Overview

The Department of Geography continued to grow its student numbers significantly on both the Main Campus in Bloemfontein and the Qwaqwa Campus. While undergraduate teaching demanded considerable input from academic staff, postgraduate teaching and supervision was not left behind. Published research outputs and conference attendance reflect departmental inputs in the increasingly important area of research. The department continued to align itself with the strategic aims of the university.

A highlight of 2007 was the creation of a new postgraduate study facility in the Geography building on the Main Campus with ten individual cubicles for honours, masters and doctoral students. All of these were equipped with network points and computers. In addition, secure locker space was made available to postgraduate students. The idea behind this considerable capital investment on the part of the department is to encourage postgraduate students to base themselves within the department, thereby promoting a culture of research.

The numbers of postgraduate students remained positive, with five doctoral students (including one from Malawi), 11 masters and 14 honours students registered across the two campuses in 2007. The honours students again attended the annual Student Conference which preceded the conference of the Society of South African Geographers in Port Elizabeth.

The Geographical Information Systems (GIS) laboratory, under the direction of Dr Charles Barker, was further expanded, bringing the number of GIS-dedicated computers to 35. The laboratory continues to run, under license and direct purchase, the latest and most up-to-date GIS software. Interactive on-screen teaching ensures optimal interaction between instructor and student. GIS is increasingly perceived by students as a potential career direction, and the department’s GIS resources are fully engaged, with limited capacity for expansion.

International visitors to the department included Prof. Margaret Marker from the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom (UK). She and Prof. Peter Holmes, Departmental Chairperson, visited the ULCO quarry and cement works in the Northern Cape to investigate limestone tufas. This visit was followed by a second, consecutive annual visit by Dr Giles Wiggs, also from the University of Oxford. Dr Wiggs is an expert on aeolian sediment transfer and is a principal collaborator on a National Research Fund (NRF) initiative into environmental change in the western Free State under the leadership of Prof. Holmes. Drs Mark Bateman from the University of Sheffield in the UK and Andrew Carr from the University of Leicester in the UK, also visited the Main Campus. They undertook fieldwork on coastal dune evolution in the southern and eastern Cape as part of an ongoing research initiative with Prof. Holmes. After this the trio attended the biennial conference of the Southern African Society for Quaternary Research (SASQUA) in Howick, KwaZulu-Natal.

Profs Holmes and Visser presented papers at international and local conferences during the year. Prof. Holmes attended the XVII INQUA Congress in Cairns, Australia where he presented a paper and was co-author of two other presentations. The abstracts were published in Quaternary International (2007) volumes 167-168. He also presented a paper and was co-author of two others at the biennial conference of SASQUA in Howick.
KwaZulu-Natal. Prof. Visser presented papers at international conferences in Ghent in Belgium, Amsterdam in the Netherlands and at the biennial conference of the Society of South African Geographers in Port Elizabeth. Mrs Tobeka Mehlomakulu also attended the conference of the Society of South African Geographers and presented a paper.

Community service continued to manifest itself in terms of Prof. Willie van Zyl and Mr Alex Adjei’s tourism training initiative. Prof. Visser continued to serve as President of the Society of South African Geographers. Both the Qwaqwa Campus and the Main Campus were actively involved in hosting Geography learners from various Free State and Northern Cape high schools.

Dr Hennie Claassen was re-elected as subject head on the Qwaqwa Campus. Mr Pululu Mahasa took over a vacancy on the Qwaqwa Campus on a contract basis. Prof. Van Zyl was seconded to a management position on the Qwaqwa Campus.

On the Main Campus in Bloemfontein, Mr Gijsbert Hoogendoorn was appointed to a one-year contract position, thus helping to relieve the teaching load which resulted from a large increase in the number of first-year students. Ms Eldalize Kruger continued to carry the responsibility for environmental management courses, an important facet of the department’s academic profile.

Mrs Sheila Vrahimis continued to work with large numbers of students in the four-year B.Sc. degree programme, while Mrs Tobeka Mehlomakulu convened the honours class on the Main Campus.

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Prof. Peter Holmes, Departmental Chairperson, attended INQUA XVII in Cairns, Queensland, Australia. Behind him is one of the famous Glasshouse Mountains, an exhumed volcanic plug.

Research outputs

Research articles


Chapters in books


Reports

Conference contributions


