

Excellence in Teaching

Jeff Baldwin

Geography



Why I love teaching

Teaching has always seemed somewhat magical to me. By sharing information one can make others wealthier, more effective, and more empowered with very little cost to oneself. I recognized my affinity for teaching a very long time ago, when I was in Boy Scouts. The road to becoming a teacher was immediate; the route to becoming a geographer and professor was far more circuitous.

My path to geography began completely without my knowing it, largely because I had no idea that Geography was not really about the names, locations, and description of places; that it was really about the interplay between humans and environments, and between groups inhabiting different spaces.

And so as I investigated and portrayed human environment relations as a fine print photographer, I didn't know I was doing geography.

As a hiker, traveler, and cyclist I had also cultivated a love of maps, largely for the promise they held of how to get to the places I had not yet seen, and for the way they lovingly recorded the topography of the places I loved. But I didn't know that geographers made maps, I thought mapmakers did.

One place in my life where I especially appreciated maps was in bicycle touring. How helpful to know ahead of time how big the next hill was, and how far it was to the next campground or town. As I began to bike tour in Hawaii, a lack of such maps struck me as an opportunity—I decided to write and publish a cycle touring guide with maps that I would produce myself. Through that project I met the cartographers at the University of Oregon, just as I was deciding to go back to school to become certified to teach, in some vague capacity.

Long story short, though I was accepted into Southern Oregon University's K-12 Master's program, I set my sights on a different graduate degree; one that would allow me to teach college.

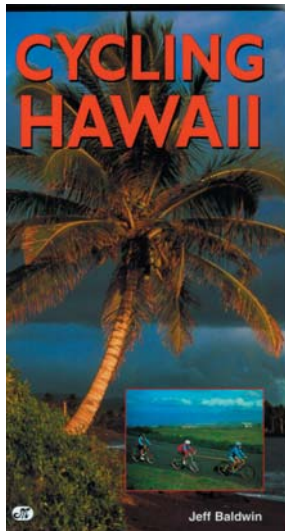
It's strange where life takes us.

I went to Antigua and Barbuda, in the West Indies for my Master's degree research project—not a place I had ever aspired to visit. The people and the land there taught me more than I imagined possible, and I am still learning from that small island.

The following summer I ended up camping among high altitude cow pies in the Montana Rockies, helping a friend with steam survey work. A place I had long aspired to visit, but was devastated to learn what we had done to it.

Geography has allowed me to explore our relationships with our environments. Its critical perspective, however, has forever changed how I view the world. A landscape (urban or wild) is no longer only pretty, or inspiring. Now I want to know why it is as it is, and what role have people played in creating it. I have come to believe that is some of the most important knowledge one can have, and I strive to impart that curiosity in my students.

For me, undergraduate geography is about learning how things, places, and people are connected, and why, and to what effect. And perhaps most importantly, is that what we want, is it just, is it what is best? I love this world, and I get excited when my students begin to see their inter-relationship with their worlds in more complex ways. What really gets me excited, is when they learn . . . because its like magic—the seed of new knowledge growing from fertile ground. What could be better than that?



About Jeff

Jeff Baldwin began teaching in fall 2005 and is thus relatively "new" to Western Oregon University. Before coming to WOU he previously taught at Willamette University. Jeff holds a Ph.D. in Geography from the University of Oregon.

Jeff teaches a variety of geography courses at WOU, including Physical Geography, Economic Geography, Environmental Conservation and Field Methods. Students in the field methods class will learn the fundamentals of surveying. Jeff enjoys looking at the way social processes engage in a dialectic with natural processes with regard to space.

Before earning the Ph.D. in Geography Jeff worked in the fine arts as a professional photographer. Even in this arena, however, he focused largely on humans and the way they interacted with the environment. Jeff's work has been exhibited in galleries across the country, including a show in New York City. Jeff also owned galleries in Seattle, WA and Berkeley, CA.

Jeff teaches large classes and enjoys utilizing innovative pedagogies to make the classes more engaging for students. He is skilled at using technology and often incorporates a variety of multimedia in his courses. For example, he used a variety of photos from around

the world to illustrate his lecture on mineral extraction and mining techniques.

The slides included local examples (the Placer Barge in Sumter, Oregon), national examples (open cast or strip mining operations in West Virginia), and international examples (open pit mines in Australia). Jeff integrated video into his presentation as well, showing parts of the public television program, "Oregon Field Guide," to illustrate mining issues.

When he discussed the social and environmental impacts of mercury in Japan and Gold mining in New Guinea he contextualized the information by including photos and maps. He concluded the unit on mineral extraction with a multimedia presentation that include music and visuals to demonstrate the way human activity influences space.

Jeff also uses technology to bring students to different locations, often putting up a slide and asking students to form groups as they answer the question "What is going on here?" This quarter, students in his Physical Geography course have enjoyed commenting on newspaper articles and linking geography and economics. Students bring in articles from the *New York Times*, internet news sources, or the Salem *Statesman Journal*, and discuss them in groups on a regular basis. The in-class discussions help students think of ideas for their class paper.

In addition to teaching, Jeff is an active scholar. He has an article coming out soon in *Ethics and Environment*, titled "The Culture of Nature Through Mississippian Geographies." At the meeting of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers in Phoenix he presented a paper titled "Embodied Spatial Metaphors, Six-legged Frogs, and You: The Role of Metaphors in Biospheric Toxicification." In March Jeff presented a paper at the national Conference of the American Association of Geography on "The Liberalization of Indonesian Forest Wealth: Re-examining Political Economy and Ecology Analysis and Policy, and Politics *With* Nature."



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