



UNIVERSITY  
OF ALBERTA

# EAS MONTHLY

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## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR, MURRAY GINGRAS

### Changing the Name, Keeping the Community

One of the things I value most about EAS is the sense of community that exists within the department. Like any large and busy organization, we are sometimes put in situations where decisions are difficult, resources are stretched, or circumstances do not always feel as collegial as we might like. But I am regularly reminded of the many occasions when people in EAS simply step forward to help one another.

Those moments matter. The willingness to share time, expertise, equipment, advice, or simply to do something extra for a colleague or student is a large part of what makes EAS such a special place to work and study.

A student recently shared an example with me from the COVID years involving our lab coordinator, Marilyn Huff. I have left the student's name out because I did not ask permission to identify them, but I thought their story was worth passing along:

"During the COVID years, I was taking the optical mineralogy course online from Japan. Being a hands-on course, I was worried about whether I could succeed in the course. While I was able to find an optical microscope that I could use in Japan, Marilyn was kind enough to ship me the course packet with all of the necessary thin sections, all the way from Canada to Japan. I was able to complete the course with no major issues."

I love this example because there was nothing particularly complicated about the solution. Marilyn saw what a student needed and found a way to make it happen. From the student's perspective, though, that act of kindness made it possible to participate fully in a hands-on course from halfway around the world during an extraordinarily difficult period.

And there were so many examples like that during the COVID years. Our instructors, laboratory staff, teaching assistants, and support staff made extraordinary efforts to deliver online lectures and laboratories at a time when very few of us had much experience doing so. Just as importantly, our students rose to the occasion. They worked hard to keep up with course materials, adapted to unfamiliar ways of learning, and continued to engage despite circumstances that were difficult for everyone.

I remember teaching EAS 209, Geology of Western Canada and the National and Provincial Parks, during that period. There were only about eleven students in the class, and we ended up doing virtual field trips to national parks across the country. What I remember most is how committed those students remained. Their interest never seemed to waver, and they continued to participate enthusiastically despite everything that was happening around them. I was tremendously proud of them for sticking with it.

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR, MURRAY GINGRAS... CONT'D

Interestingly, the online format turned out to work remarkably well for virtual field trips. By the end of the term, EAS 209 had become, at least by my own self-assessment, one of the better courses I had ever taught. That was not because the circumstances were ideal. Far from it. It was because everyone involved made the effort to make the best of them.

That same sense of community is worth thinking about now as we prepare for another important change. Earth and Atmospheric Sciences will become **Geoscience, Geography and Planning**, potentially as of July 1, 2027.

To me, the reasoning behind the change is fairly simple. A department's name ought to reflect the people and programs that make up that department. Today, that community includes strong programs in geoscience, human geography, and planning, together with paleontology and the many instructors, students, staff, and others who support them. Geoscience, Geography and Planning represents that community more clearly than our current name does.



Speaking of community, professors Brian Jones (left) and S. George Pemberton 'working' on Grand Cayman Island (late 1980's). Brian Jones became the first chair of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences in 1995.

There are historical reasons why we arrived where we did. When Geography and Geology were brought together in 1995, Planning was not yet part of the department. The merger also occurred during a period of significant budgetary pressure at the University, when creating larger departments was part of a broader administrative response to those pressures. My understanding is that, because of the circumstances surrounding that merger, the new department was not to carry geology, geoscience, or geography in its name. Hence, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences (after A LOT of departmental debate).

Thirty years later, we are a different department. Human Geography has developed into a strong and important part of EAS. Planning has become an very important part of our community. Geoscience remains a major strength, including the paleontological work that has long been associated with the department. The proposed name simply does a better job of saying who we are.

What has impressed me most about the name-change discussion is how readily people have understood that principle. There have been very few detractors. People have recognized that being part of a team also means making sure that the different parts of that team can see themselves represented in the whole. That willingness to think collectively rather than only from the perspective of one's own program is, in itself, another example of the community spirit I have been talking about.

So, as we look toward becoming Geoscience, Geography and Planning, I do not expect the nature of this community to change. The letters on the front office door may be different, but the qualities that matter will not be. I congratulate everyone in the department for the thoughtful and collegial way this process has unfolded, and I look forward to seeing that same spirit of collaboration, generosity, and mutual support carry forward for many years to come.

## WELLNESS COMMITTEE

### Pumpkin Decorating Contest

This year marks the second annual EAS Pumpkin Carving Contest! Get a team together and compete for a chance to win the title of 'Most Gorgeous Gourd', and take home the coveted Golden Pumpkin.

