Beyond the Ivory Tower B: Preparing Geographers for Careers in Government and Nonprofits

A panel discussion sponsored by the EDGE Project, the Applied Geography Specialty Group, and the Private/Public Affinity 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

Beth Schlemper [moderator] is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Geography and Planning at the University of Toledo. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2003. Her research interests are in cultural and historical geography, specifically the construction of regional identity, the role of scale, and shifting boundaries. In exploring these interrelated topics, Dr. Schlemper has conducted research in both the United States and Europe. More recently, her research and publications have related to career and professional development in higher education. She has served as a principal researcher and a co-PI for the AAG’s EDGE project. Her publications appear in a variety of geography and higher education journals including Journal of Historical Geography, Journal of Cultural Geography, The Professional Geographer, Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Journal of Geography in Higher Education, and Research in Higher Education.

Michael Solem [moderator] is Educational Affairs Director for the Association of American Geographers. Dr. Solem currently directs the Enhancing Departments and Graduate Education in Geography (EDGE) project and the Center for Global Geography Education (CGGE) initiative, both funded by NSF. He currently serves as the North American coordinator of the International Network for Learning and Teaching Geography in Higher Education (INLT), is associate director of the Grosvenor Center for Geographic Education at Texas State University—San Marcos, and is Treasurer for the International Geographical Union’s Commission on Geographical Education. Dr. Solem twice received the Journal of Geography in Higher Education’s award for promoting excellence in teaching and learning for his research on faculty development and graduate education in geography.

Paul Frederic is First Selectman of Starks, Maine, and Treasurer of the Kennebec Valley Regional Waste Corporation. He is a former Executive Director of the Maine Land Use Regulation Commission, a government agency responsible for planning and land regulation for 15,000 square miles of forest. Dr. Frederic has also served on a wide variety of rural-focused state, county, regional, and municipal committees as well as on boards of nonprofits. He has owned and operated a livestock farm since 1976. Dr. Frederic’s academic career spans 33 years of university teaching in the U.S., Namibia, and China, of which 27 years were spent at the University of Maine-Farmington where he is Professor Emeritus. Land use and town and regional planning were part of his instructional and research concentration. Internships played a major role in Dr. Frederic’s teaching, and many of his former students are now employed in government positions. He holds a Ph.D. in Geography from the University of Illinois and serves the profession in numerous positions including President of the New England St. Lawrence Valley Geographical Society and Regional Councillor of the Association of American Geographers.

Robert Kerr is Chair of Cultural Geography Programs at the U.S. Air Force Culture and Language Center at Maxwell AFB in Montgomery, AL. In that role he develops and teaches education and training curricula designed to bridge the gap between geographical theory and practice to enlisted and officer Airmen. He regularly teaches at the Air Force Senior NCO Academy, Squadron Officer School, Air Command and Staff College, Air War College, and the Air Force Special Operations School. Prior to his work with the Air Force, Dr. Kerr deployed to the Northeast Baghdad neighborhoods of Adhamiyah, Sadr City, and Istiqial with the U.S. Army’s 4th Infantry and 1st Cavalry Divisions, where he spent 15 months spanning 2008 and 2009 uncovering the complex political, social, economic, and cultural geographies of the area as part of the Army’s applied counter-insurgency strategy. Dr. Kerr earned his Ph.D. in 2002 from the Department of Geography at the University of Oregon where he
wrote his dissertation on the geographical nature of xenophobia, he and completed his masters degree in geography at the University of South Carolina in 1998.

Elizabeth (Liz) Lyon has been a Geographer with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Engineer Research and Development Center, for five years. Since 2010, she has been fortunate to have a unique detail supporting the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Research and Engineering), Human Performance, Training and BioSystems Directorate, as the Assistant Director of Geospatial and Social Modeling and Technologies. Recently nominated to the U.S. Geospatial Intelligence Foundation’s Board of Directors, Ms. Lyon volunteers her time, actively working with the young professional community and more broadly supporting the geospatial community. Ms. Lyon is currently completing her Ph.D. in computational social science at George Mason University. She has a master’s of science in geography from the University of Illinois and a bachelor’s degree in economics and French from Augustana College.

