Dear EAC Colleagues,

Thank you for taking time last week to discuss the request for a tenure track GIS position submitted by the Geography Department earlier this year. Forgive me if I sound insane, but the department would like to table that request given the outcome of a set of conversations that have been happening within our department and with the Administration. In our meeting last week, you inquired about the possibility of envisioning an alternative staffing model for GIS instruction. To this end, we’ve engaged the Administration about establishing a GIS Teaching Fellowship program. In short, the Fellowship program (at least at the outset) would bring two fellows (ABD or recent PhD) to campus each year who would work alongside departmental faculty in learning GIS pedagogy and develop lab exercises during the fall semester. Then, in the spring semester, these two fellows would have the opportunity to teach sections of the course (GEOG120) and more advanced techniques courses in their area of specialization. The advantage of the teaching fellow model is that annually it brings fellows with fresh ideas to Middlebury enabling the College to keep up to date on the state of the art in the field. In addition, the regular turnover in fellows will allow scholars from a wide array of fields (and possibly practitioners) to broaden the scope of GIS instruction across the curriculum. For example, in one year, a medical geographer may be appointed as a fellow alongside a landscape architect, while in the next year we could have fellows coming from archeology or urban planning. This model creates much more flexibility in GIS instruction than a tenure track line.

Unfortunately, with Zach’s departure and Timi’s recent administrative appointment to the Rohatyn Center, we find ourselves short-staffed for at least three more years. Under the scenario with the tenure track proposal, we had this new hire offering electives when not teaching techniques courses, but given the teaching scenario envisioned under the Fellowship program, we see the need to hire a 3-year term position that can contribute to our 200 level elective offerings until the administrative appointments expire. Thus, attached, you will find a proposal for a 3-year term position in Geography NOT dedicated to GIS (I realize this is unbelievable). The merits of the proposal are outlined below, but in sum the package of a GIS Fellowship Program along with a 3-year term position will allow Middlebury to maintain its leadership role in both undergraduate Geographic education and the teaching of Geo-Spatial techniques within a liberal arts context.

Respectfully,

Peter B. Nelson
Chair, Geography Department
Proposal for a 3-year term position in Human Geography

The Request

The Geography Department seeks one 3-year term position in Human Geography to begin in the fall of 2013 to relieve enrollment constraints in our elective level courses and senior seminars. These enrollment constraints result from both the departure of Zach Christman and Guntram Herb's, Tamar Mayer's and Peter Nelson's teaching reductions associated with serving on the COR, Directing the Rohaytn Center, and serving as Atwater Commons Head respectively. Combined, these teaching reductions amount to more than a full FTE. The unusually high level of institutional service provided by the three senior-most members of the department (75% of the tenured geography faculty and 60% of the tenure track faculty) impacts our curriculum by reducing the frequency these faculty members can offer their high enrollment elective level courses (200 level) as well as capstone senior seminars (400 level). Therefore, we seek a broadly trained human geographer with research and teaching interests that complement the department's existing thematic strengths and expand our regional expertise. The ideal candidate will have the ability to teach thematically based courses in areas such as Health, Hazards, Food, or Nature-Society relations and a research program based in the Global South.

Specifically, this position will:

1) Better meet the existing demand for elective level courses and senior seminars that serve geography students as well as other interdisciplinary programs across campus.
2) Expand the thematic areas of expertise within the Geography Department to include new areas such as food geographies, geographies of health, or natural hazards.
3) Offer a more robust array of senior seminars to enhance our senior capstone experience.
4) Expand the regional coverage within the geography department to include the developing world, ideally Latin America or Africa. Such coverage of the Global South will also enhance International Studies.
5) Allow the Geography Department to contribute more consistently to the First Year Seminar and College Writing Programs.

Rationale

Curricular Considerations

The Geography Department has established strengths in several sub-fields of human geography including urban, economic, population, political, cultural, historical, development, and geo-spatial techniques. In addition, we have strong regional coverage of North America, Europe, and the Middle East. Despite these strengths, there are several sub-fields within human geography and regions not covered in our curriculum. In particular, we lack thematic coverage in areas related to Health, Hazards, Nature-Society Relations, and Food. These areas represent growing subfields of the discipline as well as areas with potentially broad appeal to Middlebury students. Moreover, we completely lack regional expertise in the Global South. Therefore, we see this term position as expanding our course offerings both thematically and regionally. Additionally, such a person would likely contribute to other
interdisciplinary programs. For example, a medical geographer with research expertise on the resurgence of Malaria in Latin America would offer courses with the potential to contribute to Geography, Global Health, Environmental Studies and International Studies. Finally, the Geography Department has historically used our electives to contribute to the College Writing program. Reducing our elective level offerings will eliminate our ability to offer College Writing courses for the foreseeable future. Therefore, this term position will relieve enrollment pressure at the elective level, expand thematic and regional coverage in new directions, and contribute to other programs across campus.