Fill out the [google form](#) if you would like to participate. We will have ten pumpkins, so make sure that your team gets their form in, as it is first-come, first-served!



The pumpkins from the 2025 competition

### Welcome Back Event Recap

We had a great turn out for the Welcome Back Event on September 18th. Thank you to everyone who came by; let's have another great year!



### Franks for Fall!

Come grab a hotdog and visit with fellow staff and students!

**When:** October 15, 2026 | 3 - 5pm

**Where:** ESB front lawn (weather permitting; otherwise we will set up in Tory 3-36)



## WELLNESS COMMITTEE CONT'D...

### Winter Gear Donations

We are now accepting donations for warm winter clothing, including, but not limited to: sweaters, jackets, boots, mittens, and hats.

Items can be brought to the main office (ESB 1-26), and will then be made available to our students.



### Shift the Stigma: Steps for the Mind

[Join Days of Action and Jack.org](#) on **October 15th from 12-1:30pm** for a guided walk to the river valley, focused on self-care and community support. Expect interactive games, quiet reflection and practical takeaway tools to care for yourself and others.

This walk will go down into the river valley, which includes going up and down a steep embankment via paved paths and stairs. Dress for the weather and wear appropriate footwear.



Intermediate First Aid- Level C CPR & AED

In this two-day BLENDED learning course, students will learn to recognize and provide interventions for life-threatening emergencies until medical aid arrives. Topics include: shock and unconsciousness, severe bleeding, head and spinal injuries, major medical conditions, AED training and certification, and fractures of the upper and lower limbs. This course includes Level C CPR training and certification (Adult, Child, Infant, and 2-rescuer resuscitation), and AED training and certification.

**RECERTIFICATION is available.** The blended learning can be combined with recertification training as long as the certificate is approved in Alberta and still valid. Individuals completing the recertification must attend the Day 2 in person training.

**When:** October 19, 2026 | 7:45am - 4:15pm  
**Where:** BSB CW410

[Pre-Register Now!](#)



- What do you do in the department?**  
*I just started as director of the School of Urban and Regional Planning, but I have been at U of A since 2014, first shared with Faculty of Extension, and since 2019 full time at Faculty of Science.*
- What is your first U of A memory?**  
*First Edmonton memory is a thunderstorm; first U of A memory was finding a big pillar in the middle of my Extension office. After that, things improved.*
- What’s something your coworkers might not know about you?**  
*I used to be a part-time mushroom hunter but never poisoned anyone.*
- What’s your favourite distraction?**  
*Many things -music, cooking, birdwatching, gardening, ancient history.*

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## FACULTY & STAFF EVENTS, RESOURCES, & ANNOUNCEMENTS CONT'D...

**If you were enrolling in one course, program or degree right now, what would it be?**

*Not sure, too many interests; maybe something in natural science (though not chemistry) and some ancient language, sufficiently obscure.*

**You can invite anyone – alive or dead, real or fictional – to dinner. Who would it be?**

*Umberto Eco, and ask him to tell me how he did so many things at the same time, all with depth and passion, and enjoyment.*

**If you could see any live performance tomorrow, what would it be?**

*Pianist Sviatoslav Richter playing anything he likes.*

**What advice would you give your 18-year-old self?**

*Very difficult question – maybe be more selective, intentional, active, in seeking advice, and not just accepting or rejecting things from random voices around.*

**What's one thing you can't live without?**

*Coffee, or, more seriously, family and friends.*

**What's something that makes you happy to come to work?**

*Interesting colleagues to talk to.*

**Do you have any upcoming projects or initiatives you are looking forward to at work?**

*Yes, a research stay in Japan this coming winter and deepening the collaboration with South Africa on resource communities. And, in Canada, further exploring how local leadership can shape the course of communities, and which forms of strategy make most sense under which conditions.*

**Would you like to introduce yourself to the department? Or maybe there is someone you'd like to recommend? Contact Sasha Wilson ([sawilson@ualberta.ca](mailto:sawilson@ualberta.ca)) for more information.**

## DEPARTMENT ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

### Department Name Change – Phase 1

Following institutional approval of our new name, the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences will become the Department of Geoscience, Geography, and Planning (GGP), effective July 1, 2027. The period leading up to July 1 will be used to introduce and build recognition of the new name while preparing for a coordinated transition across University systems, websites, signage and communications.

