciences community, volunteering with the GSA Limnogeology division and the IMAGE conference steering committee.

Michael Kiel '14 Geography - is still living in Austin, where he is now a program manager on the Vision Zero team at the City. Although he was laid off from a new job in international development last year, he credits his geographical education for helping him stay nimble across scale. He is also getting into a bit of science fiction writing and is now a cat step-dad.

Toby Sola '14 Geography - recently moved nearby, to Kingston, NY! He lives with his lovely wife Hannah and brand new daughter, Lillian Sola. Toby runs Brightmind Meditation, a meditation app and global community.

Brooke Minnich (Robinson) '15 Geography - moved from Santa Fe, New Mexico to her husband's hometown of Durango, in southwest Colorado, last year. She is now the Garden Manager at the SOIL Outdoor Learning Lab, a Durango School District project that offers garden and environmental education to K-College students as well as a community garden and public programs. She's also loving gardening at home and getting into the mountains with her two-year-old daughter, Heidi.

Cassie Stirpe '15 Earth Science - From 2016 to 2023 I was at the University of Maine, completing an MS and PhD in Earth and Climate Sciences, with a focus on paleoceanography. After receiving my PhD, I accepted a two-year postdoc position at the University of Florida where I conducted research and also spent a semester teaching. My research uses geochemical proxies in microfossils (forams) to reconstruct changes in ocean properties across the last glacial termination. The goal is to acquire a better understanding of how the ocean interacted with the rest of the climate system during this transition. I'm also working to expand my research to include further back in time as well, with some of my postdoc work covering a full glacial cycle. I'm currently working as a Visiting Assistant Professor at Oberlin College for the 2025-2026 academic year, teaching courses related to global climate and oceanography, and I'm hoping to secure a tenure-track position at a college or university sometime in the next few years.

Katie Ewen '15 Earth Science - After living the life of seasonal adventures for many years, as well as earning her Master's from Western Washington University in 2023, Katie finally landed a permanent role with the National Park Service. She works as an aquatic ecologist for the North Coast and Cascades Network, overseeing a long-term monitoring project at alpine lakes in North Cascades National Park as well as a wider effort to monitor ecological integrity in rivers throughout Washington's National Parks. As much as she loves the mountains, water, and aquatic critters of the Northwest, there was nothing quite like returning to Vassar for a recent reunion and strolling through Ely!

John Silk '18 Earth Science - After graduating from Vassar in 2018, I returned to my home state of New Hampshire, where I worked in a variety of educational settings, from overnight outdoor education programs to public schools to Federal TRIO programs. I received my Master's in Environmental Studies from Antioch University New England in 2021. I got married in 2022, and my wife and I now find ourselves living in Queens, NY. I am currently an Academic Success Coach at the New York Institute of Technology in Manhattan, where I support second- and third-year college students on their academic journeys. When I am not working, I can be found exploring New York's green spaces, catching film screenings at the Museum of the Moving Image, and collecting Star Wars memorabilia.

Becca Odell '19 Earth Science and Society - Hi all! I have moved from Albany to Brooklyn for grad school, and I am excited to graduate with my master's in urban planning from Hunter College this summer! I will then start working for the City Department of Transportation. In other exciting news, I recently had some map-based art exhibited at BRIC as part of the annual Data Through Design show. I'd love to grab coffee with any ESCI/GEOG people in the City!

2020S

Alex Azuelos '20 Earth Science - Since graduation, I've been living in my hometown of Philadelphia. I was hired by the Philadelphia Water Department as an environmental scientist in a lab that monitors both municipal and commercial water pollution in the city's waterways. In 2024 I was promoted to supervisor of my lab. Otherwise, I've been spending my time cooking, reading, biking, and practicing photography.

Camelia Manning '20 Geography - Hello from Indianapolis where I have lived since we "graduated" in 2020. These days I work for the ACLU of Indiana (where I do my best to find excuses to do cartography projects). For the last four years I have also been in law school part-time. I graduate in May, and by the time you read this I will have taken the bar exam. I wish I had taken a geology class or two at Vassar because now in my free time all I do is climb rocks, and I'm hoping to make it out to the Hudson Valley this spring for a visit to Poughkeepsie and to the Gunks for some climbing.

Kai Peterson '20 Earth Science and Society - is living in NYC, and excited to start a job as an educator with the Brooklyn Botanic Garden's School Programs this spring! After graduating from the American Museum of Natural History's MAT program for Earth Science teachers, Kai taught for 2.5 years at Lyons Community School, and now they're looking to shift into informal science education.

