He knows where you've been

Researcher Daniel Rainham is tracking the daily movements of some Halifax residents with the help of a pair of Global Positioning Systems and 24 satellites. While he can't tell how many trips you've made between the fridge and couch, he can determine the stores you shop at regularly, the bars you frequent, the park you walk your dog in, and your usual route to work. (Phew – while he knows you went to a video store, your *Dirty Dancing* secret is safe.)

In short, he'll figure out how wide your world is. "The purpose is to try and examine the relationship between the quality of neighborhoods and people's spatial extent and health," explains Mr. Rainham, a PhD student specializing in population health.

CBC Radio reporter Jack Julian (BA(K)'94, BJ(K)'98) tried out the tracking system as part of the pilot study and was surprised to discover how routine his movements are.

"There were smudges of activity here and there – like when I went to the Annapolis Valley for a story and to the Bedford Institute of Oceanography," says Mr. Julian. "But if it wasn't for my job as a reporter, it was just home to work, home to the grocery store, home to Point Pleasant Park to walk my dog. "I turned out to be a very patterned guy."

Using data from 80 volunteers, the pilot study is testing how well the technology performs. For a week, volunteers are tagged with a GPS unit that looks like a small camera case with a shoulder strap. The GPS receiver sits on top of the shoulder strap, while the battery pack and data logger are in the case. A chip takes information beamed down from satellites, recording latitude and longitude, time and speed. Mr. Rainham downloads the info into a Geographic Information System and provides a visual picture of the person's activities over an entire week.

It's proven surprisingly accurate, with a few funny glitches. (Like one volunteer who appeared to hang out on top of Dingle Tower or another – *sans* boat – in the middle of Halifax Harbour.) "I can see where you've been within 15 feet," says Mr. Rainham, 35.

He's set to embark on the larger study in the summer. He hopes to randomly recruit 250 to 300 subjects – both healthy and unhealthy – within HRM and the Annapolis Valley.

The study could have wider ramifications beyond his purposes – useful for urban planners designing healthier communities or economists interested in people's buying habits.

- Marilyn Smulders

Daniel Rainham's GPS-based research study tracks daily movement patterns

Photo: Pearce

Informatics degree: a Canadian first

People, information and technology will come together this September when Dalhousie launches the Bachelor of Informatics degree, the first of its kind in Canada. Informatics is the study of how people transform technology, and how technology transforms us. With an innovative curriculum and co-op terms, this program will prepare students from diverse backgrounds for careers with unlimited possibilities.

Where the jobs are

The Bachelor of Informatics, designed with input from the corporate and public sectors, will fill a major gap in the IT workforce, which requires people with strong technical skills and a broad knowledge of other fields. Employers

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Senator Oliver wins Human Rights Award

Senator **Donald Oliver,** Q.C., (LLB'64, LLD'03) was awarded the 2006 Human Rights Award by the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission and Partners Against Racism (PAR) on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Senator Oliver was recognized for his tireless work improving the quality of life for visible minorities around the world. He is a former president of the Halifax Children's Aid Society, and founding president of the Society for the Protection and Preservation of Black Culture in Nova Scotia. Senator Oliver was a part-time professor at Dalhousie Law School for 14 years and was awarded an honorary degree from Dalhousie in 2003.