

Meet the Councillors of the Geography Teachers Association of NSW & ACT

Dr Paul Batten

This is my second year as VP of the association. I really enjoy being amongst passionate Geographers who think, talk and act on that passion to help shape the future of Geography in NSW. Some of the challenges and opportunities for our association are directional – what we want to do and how we can accomplish those things. I enjoy thinking about this stuff. My PhD – done many years ago, was on understanding the philosophies, perspectives and information frameworks in the subject, across physical and human Geography.

I also enjoy acting as an online learning coordinator for the association, managing NESA-accredited courses with Katerina Stojanovski. We have ten courses now, and I think we can be proud of what we've achieved there. We continue to think about how we can further these efforts in sustainable ways.

One of the most important things I try and encourage in my students in the classroom is their capacity to discuss issues in the world. I strongly believe that not only is everything Geography, but also that learning Geography enables students to become better people – more informed, more capable of thinking about issues, and more open to hearing different perspectives. On that “everything is Geography” line – I do think Geography is a superb subject because it combines literacy and numeracy, science, culture and language, politics, economics, etc., etc., etc. Geography is a strong choice for senior years including because all other subjects



complement it, and because it complements all other subjects by providing context and perspective to those subjects. Ditto with the associations big push for our subject to be thought of with STEM. STEM without geo can be directionless. STEM with geo is applied and strategic.

I have some extra-curricular interests that are directly related to Geography. Life is a bit busy living in the Illawarra and working in Sydney, and having four children of my own, but when we get a chance my wife and I love to go orienteering or rogaining. Rogaining is like orienteering but over a longer timeframe, a larger mapped area, and rather than an A to B to C event it's a choose your own path event (you may go B to A and leave C). I also enjoy owning an electric car, not only because of the sustainability of the thing, but also because it is a pretty sweet ride. Finally, I enjoy following politics. Not as a member of any party, just as a person who cares about our futures, a.k.a. I'm a Geographer ;-)

Kieran Bonin

I decided to become a GTA councillor this year to give back to the Geography community. The GTA helped me out when I started teaching through their Facebook pages, Bulletins and various workshops they run. Being in a school that had not run a Senior Geography class in quite a while, the GTA gave me confidence in delivering content and case studies that were engaging to students. This year I have contributed to the Bulletin and am helping out with the Young Geographers Awards.

I like to develop hands-on lessons for my students. I have made my own surveying poles and infiltrometers to be used out in the field and the use of other kinesthetic tools like play-dough and lego in the

classroom. I find students remember the concepts from these hands-on lessons rather better than if I were to use a worksheet or textbook. With all the covid restrictions slowly easing I have finally gotten a field work week up to Cairns running for my year 12 class. Through these techniques we have now got two preliminary Geography classes in 2022 and the more Geography students the better the world will be!



Dr Susan Caldis, President GTA NSW & ACT



I've been a member of GTA NSW & ACT since 2005 and joined Council in 2011. GTA NSW & ACT has been a big part of my journey in geography education as a Head Teacher, Curriculum Development Officer, PhD researcher and now as a Lecturer in geography education working with pre-service teachers, education academics and

geography academics. Being part of Council has been a constant source of inspiration where we are not afraid to explore opportunities for enriching and extending understanding about geography and how to teach it. Since 2011 I've held the roles of Councillor (2011, 2012), Honorary Secretary (Oct 2016 – 2019) and been President twice (Oct 2013 – Oct 2016 and Oct 2019 – present), which also means I've been an Immediate Past President (Oct 2016 – Oct 2019).

My contributions are focused on advocacy for geography. As geography educators we are all

compelled to be ambassadors for our subject – we are a small pool! If we don't stand up for our subject who will? I see my role on Council as being one who is fearless in leading and demonstrating the possibilities for geography education in connection with an evidence base – so we are grounded and empowered by clear reasoning.

