

Q&A

Blinded in 1984, geographer **Reginald Golledge** was this year named Faculty Research Lecturer by the University of California, Santa Barbara.



How did you begin on your career path?

In the 1960s, I discovered that a theoretical and quantitative revolution was transforming the previously descriptive field of geography, so I decided to research how people acquire spatial knowledge.

How did sudden blindness affect your career?

I was completely lost. I had no idea how I was going to teach without access to notes, prepared lectures or overheads. Figuring out how to continue my research was even more difficult. One day, two psychologists — Jack Loomis and Roberta Klatzky, both then at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) — asked if they could help. Roberta suggested I find ways to build on my previous mental-map research. They agreed to meet with me weekly and we began 25 years of intense collaboration, which took my research in a new direction towards dissecting spatial cognition. In the process,

I became more competent and was able to continue my academic life while helping other blind people around the world.

What is your greatest scientific achievement?

I pioneered a behavioural approach to human geography to study how humans find their way in the world. More than anything else, I think I opened the field's eyes to the fact that the geography you carry in your mind, your mental map and the way you process spatial information, are just as important as recording the facts of human existence on the surface of Earth. In addition to an objective reality, there is also subjective reality — what is stored in your mind's mental model of the world.

What has given you the most career satisfaction?

I've been developing a personal guidance system for blind travellers that allows them to be completely independent of

guides or guide dogs. Our prototype got a great deal of recognition, and now companies in many countries are producing these guidance systems. They're similar to vehicle-guidance systems, which use GPS and spatial databases or electronic maps.

Do you have any advice for disabled people who want to be scientists?

Disabled people can make long-term career plans, but it takes a strong commitment to their work.

What does this faculty award mean to you?

This is the best because it is given by your peers. It's the highest honour that UCSB faculty can award. It is so nice to know that what I've been doing has not gone unnoticed.

What is your motto?

You don't have to have sight to have vision. ■

Interview by Virginia Gewin. Reginald Golledge sadly died on 29 May.

POSTDOC JOURNAL

Personal peer review



A goal all postdocs share is to publish their work so that they can build a competitive résumé. Recently I realized that the challenges of publishing a manuscript are strikingly parallel to many of the hurdles I will face when seeking a job. A few months ago I had an article published in *Genome Research* (B. J. Venters and B. F. Pugh *Genome Res.* **19**, 360–371; 2009). The process of getting this and other papers published taught me some important lessons about applying for jobs.

First, finding a journal suitable for my manuscript is analogous to finding a position for which I am qualified.

In other words, I seek to publish in a journal that is most relevant to my field and has the highest readership. However, if I misjudge the suitability of a manuscript for a particular journal, then the submission may be an exercise in futility. In the same way, whether in academia or industry, it is critical that I match my skills with the right position. Publishing papers requires tenacity, and this trait extends to mounting a successful job search.

Second, manuscript peer review is much like a job interview because my work is scrutinized and a decision is made one way or another.

During peer review, I want to persuade the reviewers that my work is novel and represents a significant contribution to the field. Similarly, in a job interview, my goal is to convince others that my unique blend of skills and experiences will be an asset to the university, institution or company to which I am applying. Two phrases I hope to hear in the future are, "Your manuscript has been accepted" and "You're hired". ■

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IN BRIEF

Stem cells in Maryland

A subsidiary of Korea-based biotech RNL Bio is expanding into Germantown, Maryland, where it is building a stem-cell research and development and manufacturing facility. The 930-square-metre building will be completed by the end of June, according to Donna Lee, director of business development, who says the company is hiring 50 lab technicians. By 2014, the company expects to double its floor space and hire stem-cell researchers. "There is a need for continuing studies on characteristics of the cells themselves and different disease indications," Lee says. RNL Biostar and parent company RNL Bio carry out research on therapies based on adult-derived stem cells.

Nuclear revival

The number of PhD degrees granted in nuclear engineering in the United States continues to increase, according to a survey by the Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, which identified a 72% jump — from 74 to 127 — between 2000 and 2008. The total rose 43% from 2007 to 2008, the survey found. Graduate enrolments have also increased each year since 2001, to 1,225 in 2008. "The promise of a nuclear renaissance has undoubtedly helped to drive increasing graduation and enrolment rates in nuclear engineering," says Eric Abelquist, a vice-president of Oak Ridge Associated Universities, which manages the institute for the US Department of Energy.

Minority health concern

The US National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities is seeking to boost the diversity of the US biomedical workforce. The centre, part of the National Institutes of Health, has set up a two-year pilot research grant funded with \$500,000 of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act monies. Eligible research must be related to minority health or health inequalities and focus on diseases most often suffered by people in poor, rural or minority communities. The pilot programme could become permanent depending on its success, according to spokeswoman Kester Williams. It aims to funnel more biomedical researchers from diverse backgrounds into the field and increase the pool of those researching minority health or health disparities.