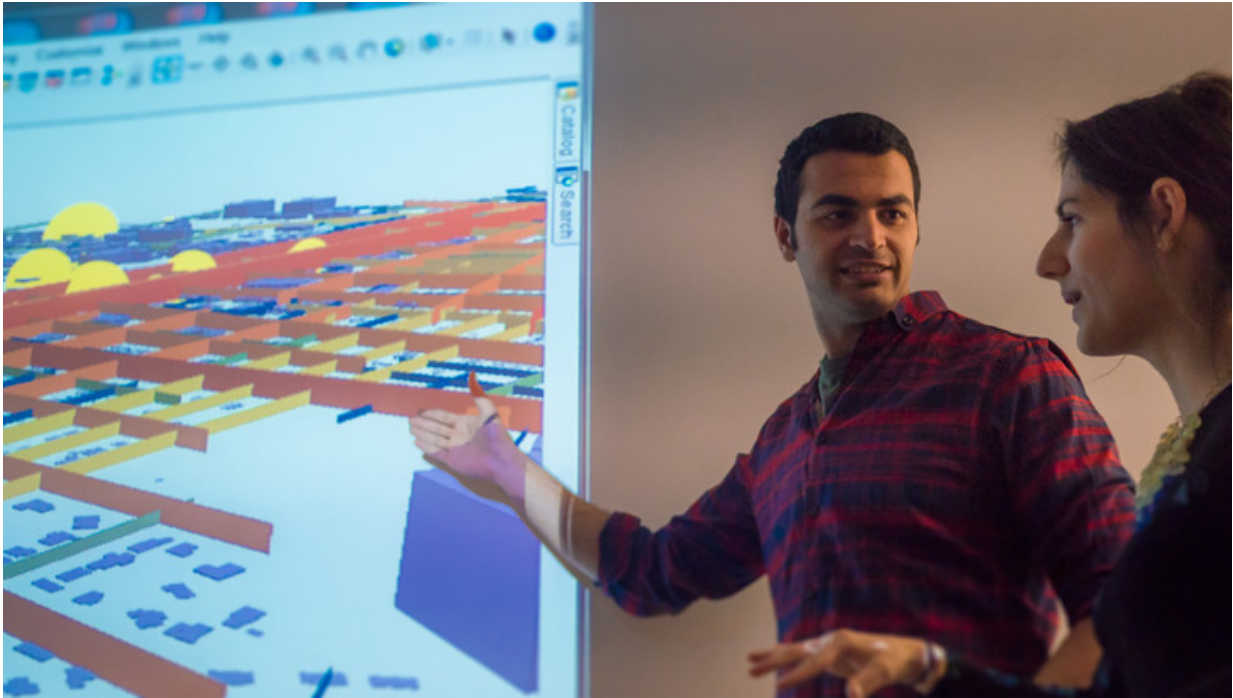


Researchers study location's role in romance

April 26 2016, by Katie Bohn



Clio Andris and Sohrab Rahimi discuss their map of the State College area.
Credit: Tom Klimek

Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck had their holiday in Rome. Meg Ryan and Tom Hanks had their meeting at the top of the Empire State Building in New York. And of course, Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman will always have Paris.

Cities have long played an important role in [romantic relationships](#), both

on and off screen. Couples met in coffee shops, had picnics in the park and went on dates at the bowling alley. But a Penn State research team says that's begun to change with the rise of online dating and weekend-long Netflix binges.

"Love used to be a big part of the city landscape, but now so many relationships are contained online," said Clio Andris, assistant professor of geography in the College of Earth and Mineral Sciences. "We're interested in learning how the city's role in relationships has changed. Where are [couples](#) meeting and making their memories?"

Andris, along with architecture graduate student Sohrab Rahimi, is studying how cities—and State College specifically—play a role in modern romantic relationships. They're interviewing students and alumni to discover how they meet romantic partners, where they spend their time and how their relationship status influences where they live.

Last fall, Andris and Rahimi kicked off their study by creating a questionnaire to review with alumni couples as they tailgated at Beaver Stadium during football games.

"We wanted to know how these couples spent their time in State College both when they were students and now as they return to visit the area," said Andris. "We asked them how often they visit, where they stay, what their favorite places are on campus and in town, and what they like about State College in general."

Andris and Rahimi gathered the responses from more than 100 interviews with Google Forms to analyze at their lab, which specializes in learning how people travel, communicate and form connections between and within cities. To prep the data, they "coded" the alumni's responses—identifying common replies and keeping a tally of them to create numerical data.

Once they had the numbers, they used a suite of geospatial processing programs called ArcGIS to transform the data into 3-D interactive maps. Popular locations were marked by yellow circles that grew in relation to how many times they were mentioned, and important streets turned red.

The maps revealed that alumni talked most about places along College Avenue, as well as some popular sites on campus.

"The couples talked a lot about well-known Penn State landmarks," said Rahimi. "Many couples talked about getting engaged at the Lion Shrine, and many mentioned always visiting the Corner Room when they visit the area."

Eventually, Andris and Rahimi also plan on interviewing undergraduate and graduate students as well as faculty to see how and where they develop their romantic relationships. Andris says she expects to see differences in how each generation formed relationships.

"Many alumni talked about meeting [romantic partners](#) at orchestrated events, like formal dances or sorority and fraternity socials," said Andris. "We expect student responses will be different, and we're curious to compare them."

Rahimi said that learning more about a city's role in romantic relationships is important to architects, urban designers and—in the case of college towns—a campus's administration.

"Designing more social places doesn't just benefit couples," said Rahimi. "Single people are a big demographic in almost every city, and having places where people can meet and spend time together benefits everyone. It helps build and determine a city's culture."

So even though the role of the city in relationships is changing, it seems

there will always be places that people remember and want to return to.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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