Key areas of my leadership in the Association focus on developing the practitioner and developing the subject. To develop the practitioner, I actively promote the GEOG Standards as a pedagogical and reflective tool to enhance individual professional practice as geography educators. To develop our subject, I am leading the Association in actioning recommendations of the strategic plan for Geography which include raising the profile of our subject through a Geography and STEM agenda, raising awareness about the extent and implications out-of-field teaching in geography, deepening connections with academic geographers, and connecting the work of GTA NSW & ACT to a national scale.

Lorraine Chaffer

GTA NSW has been a part of my teaching life since day 1. I would eagerly await the arrival of the Geography Bulletin to the faculty (hard copy only), eventually becoming a personal member because I wanted my own copies of the Geography Bulletin (the staff copy was always 'lost' on someone's desk). For every GTA conference, I would be the first at my school volunteering to attend and hoping no one else would want to go. I loved the exposure to new resources and mixing with like-minded professionals who loved their geography as much as I did - sharing teaching ideas and resources. Creating new resources has been a passion of my teaching career and the opportunity to join GTA Council provided the opportunity to share my ideas and resources wider than my local community.

After many years and whilst presenting at one particular HSC Exam Review Day I was approached by Susan Bliss and encouraged by a colleague, to join the GTA Council. I had always thought that living out of Sydney would preclude me this role, so I joined as a co-opted member to see if I could make it work, and eventually sought election at the AGM. It was only at that time that I realised the council was principally run by practicing or retired classroom or university geography teachers from a mix of public and private schools. Despite the long



Exploring the world. North Cape – as far north as I could go in Norway

trip to Sydney for council meetings (Zoom or Teams did not exist) several times a year I loved being able to contribute to the support the association provided to teachers through the provision of resources and professional learning opportunities. It was exciting as a 'young' teacher to be working alongside geographers that I admired and respected such as Susan Bliss, Nick Hutchinson, and Grant Kleeman. Before long I had contributed my first bulletin article and was touring NSW to provide professional learning in regional towns. I was fortunate that my school principals all supported me and saw the benefit for myself and the school of my involvement in a professional association.

GTA NSW & ACT COUNCILLORS

Throughout my time at GTA I have taken on many roles including councillor, Vice President and President, conference organiser, HSC Exam Preparation lecture coordinator and editor. Through these roles my belief has always been that GTA is there to enrich the teaching lives of NSW geography teachers while at the same time advocating for geography when situations arose that needed a response on behalf of teachers and to promote the subject. I took these roles very seriously and still do.

Over recent years I have been proud to have played a role in a team that has transitioned GTA to a digital world and provided support for teachers in a time that has seen a rapid growth in technology, new pedagogical demands and practices, the advent of STEM, increased accountability, and an increasing number of 'out of field' teachers. It has been challenging to our keep support relevant with the added complexity created by the COVID-19 Pandemic. During this time GTA has modernised their website; provided conference events offering teachers choice to match their needs; introduced a webinar program under the leadership of Sharon McLean; developed anytime E learning courses under the leadership of Paul Batten and Katerina Stojanovski; transitioned to online council meetings; delivered digital conferences and symposiums and HSC support packages during Covid, and produced Geography Bulletins that are resource rich – with a balance of teaching resources, advocacy, and professional reading.

Today, I still have as much passion for supporting classroom teachers as when I began as a GTA councillor. While stepping down from many council responsibilities, I see myself increasingly as a mentor to councillors who will take on leadership roles in the future, providing historical knowledge and practice and my ideas and visions for the future of geography. Succession planning has always been a part of my mindset and under the leadership of Susan Caldis and future leaders I look forward to seeing GTA NSW & ACT continue to transition and adapt to meet the needs of geography teachers in NSW and ACT.



Exploring the world. Adding a stone to a travellers cairn in Morocco.

