Inaugural UTCM Fellows Named

Direct support of students is part of UTCM’s education directive. Students in transportation-related programs may be supported by various means including fellowships, scholarships, stand-alone assistantships, and tuition and/or fee awards.

UTCM worked closely this year with the Zachry Department of Civil Engineering at Texas A&M University to assist in the recruiting of outstanding graduate students. As a result, two promising incoming PhD students, Mr. Ben Sperry and Ms. Susan Paulus, have been named 2008 UTCM Fellows. Each Fellowship carries a two year stipend that supplements the student’s departmental assistantship.

Ben Sperry

A native of Springfield, Illinois, Ben Sperry is pursuing a PhD in Civil Engineering at Texas A&M University. In addition to a multi-year UTCM fellowship, he holds an assistantship in the Multi-modal Freight Transportation Programs of the Texas Transportation Institute. Ben earned a Master of Science in Civil Engineering from Texas A&M University and a B.S. in Civil Engineering and Engineering Management from the University of Evansville, Indiana. His past work experience includes participation in the Southwest University Transportation Center (SWUTC) Undergraduate Transportation Scholars Program and an internship position with the Evansville Metropolitan Planning Organization. Ben’s research interests include multimodal freight and passenger transport, the link between travel behavior and the built environment and transportation economics.

Susan Paulus

Susan C. Paulus graduated from the University of Wisconsin in May with dual degrees: Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering and Bachelor of Business Administration in Productions and Operations Management. Next month, Suzie will enter Texas A&M as a UTCM Fellow to pursue a PhD in Engineering. When she began her course work, her goal was to start her own engineering firm. But attending the TRB annual meeting this year opened her eyes to her love of research which she shared with TRB participants and her professors. Now her goals after graduate school include becoming a professor and researcher. With only eight percent of engineering faculty being female, Suzie hopes to be a role model for women in engineering and she looks forward to encouraging women to pursue degrees in technical disciplines.

The UTCM is pleased to enhance the development of the transportation and mobility workforce through the training and support of outstanding students. Inaugural UTCM Fellows Ben and Suzie have set the standard for excellence in our student support programs.

This education initiative involves the collaborative efforts of:

UTCM Fellow Suzie Paulus

UTCM Fellow Ben Sperry
SPOTLIGHT ON TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER

New Web Site Explores Transportation Funding Options

Project Title: A Guide to Transportation Funding Options

Principal Investigator: Tina Geiselbrecht, Associate Transportation Researcher, System Planning, Policy and Environment Research Group, Texas Transportation Institute, Austin Office

As our nation’s transportation demand continues to grow due to population increases and an expanded economy, elected officials at all levels of government are faced with difficult decisions regarding mechanisms to adequately fund the maintenance and expansion of the nation’s transportation systems.

Where does a policy maker go for the concise information and data they need on the options for funding transportation infrastructure improvements?

Thanks to Tina Geiselbrecht, such a resource now exists on the world wide web. With funding from the UTCM and assistance from web site developer Tobey Lindsey at Texas Transportation Institute and Martha Raney Taylor at the UTCM, Geiselbrecht has produced a concise, user-friendly web site called a Guide to Transportation Funding Options, or TFO, for leaders and policy makers. TFO describes the array of transportation funding options that are or may be available for use throughout the country.

“The TFO site describes each funding option and, where possible, offers links to projects that are utilizing a particular type of funding,” says Geiselbrecht. Located within the UTCM web site, the TFO web site is accessible on the UTCM home page, http://utcm.tamu.edu.

“Phase 1 of the project includes funding for highways, and subsequent phases will focus on additional modes of surface transportation,” says Geiselbrecht. “And as we continue to develop the TFO site, we encourage feedback and contributions of material and links by other transportation funding experts.”

It is expected that another UTCM project under the direction of Linda Cherrington, Program Manager of the Transit Mobility Program in TTI’s Houston Office, will provide significant information in the fall for mass transit funding options.

For more information, visit the TFO web site at http://utcm.tamu.edu/tfo

UTCM’s popular and successful colloquium series continued with two additional lunchtime seminars attended by a variety of Texas A&M and TTI staff and students, both in person and remotely by teleconference.

Dr. Doug Shaw  Dr. Sue Chrysler

04.14.2008

“SMILE! You’re on Traffic Light Camera: Applying Stated Choice Modeling to Transportation”

Douglass Shaw, PhD
Professor, Water Resources Policy and Economics, Department of Agricultural Economics, Texas A&M University

A survey technique long used by new product marketers to determine, for example, what type of shampoo consumers might buy, Stated Choice Modeling (SCM) “has a direct application” in transportation projects. Dr. Douglass Shaw had many examples of how SCM might be used by transportation researchers.

Shaw is a professor at Texas A&M University with both the Department of Agricultural Economics and the Department of Recreation, Parks and Tourism Sciences (RPTS).

“Stated Choice Modeling has some advantages in transportation, especially because it gives respondents the chance to choose from several alternatives that don’t yet actually exist,” Shaw told the crowd. For example, SCM can
help determine what factors might be important in establishing new transportation routes or in making improvements to existing ones.

The colloquium title was derived from a project by Agriculture Economics and RPTS graduate students who are using SCM to assess College Station’s existing and future red light camera programs.

In the project, the students are determining how the red light cameras affect driver behavior, as well as road, traffic and pedestrian safety at key intersections in Bryan and College Station. Their preliminary results indicate that the assessed fines are an important attribute of the future program. The speed limit at those intersections also matters.

Dr. Tim Lomax and Dr. Mark Burris are both using SCM on their current UTCM projects, including an examination of the potential for congestion lanes on Texas freeways.

