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Association of American
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Disciplinary Data: Critical Needs and Updated Priorities

The AAG has established an internal committee which has been meeting for the past year to examine existing AAG data collection and dissemination activities. The goal is to revamp the processes to ensure that we collect the most crucial data for the discipline of geography while also minimizing the burden of our data collection requests on departments and AAG members. The members of our internal AAG data review committee include myself, Kavita Pandit, Michael Solem, Megan Nortrup, Beth Schlemper, Robert Andelmann, and Jan Monk.

The need for better data about our discipline is critical. Rarely does a week pass that I do not receive multiple requests for detailed and updated data from geography departments proposing new geography degree programs or defending existing ones; from individuals for research, dissertations, publications, or curiosity driven research; and from governmental agencies and the media. Responding to these requests is time-consuming, and

sometimes more frustrating than necessary, as the basic data needed to provide accurate, up-to-date and speedy replies are not always available.

There are many reasons why statistical data collection and analysis for geography as a discipline is difficult and complex. As a rapidly evolving discipline, we are a moving target. New subdisciplines, programs, centers, and terminology proliferate. We are also a somewhat amorphous entity. Geography departments are often combined or "blended." Academic geographers are sometimes hidden in interdisciplinary departments with monikers varying from "environmental studies" to "urban spatial analysis."

Private sector and governmental geographers are disguised more often than not under job titles that do not mention the term geographer (though we have been working closely with the Department of Labor to change this and are having some success). Standard or commonly used classifications for demographic data such as race and ethnicity also continue to evolve,

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AAG Membership by Gender and Race/Ethnicity, 2003-2005

Category	Females			Males			Gender Not Reported			Total			Percent		
	2003	2004	2005	2003	2004	2005	2003	2004	2005	2003	2004	2005	2003	2004	2005
Asian	154	224	284	274	377	465	4	3	0	432	604	749	5.2	6.6	7.9
Black	32	42	59	75	99	127	1	1	0	108	142	186	1.3	1.6	2.0
Hispanic	41	52	82	70	94	126	0	0	0	111	146	208	1.3	1.6	2.2
Native Alaskan	1	2	2	2	2	3	0	0	0	3	4	5	0.0	0.0	0.1
Native American	13	12	18	20	25	33	0	0	0	33	37	51	0.4	0.4	0.5
Pacific Islander	6	5	6	5	8	10	0	0	0	11	13	16	0.1	0.1	0.2
White, Non-Hispanic	N/A ¹	N/A ¹	62	N/A ¹	N/A ¹	103	N/A ¹	N/A ¹	0	N/A ¹	N/A ¹	165	N/A ¹	N/A ¹	1.74
Not Reported ²	1788	2139	2581	3732	4284	4878	2161	1716	644	7681	8139	8103	91.7	89.6	85.4
Total	2035	2476	3094	4178	4889	5745	2166	1720	644	8379	9085	9483	100.0	100.0	100.0

¹The White, Non-Hispanic category was introduced in 2005.

²Note the high percentage of members who did not report race/ethnicity.

Tables compiled by Beth Schlemper. Membership information is based on data for the AAG *Guide to Geography Programs*, which is accessed in late November of each year, and thus varies slightly from year-end totals.

as do federal standard occupational codes (SOCs) for geography related employment.

Another challenge for data collection in recent years is the increasing reluctance by individuals and even organizations to provide personal demographic or other information. This much discussed "crisis" in survey research has its roots in legitimate concerns about identity theft, commercial solicitations, Internet privacy, junk mail and email, and other privacy concerns, including those related to government use or abuse of personal information. Another major factor in the drop-off of survey response rates is the sheer proliferation of new requests for survey information that has occurred in recent years, especially on the Internet, and the amount of time it consumes for busy individuals or organizations to reply, however worthy the cause may be.

Thus, in order to collect good quality, high response rate disciplinary data we will need to be "disciplined" about what and how much we can reasonably ask for on our membership forms and departmental surveys. In revamping our disciplinary data collection efforts, we are seeking to identify the most critical information needed by departments and individual researchers; to update the categories of data collected by the AAG to be consistent with and comparable to current broader usage; and to balance the near-infinite data collection possibilities against the burden their collection places on individual AAG members and geography department administrative staff.