Amy Freshwater

This is my first year as a GTA councillor and I hope to contribute to the work that the GTA does by helping to provide teaching resources and professional development to those teaching geography in schools. I have seven years experience teaching both junior and senior geography so I fit somewhere in the middle of the really experienced teachers and the beginning teachers. As a beginning teacher I relied upon the experience of others and my fellow teachers' resources, so I hope I can help the new beginning teachers when it comes to this. I am also still learning myself and often look to the GTA for resources or advice when coming up with new teaching resources or lessons. I have a strong interest in sustainability and believe the strong links we make to sustainability in geography make it a pivotal subject for our students' future.

A practical strategy I use in my geography classroom is getting students to debate a controversial topic. This engages students with the topic in a different way, and challenges them to think critically and construct evidence-based arguments for one side of the argument. I run the debate quite informally and find that the students find this activity fun, they learn about both sides of the argument and therefore it gives them multiple perspectives, which we know are so important in geography.



James Harte



I am an early career teacher at Roseville College on Sydney's North Shore. This is my first year on the Council for the GTA NSW & ACT and my primary role so far has been supporting the implementation of online learning modules for Stage 4, and Stage 6 professional learning. This

offering of the GTA provides step-by-step guidance on concepts and content of the NSW Geography syllabus, whilst also offering relevant and practical teaching strategies, in addition to programming guidance. The aim is to upskill experienced teachers, whilst also supporting out-of-field Geography teachers.

In furthering the efforts of the GTA NSW & ACT in

supporting its members, I would like to offer a practical teaching strategy to the readers that they can access at any time.

One thing I have benefitted from my own attendance at the GTA NSW & ACT Annual Conferences is the provision of new, innovative, and effective teaching strategies. One I would like to share is the use of 'visual verbs', which Khya Brooks, Chantelle Hicklin, and Jade Cunningham presented at the 2021 Annual Conference. One of many innovative and effective teaching strategies presented on the day, 'visual verbs' provides visual components to directive terms, to better enable students to understand the requirements of directive terms when answering questions. These cater to diverse learning needs in the classroom and enable Stage 4 and Stage 5 students grapple with the sometimes complex requirements of the directive terms.

Note: The visual verbs document has been added as an appendix to supplement this edition of the Bulletin.

Christopher Jenkins

This is my first year as a counsellor on the GTA NSW & ACT. So far, I have contributed to the HSC Examination Analysis and am looking to increase my involvement in small group professional development across the Junior and Senior Courses. I decided to join as I've received strong and consistent support from the association over the last ten years, particularly through professional learning, conferences and developing strong professional networks, and wanted to formally provide that support for others to support the growth of geographical education in NSW.

As a Geography Educator, I privilege geographical thinking in the classroom to support students to develop a deep understanding of geographical processes and content to create transferable knowledge which can be applied in a variety of situations and contexts. This is aligned to the AGTA *GEOGstandard 3*. I want young geographers to be presented with current geographical issues, be able to identify why they are occurring (linked to concepts) and be able to confidently and capably apply an informed opinion to determine what action is appropriate. My Geography is promoting a functional understanding to make clear connections between geographic thinking, concepts and its application in the real world.

Practical strategies I use in the classroom to achieve this



are Harvard Project Zero *Visible Thinking* routines. I prioritise *what makes you say that?* and *the explanation game* to promote process and critical thinking when exploring geographic content and concepts.

John Lewis



In my 38 years of teaching HSIE (the last 18 as Head Teacher), I have had the experience and privilege of working with many talented and passionate Geography teachers. In that time, I have been fortunate to work on three significant professional associations: the North-West

Secondary Social Science Curriculum Committee, Central Coast Social Science Teachers Association, and I have been a Councillor with the GTA NSW & ACT for the past 20 years.

As a Councillor on GTA NSW & ACT, I have supported all of their major events and programs including the Annual Conferences, Regional Conferences, HSC Student Days, Arthur Phillip (now Young Geographer) Awards, and HSC Marking and Skills Workshop initiatives. I have also assisted in Constitutional amendments, GTA NSW & ACT resource storage, and administration matters. New challenges for me have included webinars, online learning, and of course Zoom meetings!