Enrollment Considerations

Our 200 level electives are the ‘bread and butter’ of the Geography Department, and we serve large numbers of students through these courses, both geography majors and non-majors alike. Our geography majors must complete five of these courses (joint majors must complete three), and many of our electives are required for or serve as electives in programs such as International Studies, Environmental Studies, Global Health, and American Studies. Finally, our 200 level electives are often the gateway through which we draw students into the Geography Department. For many students, their first introduction to academic geography comes through one of these elective courses. Given the importance of our elective courses to our curriculum, we need to be able to offer a minimum of 6-8 200 level electives per year to serve our majors, other programs, and the broader student body. While it has been a strain over the past two years with Pete’s appointment as Commons Head and Guntram’s service on the COR, we have been able to maintain the bare minimum level of elective offerings, mainly because Timi has consistently offered 3 electives each year. Now, with her administrative appointment, we lose two of her courses effectively pushing us beyond the breaking point. Further compounding the need for additional teaching resources are the already existing enrollment pressures within the 200 level elective offerings. Since 2006, each of our 200 level courses have enrolled on average 29.6 students, and over the same time period, our department has averaged 93 students per FTE, well above the targeted average of 84 students per year suggested in the new teaching load guidelines. Therefore, simply redirecting students from the electives no longer offered by Timi into the few we are able to maintain would push these enrollments higher and reduce the thematic and regional breadth of our program.

Conclusion

Since Bob Churchill died in 2004, the Geography Department has been struggling to think about ways to meet the expanding demand for GIS instruction across the curriculum. We have always been thinking about his replacement in terms of additional faculty resources, and our commitment to maintaining a leadership position in undergraduate liberal arts GIS instruction has forced us to focus on this need at the expense of other areas of our curriculum. Establishing a GIS teaching fellowship program, however, will simultaneously expand GIS instruction at Middlebury and allow us to address other curricular needs within the Geography Department. The teaching fellowships will create a flexible way to broaden GIS instruction into new thematic areas, and the three-year term position will allow the Geography Department to offer a more robust array of courses serving Geography majors as well as students from
other areas of the curriculum. In sum, this package will reinforce Middlebury’s leadership position in geographic education in an undergraduate liberal arts context.

Reaching Strategy

The job advertisement as written below is designed with three objectives. First, we hope to recruit a broad field of applicants by casting a wide net. Second, we hope to expand the regional areas of expertise by seeking an individual with research interests in the developing world. Third, by seeking applicants with research interests in the developing world, we hope to increase the possibility of recruiting an applicant of color. We hope to get permission to advertise this position in the September, October, and November issues of the AAG Newsletter and bring candidates to campus in December of 2012. Possible external search committee members include: Jeff Munroe, Nick Muller, Kathy Morse, Svea Closser.

POSITION ADVERTISEMENT:

VERMONT, MIDDLEBURY 05753. The Geography Department seeks to fill one three-year term position beginning in the fall of 2013 in Human Geography at the instructor (ABD) or Assistant Professor (Ph.D) level. We seek broadly trained candidates who complement the department’s existing thematic and regional strengths. In particular, preference will be given to candidates with the research and teaching based in the ‘Global South’ and ability to offer thematic courses in one or more of the following areas: medical geography, hazards, nature-society relations, or food systems. Teaching responsibilities include: one regional course per year, thematic electives in the candidate’s areas of expertise, and a senior seminar. The strongest candidates will be able to strengthen the department’s existing ties with other departments and programs across campus (e.g. Environmental Studies, International Studies, and Global Health). Please submit a letter of application, curriculum vitae, and three letters of recommendation at least two of which address teaching ability through InterFolio. Review of applications will begin November 1, 2012 and continue until the position is filled. Apply: Chair, Department of Geography, Middlebury College, Middlebury, VT 05753. Middlebury College is an equal opportunity employer, committed to hiring a diverse faculty to complement the increasing diversity of the student body.