Jack Cheng

Team: Canada

Participating Year(s): 2018

Current position/affiliation: Graduating from UBC with BSc in Microbiology and Immunology, class of 2022, starting graduate school in September 2022 for an MSc in Geography at the University of Toronto

The Meaning of Geography to Me

Geography is more than just an area of study; it is a way of thinking. Over the many years of learning geography, I have come to a greater understanding of what it represents today. In the simplest sense, geography is the study of space and place. From taking university-level geography courses and meeting other students during my time as the VP Academic at UBC's Geography Students' Association, I discovered the diverse topics of study among professors and students, combining methods used in the sciences and arts. The sub-discipline I was intrigued by the most was GIS and spatial analysis because it creates a geographical framework that could solve problems in many careers. Since GIS utilizes maps as the main visualization tool, it is an opportunity to apply my passion for cartography. Although I majored in life sciences during my undergrad due to career aspirations in medicine and lab research, I wanted to incorporate geographical thinking into my career. From my GIS professor Dr. Brian Klinkenberg, I was introduced to health geography. I thought that would be a great way to incorporate geographical thinking and life sciences, so that was the topic I selected for my graduate school applications. I will be going to the University of Toronto, where I will be completing an MSc in Geography under the supervision of Dr. Matthew Adams, where the research topic is using GIS and spatial science to study air pollution and human health. The research group is truly interdisciplinary, with students completing previous degrees ranging from engineering to life sciences but are all united by the desire to study using geography as a way of thinking to solve complex problems.
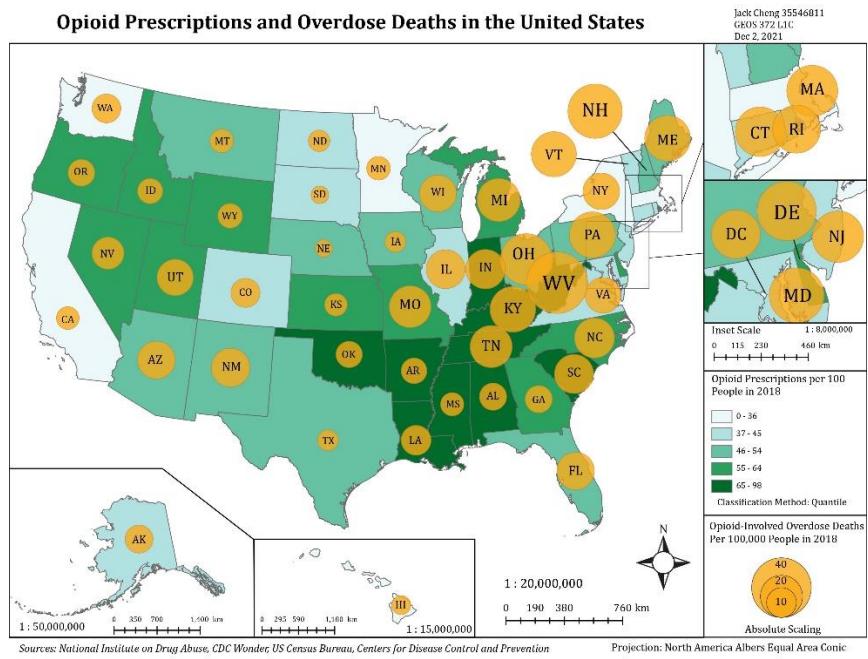
Impact of iGeo Preparation on my Life

Most importantly, iGeo was an opportunity to meet the brightest geography students and professionals from around the world, and this network I had joined was valuable in creating more meaningful experiences even after my participation in iGeo. Even though I had entered university in 2019 and was not eligible to compete in iGeo that year, I became a volunteer at the 2019 iGeo in Hong Kong, where I reconnected with students I met in 2018, and made new connections with new participants and local volunteers. In 2019, I was elected as the Vice President Academic of UBC's Geography Students Association, where I developed my leadership skills and connected with UBC's geography community. I started an online group called MapSquad in the spring of 2020, when the pandemic had just started. I managed the group alongside my friend and iGeo teammate, Ben Woodward. Since everything was moved online, it was a way to find something meaningful to do during the pandemic, and also a way to stay connected with the people that we met internationally during the competition. Every month, we hosted an online mapathon, where we mapped on OpenStreetMap together through video conferencing calls. In the fall of 2021, I founded a new YouthMappers chapter at UBC. YouthMappers is an international network of university-student-led chapters that does humanitarian mapping on OpenStreetMap, benefitting humanitarian organizations such as the Red Cross or Médecins Sans Frontières. Our work assists with development issues such as access to healthcare and disaster prevention planning. The creation of this chapter allowed motivated students and professionals at my university to make connections with each other and the greater mapping community.

Ideas for Promoting Geography

Here is a map I made for the final project in a university cartography class. It is about opioid drug prescriptions and deaths in the US. Geography has applications in many disciplines, including public health.

Opioid Prescriptions and Overdose Deaths in the United States

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GEOS 372 L1C
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Inset Scale   1 : 8,000,000
0   115   230   460 km

Opioid Prescriptions per 100 People in 2018

- 0 - 36
- 37 - 45
- 46 - 54
- 55 - 64
- 65 - 98

Classification Method: Quantile

Opioid-Involved Overdose Deaths Per 100,000 People in 2018

40
20
10

Absolute Scaling

1 : 20,000,000
0   190   380   760 km

N

1 : 50,000,000
0   350   700   1,400 km

1 : 15,000,000
0   295   590   1,180 km

Sources: National Institute on Drug Abuse, CDC Wonder, US Census Bureau, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Projection: North America Albers Equal Area Conic

5 July, 2022