Geographer Is Driven by Urban Transportation Needs

Daily bus rides in Seoul led to fascinating research for Changjoo Kim, assistant professor of geography.

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Changjoo Kim's initial interest in transportation and how it affects everyday life started to roll during bus rides he took as a student in Seoul, South Korea.

Now, just a short walk away from the Clifton Avenue bus stops in front of McMicken Hall, he has joined the Department of Geography as an assistant professor. Wherever Kim settles or studies, however, his research and teaching interests center on geographic information science, urban transportation, networks, location analysis and spatial modeling.

"While I was on the bus to school, I was thinking about how to avoid traffic jams and how to improve the system," Kim says.

"Traffic volume represents many aspects of urban environments: how a city grows over time, how land use and land cover change over time, how housing markets or retail fluctuates and how people travel to work every day. Behind all these, transportation plays a major role in explaining the urban phenomena."

Guided to UC through a friend and former UC employee, Kim was attracted to the university's urban research institute status, "since my research is mostly based on urban settings," he says.

That work could benefit the road-weary public in many ways.

"For example, the Cincinnati Metropolitan Statistical Area might consider my research findings and perspectives in terms of public transit planning, including current bus routes or future light-rail transit if necessary," Kim says.

"The Ohio Department of Transportation can utilize my research to address many transportation issues such as traffic signs, traffic congestion, etc."

Kim, who was born and raised in South Korea, arrived in the United States in 1997. He earned his PhD at The Ohio State University in 2004, followed by four years as an assistant professor at Minnesota State University in Mankato.

He's "very energetic and enthusiastic" as an instructor, he notes, and has enjoyed the interdisciplinary aspects of his research. In his case, that can mean working with programs including urban planning, mathematics, statistics, economics and civil engineering.

He loves equally, he says, research and applying that research to teaching.

"Oftentimes, teaching motivates me to extend my research areas," he notes. "I am a strong believer that teaching and research are interrelated."
In one of his undergraduate classes, Kim recalls, he learned that "without geography we don’t know where we are – so be spatial and think spatially," he says. More than 80 percent of the data in the world has a location component, he adds.

"So I am very proud of myself being a geographer with spatial thinking," he says.

Kim – a "tennis maniac" who hopes to find tennis buddies on campus – has enjoyed "full and endless" support to pursue what he really loves from his PhD advisor and his mother.

And the road to the future is ripe with possibilities in his area of study.

"I am still in the very early stages of my career," he says. "I strongly believe my job here will guide and lead me to the next stage of my educational journey."