

# Global Read

BY TOMMY NEWTON

**GLOBALIZATION IS THE DRIVING FORCE IN TODAY'S SOCIETY AND DAVID KEELING WANTS TO PROVIDE THE ROADMAP FOR STUDENTS AND COMMUNITIES, GOVERNMENTS AND POLICYMAKERS. "OUR CHALLENGE AS EDUCATORS IS REALLY TO TEACH AS MANY PEOPLE AS POSSIBLE ABOUT THE WORLD AROUND US," DR. KEELING SAID. "BECAUSE IF YOU MAKE DECISIONS AND YOU MAKE POLICY WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE AND PLACES THEN YOUR POLICES ARE DOOMED TO FAILURE BECAUSE YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND THE IMPLICATIONS."**

Geography and science is the keys to understanding, according to Dr. Keeling, head of Western Kentucky University's Department of Geography and Geology.

"If you're going to understand people or places and how society structures itself, you have to understand geography," Dr. Keeling said.

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A lack of understanding of geography and geopolitical issues has been evident in the wake of the September 11 attacks on America, he said. Most Americans – from media commentators to government officials – don't understand the economic, social and geographic issues facing nations like Afghanistan or Pakistan.

Geographers like Dr. Keeling can analyze the human development aspects and help provide policy direction for those making crucial decisions. "Good scholarship should not only be for intellectual purposes, it should be for practical purposes as well," he said.

For the past 15 years, much of Dr. Keeling's research

and writing has focused on spatial development, economic, global trade and transportation issues facing Latin America. His published works on the region include "Buenos Aires: Global Dreams, Local Crises"; "Contemporary Argentina: A Global Perspective"; and chapters on transportation issues in "Regional Development and Planning for the 21st Century" and "World Cities in a World System." He has also published a number of articles in journals specializing in research on developing regions of the world.

Dr. Keeling remains keenly interested in how other developing nations are coping with the demands of globalization. "We're much more globally connected now technologically, politically and economically than at any time in human history," he said. "If you think about it, now for the first time we can make anything anywhere on the planet and sell anything anywhere on the planet."

An exciting new opportunity in the global arena for Western is research and development opportunities in China and Dr. Keeling has begun working on several exciting projects. With his colleagues in the Hoffman Environmental Research Institute, a research center in the Department of Geography and Geology, Dr. Keeling is helping to develop a long term, interdisciplinary study on the intersection of economic development, environmental change, regional policy, tourism, and resource use in southern China. "This research will engage undergraduates and graduates in development issues of critical importance to China over the coming decades," he said. "But it will also

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contribute to stronger relations between scientists in our two countries and will help us to understand more clearly this very important nation of over 1.2 billion people." The development of new technologies and research methodologies in the Department, such as Geographic Information Science (GIS) and dynamic spatial modeling, is providing new opportunities for students and opening new research areas for Dr. Keeling and his colleagues. "It's an exciting time to be in geography and the sciences at Western," he said.

By traveling to other countries and conducting research, Dr. Keeling gains a better understanding of people's problems and how governments respond to those problems. "We don't live in a homogenous environment spatially. Different parts of the city have different characteristics, different landscape features, different economic implications, different economic features."

Dr. Keeling is in a unique position to help students, community leaders, government officials, policymakers and others understand the role geography plays in the globalization. "That business experience exposed me to a lot of global issues," Dr. Keeling said. In the late 1980s, he decided that geography "was the place to be" and he became interested in Latin America. Dr. Keeling received his bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees at the University of Oregon.

Since the 1960s, the native of Cheltenham, England has traveled to about 170 countries.

"I've always been a traveler," Dr. Keeling said. "When I was 10 years old, my family migrated from England out to Australia. We went out on a migrant ship, sailed through the Suez Canal and visited Egypt and Yemen and I really got entranced and enthralled with different peoples, places and cultures."

But his interest in geography also grew out of his experience in the business world. In 1979, he received a degree in business from North Sydney College in Sydney, Australia. He spent much of the 1970s and 1980s in business-related positions.

"I really became interested in this whole notion of human development," including the different ways of thinking about how society develops and how place really matters, he said. That can be a challenge, especially when many Americans have limited geographic knowledge and don't understand global issues. "It's a big mission," he said. "It's a tall order to successfully spread the gospel of geography to society."

"Part of what I do in my research, in my classes and in my public service work around the country and around the world is to really try and promote that perspective that we really have to think about how people and place interlock," he said.



But through his work as a faculty member, National Councilor for the American Geographical Society, and with other groups, Dr. Keeling is striving to bring a multidisciplinary approach to global issues. "You can't solve problems from a single perspective because problems don't evolve like that," he said. "It doesn't matter what career you choose, whether it's business, planning or science, you've really got to look at things from a global perspective."

For example, Dr. Keeling is part of a Latin American studies program that includes Spanish, anthropology, political science, history and geography courses, is working with other administrators on strengthening the University's Asian studies program and helps promote the Study Abroad programs.

Dr. Keeling, who frequently travels abroad with other faculty members and with students, believes each student should have international experiences before leaving Western. "I'm a very strong promoter of a globalization perspectives, not just in terms of the impacts that globalization is having but the problems that globalization is causing on human development." In Dr. Keeling's research and travels he observes the impacts on human development that aren't limited to the geopolitical issues. In traveling the world, "you get to see the powerful impact of Western culture."

A long-term project for Dr. Keeling is a textbook on the cultural geography of popular music. "I've always had an interest in popular music," said Dr. Keeling, who was drummer in a rock band in the 1960s. The idea for the textbook stemmed out of his courses in the geography of rock 'n' roll and popular music. "Geography is such a neat discipline and is incredibly exciting," he said. "It's really one of the best jobs in the world." Geography is also a job and field that requires more than the basics of memorizing countries, capitals and rivers. "That side of geography is very important but that's only a small percentage of what geography is," he said. "Geography is about analyzing and interpreting the human environment relationship and understanding how things work globally, regionally and locally."

Through his travels, research and professional activities, Dr. Keeling is "somewhat of a global ambassador for Western and its programs." "At a national and international level through my work, Western Kentucky University gets a lot of exposure. Not only do I carry the flag of geography with me when I go, but I carry the flag of Western Kentucky University," said Dr. Keeling, who has visited about 50 countries since coming to WKU in 1993. "There's a lot of global work to be done," he said. Western is on the way to becoming successful as a comprehensive, nationally recognized institution by taking advantage of its global opportunities.