Richard (Rich) Quodomine is a New York State Department of Transportation Analyst and GIS Coordinator for the Public Transportation Bureau. Prior to joining DOT, he was an economist at the Department of Labor. He works with several public transportation providers on GIS solutions involving Title VI compliance and environmental justice initiatives. He is the Co-Chair of the New York State Environmental Justice Task Force’s Mapping Workgroup where he is working on pilot projects to better study the ramifications of new immigrant and Limited English Proficiency groups. He is also the Professional Development Committee Chair of the New York State GIS Association and serves on its Education Committee.

Carolyn Roberts is the Director of the Environmental Sustainability Knowledge Transfer Network (ESKTN), a government-funded agency in the United Kingdom that brings business and university collaborations together to research and develop innovative environmental technologies. ESKTN is located in the University of Oxford, but the team works with all British (and some international) universities and with companies of all sizes in tech areas such as water management, renewable energy and carbon sequestration, waste management and resource efficiency, and sustainable land management and food production. ESKTN also provides advice on environmental technologies to government departments. A specialist in water resource management who started her career as a physical geographer, she has undertaken research in many areas of the world and led a large university department to success at a nationally-recognized Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. Alongside her hydrological interests, she has published on student learning and sustainability and is a UK National Teaching Fellow. She has 25 years of experience as an environmental consultant and has chaired the UK professional body The Institution of Environmental Sciences.

Lowry Taylor leads the Reconciliation and Conflict Resolution Team in the Political Section of the U.S. Embassy Kabul, Afghanistan. During her 25-year career with the U.S. Department of State as a Foreign Service Officer she held overseas assignments in Poland, the Philippines, the former Yugoslavia, Pakistan, and Tunisia. Her most recent Washington assignments included Deputy of the Humanitarian Information Unit and Special Advisor on Middle East to the Secretary’s Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women’s Affairs. She has received awards for her crisis work at State and federal interagency collaboration. Before starting her diplomatic career, she worked as a Military Geographer (Library of Congress), Systems Analyst (contractor), and Geography and Environmental Studies adjunct faculty member (Northeastern Illinois University). She holds a master’s in strategic studies from the U.S. Army War College and a Ph.D. in geography from Northwestern University.

Rebecca Theobald earned doctoral and masters’ degrees in geography from the University of Colorado at Boulder and a bachelor’s degree in political science from Middlebury College. As an expatriate parent in Brussels, she became interested in that country’s approach to choice in education, and her masters’ research explored parental choice in elementary schools in Colorado Springs District 11. Expanding the geographic scale, her doctoral work examined the early-career experiences of foreign-born geography faculty in American higher education, with particular attention to departmental, institutional, and community contexts. She currently holds an appointment as Assistant Professor Adjoint in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs where she coordinates the Colorado Geographic Alliance. Her work in the community has included co-chairing the Colorado Springs School District 11 Configuration and Use Committee, and she currently serves on the board of directors of CASA of the Pikes Peak Region and the advisory board of Project Learning Tree. She is a member of the Association of American Geographers and the National Council for Geographic Education and a fellow of the Salzburg Seminar.

John Wertman serves as Senior Program Manager for Government Relations at the Association of American Geographers. His career has focused on positions in and around politics, and he previously served as Special Assistant to the Director of Presidential Letters and Messages at the White House during the Administration of President Bill Clinton. Mr. Wertman also held government relations positions at the Consortium of Social Science Associations, the University of Virginia Medical Center, and the American Urological Association. He interned on Capitol Hill for both former Congressman Tom Davis and former House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt. Mr. Wertman holds a BA in government from the University of Virginia.

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