My practical advice to all (experienced and new) Geography teachers is to have a checklist of important requirements and constantly refer to it. It would include the following as a start:

- Know your current syllabus (is it readily accessible?)
- Programs (school model, samples from GTA NSW & ACT)
- Content
- Classroom/Online Activities
- Assessments
- Fieldwork (Field Study Centres – Local, State, National)
- Skills
- Resources (texts, online, neighbouring schools, colleagues, GTA bulletin, Professional Associations)
- HSC Requirements (possibly HSC Marking Experience)
- Professional Development (requirements, avenues, Facebook groups)

I look forward to continuing my support of the GTA NSW & ACT program and to meeting many more of you passionate and inspirational teachers.

Sharon McLean

As a member of the Geography Teachers Association NSW and ACT Council for twenty years I have been committed to supporting teachers through a variety of forums. Geography has a key role in educating our students about environmental sustainability and assisting teachers to navigate the changing world views in this area. GTA provides teachers with strategies and opportunities to assist students in their learning so that they are empowered to act to build a hope filled environmental future.



Alex Pentz

I have been on Council for three years and have loved having the opportunity to help provide Geography teachers with professional learning and resources. This year I have been working on completing some book reviews of resources that can help us as professionals expand our knowledge of geographical issues. I am also currently completing a PhD part-time researching how students are being prepared as global citizens through social science curricula in secondary schools. My research intersects with my passion for Geography and has so far revealed the key place Geography has in effectively preparing students for the global challenges they are going to be solving.

A strategy that I enjoy using in my Geography classroom is the 'Zoom In' visible thinking routine. In this routine you find an interesting image and then crop the image to only show a very small section of it. Students have to guess what the image is of as you slowly reveal more and more of the entire picture. It is a great lesson hook, and gets students interested in the topic you are looking at. It also helps students to practice noticing details and to think geographically.



Martin Pluss



What do you see as your role as a Geography teacher?

My role is to enable Geography students to become geographers.

What is your teaching background (experience/education)?

Since 1984 I have taught in four independent schools including including my current school Northholm Grammar. I have professionally grown by serving on committees of the Geography Teachers Association, Geographical Society of NSW, Australian College of Educators, NSWAIS and NESAs.

How did you get interested in your subject area?

I think I have always been a geographer with a reasonable spatial awareness of the human and natural environment. My Honours Thesis was on the Historical Geography of Strathfield and my Masters in Education had a geographical angle, focusing on Asia and the Pacific.

How would you describe your educational/teaching philosophy and how it influences how you teach?

I believe in depth before breadth in teaching to enhance learning. This is facilitated by academic intentionality, encouraging students to use deeper knowledge as evidence to analyse broader geographical issues. The key

influence on my teaching is that I encourage students to engage in the natural and human environment of their local area.

What do you enjoy most/what excites you most about your subject area?

Observing the lightbulb moment when a student sees the relevance of geography. Geography becomes real beyond the classroom and students learn how to make a difference in the world.

What would you like to see in the future?

A world where more Geography students become geographers, implementing their geographical knowledge in their personal, family and professional lives.

What is one thing most people don't know about geography?

There are many employment opportunities for students by 'being geographers'. Geographers know how to balance perspectives and work sustainably within the natural and human environment.

What is an interesting thing about you personally?

I am an ultrarunner with a goal to run around Sydney. To date I have run Gosford to the Opera House, Pennant Hills to Penrith, Pennant Hills to Richmond, Pennant Hills to Manly, Manly to Watsons Bay and Liverpool to Pennant Hills via Strathfield and Chatswood. Anyone like to join me?

Katerina Stojanovski

I joined GTA council in November 2019 to support and contribute to the Geography community. My motto is 'make every lesson count' and learning should be fun and rewarding. It is important to me that all the students that I teach are engaged authentically during class time. An example lesson to teach complex ideas is "The carbon cycle game" where students take on the role of a carbon atom as it cycles through each of the spheres to help them understand the short term and long-term carbon cycle. This type of experiential learning 'learning by doing' assists students in retaining information and facts as they remember the experience which is a key component of the learning process. During my time on council this year, I have been involved in projects including writing, administering and marketing the NESA accredited Open Learning Courses with Dr Paul Batten, writing articles for the *Geography Bulletin*, Bulletin Guest Editor and supporting the organisation of the STEM symposium.



