Diversity in the Geographic Workforce

A panel discussion sponsored by the EDGE Project, the ALIGNED Diversity Project, and the Ethnic Geography Specialty Group

2012 Annual Meeting of the AAG

About the EDGE Project

Enhancing Departments and Graduate Education in Geography (EDGE) is an NSF-funded research and action project led by the Association of American Geographers to enhance the career preparation of professional geographers. EDGE-Phase 2 (2009-2012) focuses on employment opportunities for geographers in business, government, and nonprofit (BGN) organizations. Researchers are collecting a variety of data from professional geographers, employer organizations, and graduate programs to examine workforce development, industry trends, and the career paths of master’s and doctoral students. Project deliverables include paper and panel sessions at regional and national professional meetings, updates and additions to the Jobs and Careers area of the AAG’s website (www.aag.org/careers), expanded activities within the Jobs in Geography Center at the AAG’s Annual Meeting, journal articles, and books, including Practicing Geography: Careers for Enhancing Society and the Environment (Pearson Education 2012).

About the panelists

Darryl Cohen [chair] is a Geographer in the Population Division of the U.S. Census Bureau, where he has worked since 1998. He has worked on reviewing and revising budget standards for defining metropolitan areas. He also works on maintaining the geographic base for the Census Bureau’s intercensal population estimates. In addition, Mr. Cohen helps design and maintain various metropolitan and micropolitan statistical area data products, including Census 2000 and post-censal population estimates table packages, and various definition and geographic relationship files publicly available on the Census Bureau’s website. Frequently, he responds to inquiries from the media, Congress and other government agencies, and the general public. Mr. Cohen’s research on settlement classification, census geography, and population data has been published in journals and government reports and has served as the subject for numerous conference presentations. He holds a master’s and a bachelor’s degree in geography with concentrations in urban planning from the University of North Carolina and Greensboro, as well as a bachelor’s degree in philosophy. Mr. Cohen received the Department of Commerce Bronze Medal Award as a member of the metropolitan area standards review team. He currently lives in Upper Marlboro, Maryland.

Amy Blatt is a Senior Health Informatics Analyst in the Informatics and Analytics group at Quest Diagnostics. Her main responsibilities include producing the clinically relevant Quest Diagnostics HealthTrends™ research reports (which have been published in Obstetrics and Gynecology and the Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism), as well as supporting new marketing and sales initiatives through customer-driven insights and analytics. Dr. Blatt has held several other geography-related positions, such as Geodemographer at Marketing Systems Group and Statistical Data Analyst at the Hartford Customer Services Group. She also had a faculty appointment at West Chester University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Blatt is the editor of book volume entitled Perspectives in Medical Geography (Taylor and Francis 2012), and a past-president of the Esri Mid-Atlantic Users Group.

Dennis Davidson is currently a graduate student in the joint doctoral program in geography at San Diego State University and The University of California, Santa Barbara. He comes to geography after a 25-year career as a scientific artist, designer and project manager, working mostly in the nonprofit realm in museums and science centers communicating science to the public. Mr. Davidson represents "one of the new demographics in academia" as he is 25 to 30 years older than his cohorts. He also exemplifies an interdisciplinary and cross-domain approach to both research and career choices.

Paisly DiBianca is a GIS Specialist with the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 5. Ms. DiBianca was hired through the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP), which allows her to start her professional career while she completes her graduate degree. She is completing a master's degree in geography and environmental studies at Northeastern Illinois University and just finished her graduate
Rebecca she earned a Master of Arts degree in linguistics in 2002 and a Bachelor of Arts degree in anthropology and Spanish from Knox College in 1991. She is a Board Member of the Chicagoland Chapter of the Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (URISA) and a recipient of the Society of Women Geographers’ Evelyn L. Pruitt National Minority Fellowship for 2011-2012.

Rebecca Haacker-Santos is the Head of Student Opportunities for Spark—UCAR Science Education with the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research. Ms. Haacker-Santos received her Master of Science degree from the University of Hamburg, Germany, in economic geography, Latin American studies, and anthropology in 1999. At UCAR, she leads programs to engage students in the geosciences through authentic research experiences, summer internships, and leadership workshops. One of the programs, the Significant Opportunities in Atmospheric Research and Science (SOARS), is an undergraduate-to-graduate bridge program designed to broaden participation in the atmospheric sciences and related fields. SOARS has helped students enter and succeed in graduate school, careers in academia, and private-sector science positions for over 15 years. Ms. Haacker-Santos is interested in research and evaluation on the impact of workforce development programs, especially their role in enhancing community engagement and increasing diversity in our sciences.

Heather R. Houlton is the Workforce Development, Education, and Outreach Specialist at the American Geosciences Institute (AGI). Ms. Houlton received her Bachelor of Arts from the University of Colorado, Boulder, in astronomy/planetary science in 2007 and her Master of Science from Purdue University in geoscience education research in 2010. Her projects at AGI include the development and implementation of educational materials for undergraduate geoscience students and conducting original research to understand the student-to-professional transition by mapping geoscience students’ career trajectories. By identifying the reasons why students pursue a geoscience major and career, she applies her research to inform recruitment and retention strategies for academia and industry. In addition, Ms. Houlton manages diversity-related efforts such as AGI’s Minority Participation Program and is the lead on organizing and conducting an NSF-funded professional development workshop for early-career underrepresented minorities in the geosciences.

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