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07.14.2008

“Older Road User Safety and Mobility in Australia and Japan”

Sue Chrysler, PhD, Senior Research Scientist and Manager, Human Factors Group, Center for Transportation Safety, Texas Transportation Institute

What can the Japanese and Australians teach us about traffic safety for older Americans?

This was the topic of discussion at the latest Mobility Colloquium, presented by Dr. Sue Chrysler, manager of Texas Transportation Institute’s Human Factors Group. (cont. on p. 4)
SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH

Improved Demand-Response Productivity and Service Quality through Dispatch Strategies

Principal Investigator: Suzie Edrington

Increasingly, seniors are choosing to retire to rural areas. Aging citizens often have fixed incomes and physical or cognitive disabilities impairing their ability to drive. Public transit for these individuals provides access to medical services and grocery stores and allows them to stay involved in the community.

Transit agencies that serve low density, rural service areas or people with disabilities provide demand-response service. Passengers schedule services in advance using a reservation system to arrange pick-up and drop-off at their origin and destination.

While serving the needs of low density areas and disabled citizens, demand-response service costs are at least five times higher per passenger trip than a fixed-route service.

With increasing demand, higher fuel and insurance costs and tighter budgets, transit agencies are searching for ways to control costs while improving productivity.

Transit agencies using demand-response historically invest in advanced scheduling systems, putting less emphasis on the dispatch function that controls actual service delivery. Yet as much as 40% of scheduled service is changed on the day of service due to user cancellations or no-shows and service interruptions by providers. Effective dispatch is therefore key to managing frequent day-of-service changes, increasing productivity and reducing cost.

"Providers need guidance in improving their dispatch services," says Suzie Edrington, Research Specialist in the Transit Mobility Program of Texas Transportation Institute’s Houston office. With funding from the UTCM, Edrington and her team are conducting research to produce a guidebook to help transit providers emphasize effective dispatch services.

"We have just completed the first phase of the research," reports Edrington. "We began by surveying 42 transit agencies providing demand response services in"
“STUDENT REPORT”
by STI Scholars La Sasha Walker and Adam Earls

STI Scholars Adam Earls and La Sasha Walker conduct tests on an RFID scanner.

The Summer Transportation Institute (STI) goal is to expose high school students to college life and engineering and transportation as a major field of study. In this advanced project, as second year STI students, we became involved in engineering research projects using an emerging technology, Radio Frequency Identification (RFID).

Under the careful guidance Dr. Erick Jones, a world renowned researcher in RFID technologies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, we were exposed to the RFID technology through faculty presentation, lectures, videos and experimentation. In addition, Prairie View A&M undergraduate students Quinton Rodgers and Nadine Ford provided day-to-day knowledge and guidance about college life and classroom experiences.

The design methodology implemented was designed by Dr. Jones’ RFID lab.

In this study our goal was to identify the greatest distance at which the programmable RFID tags can read and play music.

Graduate assistant Angie Lehnert collected data from 42 transit agencies across Texas that provide demand response services.

Edrington and her team, including Jeff Arndt, Research Scientist, in TTI-Houston’s Transit Mobility Program and Texas A&M Masters of Urban Planning student Angie Lehnert (pictured at left), will use results from the case studies to design keys to making demand-response dispatch successful: setting dispatch goals and objectives, staffing according to those goals and objectives, developing policies and procedures for effective operations, communicating “team” responsibilities, and designing and tracking performance measures. The guidebook will outline ways to implement these keys.

Just how much difference can effective management of demand-response transit services make? “With just three percent improvement in service productivity, the average rural demand-response system would save about $65,000 a year,” says Edrington.

The guidebook, entitled “Dispatching Demand-Response – Guidebook to Increasing Productivity and Saving Money” will be offered to public transportation coordinators and operators starting January 2009.
Texas A&M Awards the First Graduate Transportation Planning Certificate

Project Title: Graduate Certificate in Transportation Planning
Principal Investigator: Forster Ndubisi, PhD, ASLA

This past Spring, Mr. Rob Rae received a unique Masters in Urban Planning degree from Texas A&M University: his diploma was accompanied by the first ever Transportation Planning Certificate. The Transportation Certification Program was developed under the direction of Dr. Forster Ndubisi, Professor and Head of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning in the College of Architecture at Texas A&M University, with funding provided by the UTCM. The certification in transportation provided Rob an additional focus area of course work in transportation during his two-year M.U.P. program.

In the certificate program, Rob completed 18 credit hours in transportation-related courses that were comprised of M.U.P. students and graduate students in various engineering disciplines. His instructors included Dr. Eric Dumbaugh, co-PI on the transportation certification project and Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning, Drs. Tim Lomax and Bill Eisele, Research Engineers in the Mobility Analysis Program at Texas Transportation Institute, Dr. Dennis Perkinson, Transportation Modeling Program Manager at TTI, and Dr. Luca Quadriofoglio, Assistant Professor in the Zachry Department of Civil Engineering.

"I am grateful for my experience at Texas A&M and find great value in the certificate that I received," says Rob. "Upon graduation I accepted a great job in Dallas with Kimley-Horn and Associates in their transportation planning group. The knowledge I gained from the courses required for the transportation certificate have greatly benefited me as I transitioned from education to employment."

"The certification is an option for any student at Texas A&M who would like a transportation focus in their graduate training," reports Dr. Ndubisi. "It has application to a wide variety of disciplines, including public health, public policy, parks and recreation, architecture and engineering. By offering this certificate, many more students can expand their career options to include transportation applications."

Six more students are slated to graduate with the Transportation Certificate in Fall 2008 and at least six will follow in Spring 2009. The program has also been formally approved by Texas A&M University, so these graduates will receive not only a separate certificate, but a notation of the certification on their A&M diplomas.