I am fortunate to be in the company of like-minded people (fellow GTA councillors and work colleagues) – all dedicated Geographers wanting to support and inspire their fellow colleagues, students and the wider geography community on best practice geography education.

Rebecca Sutcliffe

This is my second year as a GTA councillor but my fourth year as a member of the GTA. I discovered the GTA when I was at Macquarie University studying a Bachelor of Arts with Human Geography as my Major and a Bachelor of Education Secondary degree with Geography Teaching Methodology units. As a second career teacher, having worked in the Finance industry in England and Australia for over 20 years, I found myself surrounded by school leavers and others who had first hand experience of the Australian and NSW Geography Curriculum and education system. Having completed my Geography GCSE and 'A' Level in England in the early 90s I was very unfamiliar with the whole NSW educational process. In my corporate career I understood the importance of networking and how valuable having a strong network of professionals around you was. So, becoming a member of the GTA was, for me, an easy decision. As a member I took advantage of the workshops, presentations, online resources as well as attending the annual conference which developed my relationships with other experienced geography professionals. I attended the AGTA conference on the Gold Coast in 2019 and saw how the State GTAs came together under one roof to provide a richness of geographical knowledge and experience. As an early career teacher, I found being a member of the GTA provided me with a place to refer to for resources, opinions and knowledge. In late 2020 I reached out to the Council and expressed my interest in becoming a councillor. I attend meetings regularly to



observe what was being discussed and planned, and I really enjoyed what I heard. In my corporate career, as the Executive Assistant to the Head of Equities at a large corporate Investment Bank, I was highly organised in administration and regularly involved in planning and running large scale events. Traits I knew would be beneficial to the GTA.

How have I contributed to the success of the GTA so far?

In 2021/22 I hosted several webinar events under the 'From the Classroom' specifically:

I connected, via my network, with UK Geography teacher Laura Pelligrini, also known by her Twitter

handle as [@missgeog92](#). Laura spoke about the positive impact of Geography classroom displays and how she adapts these year upon year. Laura ran through a number of Geography related resource ideas and made a few suggestions on how to survive online teaching as well as the return to face to face teaching.

Co-hosted a Geography Extracurricular Activities Webinar which focused on explaining the logistics and road map to creating the Students of the World lunchtime initiative mentioned earlier. As well as providing teachers with extension ideas to help keep their students globally connected.

I hosted the 'Unpacking the HSC Geo Exam' seminar. This professional learning was aimed at making teachers more adept at assisting their students to interpret and

answer questions, and thus better prepare students for the HSC Trials and Examinations.

One practical strategy I use when planning my geography classes is to ask myself "How will the students know this is a Geography lesson?", "What makes my lesson geographical?". These questions make me stop and think. To think about how I can make sure my students understand the relevance, importance and the connection to the topic we are studying, to geography as a whole but to themselves. I would highly recommend giving this a try.

Looking ahead at the back end of 2022 and beyond I am working alongside other councillors on the 2022 HSC Geo Exam analysis as well as contributing more resources via the GTA *Geography Bulletins*.

GTA NSW & ACT Support for Teachers and Students

Professional Learning events

- **Conferences / Symposiums**
- **Webinars**
- **Online Learning courses** – Anytime PL

Online Social Media Support

- **Facebook page**
- **HSC Teachers Group**
- **Primary Teachers Group**
- **Twitter @gtanswact**

Resources

- **Geography Bulletin**
- **Geography Bulletin Guide** (Find any article)
- **Classroom Posters**
- **Scoop.it** media curation site. Topics K–12

For Students

- **HSC Exam preparation support**
- **Young Geographer Awards**

Keep up to date with upcoming events. Visit the GTA website [HERE](#)

