

AAG Newsletter
of the
**Association of American
Geographers**

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AAG and International Outreach

Whether as students, scientists, scholars, or average citizens, we are reckoning with a world where economies are increasingly connected. Country boundaries are ever-shifting, communication technologies enable information to circle the globe with great speed, workplaces are increasingly internationally distributed, and cities and towns are growing in ethnic and racial diversity. These phenomena impact our activities as geographers, especially as we perform our work of understanding space and place in the myriad ways we collectively do so.

It is not surprising then, as a professional and scholarly association, that the AAG approaches international collaboration and outreach as a strategic initiative while integrating a global perspective within our core activities. At Doug Richardson's invitation, I'm pleased to report on some of the ways in which the AAG is addressing these challenges and opportunities for international outreach.

Building Avenues for International Collaboration

The AAG continues to nurture relationships with international organizations that share interests and constituents with the community of geographers around the world. These include liaison with internationally-focused offices of scientific organizations and with scientifically-focused offices of regional and national organizations, such as the InterAmerican Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank, the OAS, the US State Department, various United Nations agencies (UNEP, UNDP, UNESCO, FAO), and the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

Taken together, and with many others like them, these relationships are important in that they represent avenues for discovering how the discipline of geography can contribute to broad international agendas

such as the Millennium Development Goals, not to mention finding ways we can help address immediate global needs such as the Asian Tsunami disaster, hurricane recovery efforts, and other events of international urgency.

Collaboration on a global scale among geographers and geographic organizations represents another key avenue for supporting and enhancing faculty exchanges, student internships and ongoing AAG programs, and for providing concrete ways to strengthen our discipline's relevance. Such AAG activities include the Online Center for Global Geography Education, an innovative NSF-funded project that supports international collaborative learning using Internet technologies. Also, AAG's participation in the Carnegie Foundation-sponsored American Council on Education (ACE) project has generated an action plan that articulates how faculty, departments, and the AAG can work to enhance internationalization within the discipline. AAG staff also participate in the International Network for Teaching and Learning, aiming to improve the quality and status of learning and teaching of geography in higher education internationally.

Developing Regional Models for International Outreach

Many of you have responded warmly to and welcomed the AAG's recent activities reaching out to Latin American geographers, as introduced in Doug's column in this newsletter (July/August 2005). At that time, AAG announced its intent to expand the *Guide to Geography Programs* to encompass all of the Americas. When you pick up your copy of the 2005-2006 edition in Chicago at the AAG booth, you will already find eleven new institutional listings from countries not previously represented in the publication.

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In addition, the My Community, Our Earth Partnership, an AAG-managed program promoting geographic learning for sustainable development, has launched a regional initiative creating linkages among the U.S. Gulf States, the Greater Caribbean, and Central America. This spring a dozen students will work on community-based geographic research projects and participate in an international peer-mentoring network to share their experiences. A special session in Chicago will present the latest on how to get involved.

Another special session in Chicago, co-sponsored with the Latin American Specialty Group, will feature a panel and discussion on the current state of geography in Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America, which promises to be a historic and enriching event as it will be conducted in Spanish.

To continue the development of regional models for international outreach, the AAG has submitted funding proposals for detailed research on international collaboration in the Americas, including one to the National Science Foundation aimed at advancing the intellectual and developmental impact of academic geography. Another proposal to the IDB seeks to support geographic education, science, and technology in the Americas chiefly by gathering and exchanging information about geographic educational programs, scientific endeavors, and the geographic technology industry in the region.

Clearly, encouraging scholarly exchange with our geography colleagues in the Americas does not preclude or diminish efforts at international collaboration with other regions. The AAG continues to invite and encourage strong interactions with geographers around the world.

Welcoming International Geographers

Many of our members are engaged in major international work through activities occurring in literally every part



Patricia Solís. In background, the Bridge of the Americas which spans the Panama Canal links North and South America.

of the world. Thanks to the continued dedication and efforts of the AAG's various regionally-focused specialty groups as well as individual scholars, the AAG is continuing to build and facilitate connections among international communities of geographers.

The numerous high-quality sessions sponsored and co-sponsored by these specialty groups scheduled for the Chicago meeting is partial evidence of these active communities. More than one thousand international geographers are expected to attend this year, many of whom we hope you will join us in welcoming at the International Reception on the opening night of the conference. In addition, the AAG is featuring a session to acquaint more geographers with international exchange opportunities available through the various Fulbright programs.

Beyond Chicago, the AAG is supporting up to twenty U.S. geographers to participate in the July 3-7, 2006 IGU Regional Congress in Brisbane with funding from NSF. Also, plans are in place for holding a sequence of jointly sponsored sessions with the Canadian Association of Geographers at their annual meeting in Saskatoon and at the AAG's Annual Meeting in San Francisco in 2007.

Indeed, the quality of internationally collaborative research, education, and

applications of geography ultimately rests upon the quality of our collective interactions.

The AAG in New Places

Certainly as we continue to grapple with a globalized world, the association finds itself in new places, sometimes literally. I write this update as I work for the time being from Panamá, my husband's native country, having come here last April for family reasons. Since then I have focused anew on AAG's Research and Outreach initiatives. Truly the email and Internet phones that are a small part of this strange phenomena we call globalization make such a work arrangement possible—not to mention the goodwill of Doug Richardson and the Meridian Place staff. Being here is akin to fieldwork and has afforded a unique perspective—grounded in the context of place—for furthering AAG's initiatives, particularly those related to reaching out to the Americas. While I now live the reality of "the annihilation of space by time," it strikes me how very much geography really does matter.

Your feedback is welcomed and encouraged. ■

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