

Deanna van Dijk, FYRES Professor

Dr. Deanna van Dijk is a physical geographer who specializes in aeolian geomorphology. Because few people understand what she means by that, the terminology is explained in the side bar.

Dr. van Dijk's interests took a number of years to develop. In high school, she discovered her love of physical geography. As an undergraduate student (Redeemer University College/McMaster University), she realized her fascination with geomorphology. Her introduction to coastal dunes occurred when she started her graduate studies (University of Waterloo). A highlight of her graduate work was living in a provincial park on the north shore of Lake Ontario for several months each winter to do field experiments on winter aeolian processes.

Dr. van Dijk moved to Michigan in 1999 to join the Calvin College faculty in the Department of Geology, Geography and Environmental Studies. Within a year, she was working with Calvin College students to set up an investigation of Lake Michigan coastal dunes. The original study area in Hoffmaster State Park continues to be a site for monitoring dune changes with a record of measurements from October 2000 to the present. Since 2000, numerous Calvin students have held paid undergraduate research positions studying the Lake Michigan coastal dunes in Hoffmaster State Park and at a variety of Ottawa County locations.

The idea for FYRES grew from the combination of Dr. van Dijk's interests in teaching core science courses, working with undergraduate research students, and providing opportunities for students to explore vocations in the geosciences. She is grateful to the many other faculty and research students who participated in developing and implementing the ideas. FYRES was first implemented in September 2011, which makes Fall 2017 the 7th FYRES year. Bringing FYRES students and Mentors to the dunes each fall semester (with logistics organized by the FYRES Coordinator) continues to be a distinct highlight of Dr. van Dijk's dune research!

Definitions

Geography is a spatial science that studies the Earth: natural and human environments and patterns, including the relationships between humans and their environments.

Physical geographers focus on the physical processes and environments of Earth: weather, climate, soils, landforms, etc.

“Geomorphology” is the study of landforms, and “aeolian” refers to the wind. Therefore, aeolian geomorphologists study landforms shaped by the wind, such as coastal dunes.