Eilif Ronning '20 Geography - Hello present and past Ely-Hallers! I'm wrapping up my master's, where I'm writing my thesis on flows and management of bambara groundnut seeds—that's *Vigna subterranea* for the binominal nomenclature fans out there. Alongside the degree, I've been working at EAT Foundation to spread the word about healthy, sustainable, and just food systems, and unfortunately, help sunset the organization. My post-degree plans are still nebulous, but will hopefully materialise into something food systems-shaped. Otherwise, I've been enjoying making prints, reading more fiction, and building deeper roots in Oslo. Please look me up if you're in the area!

Cole Palatini '22 Geography - is based in New York City working as a sculptor. In his studio, he engages his experience with earth science and geography to create sculpture and drawing which connects earthly processes, industrial material, and the human body. His work proposes that these seemingly distinct systems share common patterns. For inquiries: colepalatinistudio@gmail.com

Lilly Tipton '22 Earth Science - I've been up at Dartmouth getting a masters in earth science looking at dust particles trapped in Antarctic ice cores to see how dust emissions and transport to Antarctica have been changing over the past ~1,000 years. During my masters I was thrilled to be able to work on Dartmouth's term long field course twice. After graduating I decided to stick around in New Hampshire and have started a new position with the Dartmouth Climate Collaborative managing student engagement, programming, and curriculum development.

Alex Nguyen '23 Earth Science - I have recently completed the third year of my PhD program at Washington University in St. Louis in the Department of Earth, Environmental, and Planetary Sciences, and I received my master's degree in the same department last year. In my research, I use radar remote sensing satellites and LiDAR to study ground ice melt and subsidence as well as their relation to climate, hydrology, and communities in coastal Alaska. In April, my seed grant proposal to NCALM was selected for repeat LiDAR data collection during this summer over the small coastal town of Utqiagvik, AK, and I'm looking forward to continuing to do research related to Arctic community climate resiliency.

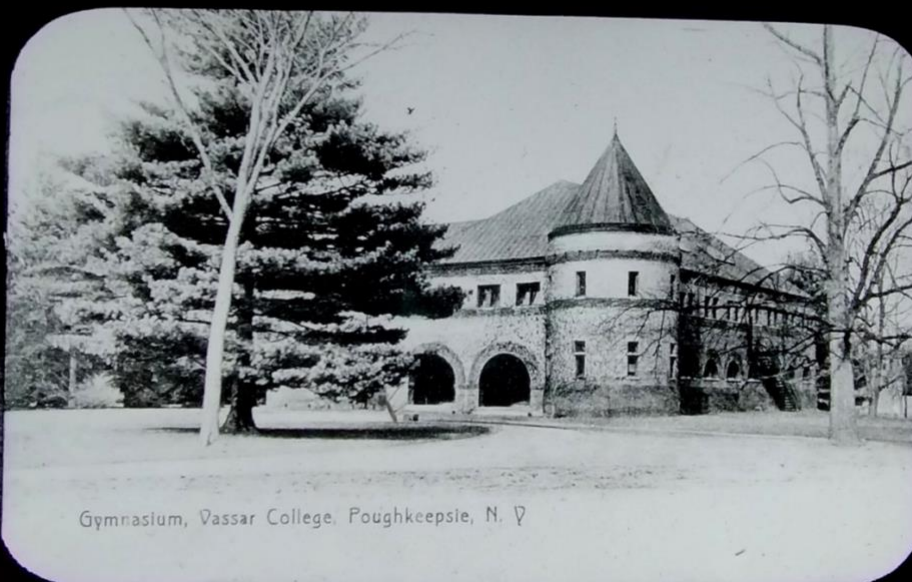
Outside of grad school, I've been enjoying living in my hometown, rollerblading around parks, and spending time with my friends and family here. I also plan on attending AGU later this year in San Francisco, and I'd love to connect or catch up if you'll be there!

Abbie Smith '24 Earth Science - I am writing from Richmond, Virginia, where I have been working for the last year and a half in environmental remediation, particularly involving landfills, power plants, and solar sites. It is a great mix of construction site visits to assess erosion and sediment control measures, environmental permitting challenges, and working directly with clients to assist them in various capacities. Outside of work, I am still playing frisbee (shoutout to the Boxing Nuns!), biking on the Virginia Capital Trail, and watching lots of movies and shows in theaters.

Ezra Potts '24 Earth Science - eawrps@gmail.com

We so love hearing from you...Drop us a line anytime! And as always, if you are in the Hudson Valley, come by for a visit!

Glass slide image of Ely Hall, circa 1900.



Gymnasium, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, N. Y.