From air, sea, and space, geospatial technology is helping nations monitor one of their biggest and most understated threats: the open ocean.
EXPANDING HORIZONS

Fayetteville State University builds geospatial intelligence curriculum

According to USGIF research, more than 400 U.S. colleges and universities offer a program focused on the geospatial sciences and related fields—and this number is expected to grow. Though Fayetteville State University (FSU) does not have a traditional GEOINT program, it offers unique interdisciplinary opportunities for undergraduate students.

FSU students majoring in geography, intelligence studies, or computer science are offered the opportunity to take courses in geospatial intelligence. Students also benefit from the Center for Defense and Homeland Security, which emphasizes research in STEM education, cybersecurity, national security, and emergency management.

The university further expanded its offerings in 2012 by applying for a research grant from the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency’s (NGA) Academic Research Program (NARP). The awarded initiative supports academic research in GEOINT to further the education of future analysts. FSU received the five-year, $443,000 grant, which includes three option years, and has applied the funds toward establishing a USGIF-accredited GEOINT certificate program. Students who meet high academic standards and graduate from accredited programs receive USGIF’s Geospatial Intelligence Certificate. USGIF accreditation ensures the GEOINT Community has a robust workforce now and in the future.

“We seemed like an ideal choice for a geospatial intelligence certificate because of the pool of students FSU attracts,” said Dr. Rakesh Malhotra, assistant professor and program coordinator of FSU’s geography curriculum.

As a result of its proximity to Fort Bragg, FSU enrolls a large number of active-duty service members and veterans. This military connection also makes it a logical step for the university to offer students the opportunity to develop promising careers in GEOINT.

With the help of the NGA funding, FSU revamped its curriculum and in November achieved USGIF academic accreditation for its GEOINT certificate program, making it the tenth school to be USGIF accredited. The GEOINT certificate is available as a standalone credential or for students jointly obtaining an FSU degree.

“FSU was unique in what they proposed, with sound research and a solid plan on developing the curriculum,” said Dennis Walker, an NGA research and development technologist as well as technical monitor for FSU’s grant. “The faculty includes students in their research opportunities and attends conferences such as USGIF’s GEOINT Symposium. Additionally, FSU is the first HBCU (historically black colleges and universities) with [a GEOINT offering]; this will help other HBCU institutions progress forward to have equal opportunities to develop GEOINT programs.”

Student Larry Watson is pursuing the GEOINT certificate, along with dual bachelor’s degrees in intelligence studies and geography. He is also an Army all-source intelligence technician at Fort Bragg.

“Being in the military, I never had the chance to go to school full-time,” Watson said. “Now I can learn the material and become more

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— Dennis Walker, NGA research and development technologist, and FSU’s grant technical monitor
of a subject matter expert to do my job better and help other analysts understand their jobs better.”

Malhotra and Dr. Adegoke Ademiluyi, government and history department chair and associate professor of geography, are both amazed by the number of inquiries the department has received about the certificate, as well as the excitement fueled by the NGA research grant.

“Achieving the grant has shown our students the power of these [geospatial] tools and what their futures can look like,” said Ademiluyi. “Certification increases the ability to get a job.”

In September 2014, FSU faculty and students were invited to present their research projects at NGA’s NARP Symposium, as well as to update the agency on the university’s GEOINT curriculum progress since receiving the grant. Geography classes have nearly doubled in size compared to the 2013 academic year, and Malhotra expects students will obtain the first batch of GEOINT certificates in spring 2015. Additionally, the school converted an old chemistry lab into a geography lab, which began hosting classes this fall.

A longer-term goal is for FSU to host an event for fellow HBCUs, with hopes that the FSU model will encourage other academic institutions to consider adding GEOINT certificate programs. Malhotra also hopes FSU will someday offer master’s degree level GEOINT coursework.

“I anticipate having the accreditation will bring greater visibility to FSU and our program,” Malhotra said. “We have an amazing outreach at Fort Bragg and interest from many students. With the accreditation, we believe the students are on the right track to becoming GEOINT professionals.”

BY LINDSAY TILTON MITCHELL

FSU STUDENTS presented their research in September at NGA’s Academic Research Program Symposium at the Keck Center in Washington, D.C.

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