For now, department members are encouraged to talk about and promote the approved new name in forward-looking communications, provided it is clear that the change takes effect July 1, 2027. Suggested wording is:

*The Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences will become the Department of Geoscience, Geography, and Planning (GGP) effective July 1, 2027.*

This wording can be used in presentations, meetings and events, recruitment activities, faculty/ research webpages and bios, and communications with students, collaborators and other external stakeholders.

Until June 30, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences (EAS) remains our formal departmental name and should continue to be used where a current official institutional affiliation is required, including formal administrative documents, agreements, contracts and grants. Department members should also continue to use EAS as their primary departmental affiliation in email signatures and publications for now, although the upcoming GGP name can be added as a secondary transition message where useful.

Additional guidance and updates will be provided as we move into the preparation and transition phase in early 2027.

## Build a Bridge AI Innovation Challenge

As part of the Bridging Divides program at the University of Alberta, we are happy to share that the Call for Team Applications for the Build a Bridge AI Innovation Challenge is now open to students!

**Call for student teams:** Build a Bridge AI Innovation Challenge

**Team application deadline:** October 15, 2026

The [Build a Bridge AI Innovation Challenge](#) is an experiential student challenge that invites student teams to design and build an AI-enabled Minimum Viable Product (MVP) addressing real barriers to immigrant inclusion.

This year's challenge focuses on using AI, technology, and human-centred innovation to improve immigrant labour market integration, particularly through better skills recognition and inclusive hiring. Student teams will develop an AI-enabled MVP to help employers better recognize, assess, and trust immigrants' internationally acquired skills, experience, and competencies.

Why participate? Make a social impact while gaining practical experience, expanding your network, building a portfolio-ready AI-enabled MVP, and competing for up to \$4,000 in prizes.

The challenge is open to teams of undergraduate and graduate students at Toronto Metropolitan University, University of British Columbia, University of Alberta, and Concordia University.

Visit [our page](#) for more information.



# BUILD A BRIDGE

## *Innovation Challenge*

## P.S. Warren Presents: WTFeldspar Does Your Prof Do?

This is an opportunity for professors in the Earth and Atmospheric Sciences department to share their research with students, and answer the question, "Aside from teaching, what does my prof do?" This event is a great opportunity for curious students to peek behind the curtain of EAS research at the U of A, and connect with their instructors over shared academic interests in an informal but professional manner. This event will have an opportunity for mingling and questions at the University Club following the presentations.

**When:** Friday October 16, 2026 | 5:00 - 8:00pm

**Where:** ESB 1-39 (presentation at 5pm; The University Club until 8pm)

**P.S. Warren Presents** **COSSA** **ISSS**

## WTFeldspar Does Your Prof Do?

- Part 1: Professor Research Presentations**  
Meet professors in the Earth and Atmospheric Science Department and learn about their research.
- Part 2: Drinks and Networking**  
Get to know EAS professors over drinks at the University Club.

**October 16**  
**5:00 - 8:00 PM**  
5:00 PM - ESB 1-39  
After the Presentation - The University Club until 8:00

## RESEARCH FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

### Canada Water Agency: Mackenzie River Freshwater Ecosystem Initiative

Description: This will fund projects to be implemented by domestic partners of the Mackenzie River Basin that address at least one of the following three program priorities: Advancing Science & Knowledge, Indigenous Knowledge, Capacity Building & Engagement, and Enabling Resiliency & Adaptation.

**RAS Full Application Deadline:** October 21, 2026

**Sponsor Deadline:** October 28, 2026

### Canada Water Agency: Fraser River Freshwater Ecosystem Initiative

Description: This will fund projects within the Canadian portion of the Fraser River Basin that focus on nutrients, contaminants, and/or sediments through at least one of the following priorities: Advancing Science & Knowledge, Collaboration & Engagement, and Taking Action to reduce Nutrients, Contaminants and/or Sediments.

**RAS Full Application Deadline:** October 6, 2026

**Sponsor Deadline:** October 14, 2026

## Call for Submissions

If you would like to submit an event, or information to be included in next month's issue, please email [s.hemrick@ualberta.ca](mailto:s.hemrick@ualberta.ca) by **October 28, 2026**.



## Newsletter Contributors

**Editor:** Sarah Hemrick

**Assistant Editor:** Sherry Eklund

**Contributors:** Rebecca Funk, Marilyn Huff, Murray Gingras, Tara McGee, Anne Myers, Tahya Weiss-Gibbons, Christine Williams, Sasha Wilson, Sarah Woodland, Dean Zaragoza