With the above challenges in mind, I would like to invite your input and ideas in this process of evaluation and analysis of AAG data collection needs, as we finalize the process. Your comments might track the four main areas we have identified below as core to our current and proposed data collection and dissemination efforts, plus any others you might want to discuss:

1. AAG-collected Individual AAG Membership Data.

The main vehicle for collecting this data is the **AAG membership form**. This form collects information such as gender,

race/ethnicity, age, topical and area proficiencies, and employment sector. We are proposing to modify this form to conform better to the race and ethnicity categories used by the recent AAG Diversity Task Force Survey of geography departments, and to current Census Bureau categories. We have consulted with geographers at the Census Bureau to review these categories and suggest any improvements. We also will add a brief statement to the forms (both paper forms and online forms) to urge better data completion. A PDF copy of the proposed new AAG membership form is available for your reference at www.aag.org/aagdata.

2. AAG-collected Data on Geography Departments.

Our main vehicle for collecting this data on an annual basis will be an enhanced version of the **AAG Guide data collection request form** for departments which list in the Association of American Geographers *Guide to Geography Programs in the Americas*. This form will collect departmental data on the type and number of degrees granted, titles of theses and dissertations completed, departmental specialties, faculty salaries, and faculty demographic data, including gender, race, and ethnicity. We have prepared a draft modified version of this data request form, including an extension of it which will be useable as a stand-alone survey form for those departments which do not list in the *AAG Guide*. A copy of this draft departmental data collection form is available at www.aag.org/aagdata. We will have the new survey vehicle reviewed by survey research specialists before launching it in final form. Consistency with other federal educational data collection efforts is also a priority in the development of this new survey of departments.

3. AAG-collected Supplemental Surveys Data.

The AAG has undertaken several major new data collection surveys during the past four years. These include the AAG Diversity Task Force Survey of geography departments; three Enhancing Departments Graduate Education (EDGE) surveys and

numerous EDGE focus group data collection activities; one DOL-funded written employment survey and two DOL employment focus group workshops to gather additional data; a lapsed member survey; Geography Faculty Development Alliance surveys (in conjunction with Ken Foote); an AAG Internationalization Survey (conducted with support from Carnegie Foundation and the American Council on Education), and others. These supplemental AAG surveys have provided a wealth of focused and up-to-date information on topics important to the AAG and our discipline. Most of this information has been made available to AAG members already on the AAG website or through newsletter articles.

4. Data Collected by Third Parties.

There is a great deal of data collected by others on geography departments and individual geographers, and on education and employment issues of potential use to our departments, our programs, and individual members. This data is scattered and often not easily available or understood. It is frequently collected as part of larger data collection efforts, and extracting, disaggregating, and interpreting the geography-relevant information from it can be challenging. Examples of such data include the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), the NRC Surveys of PhD Programs; the PhD Five Years Out surveys; the National Science Foundation compilations; data collected or compiled on the discipline by individual researchers or departments; and many other sources. The AAG will compile and summarize the most pertinent of these third-party data collection efforts.

We also propose to create a new centralized AAG Data Clearinghouse which would disseminate the data which the AAG collects in the first three categories above. The clearinghouse would also summarize the nature (and limitations) of the third-party data described above, and provide links directly to the geography-relevant portions of the most important of these third-party geography related

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AAG Membership by Gender and Highest Degree Attained¹, 2003-2005

Degree	Females						Males						Gender Not Reported						Total					
	2003		2004		2005		2003		2004		2005		2003		2004		2005		2003		2004		2005	
	N	% ²	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Bachelor's	372	18.3	522	21.1	808	26.1	452	10.8	667	13.6	1047	18.2	9	0.4	10	0.6	6	0.9	833	9.9	1199	13.2	1861	19.6
Master's	669	32.9	749	30.3	913	29.5	962	23.0	1130	23.1	1345	23.4	8	0.4	3	0.2	5	0.8	1639	19.6	1882	20.7	2263	23.9
Doctorate	749	36.8	806	32.6	908	29.3	2472	59.2	2520	51.5	2583	45.0	15	0.7	9	0.5	3	0.5	3236	38.6	3335	36.7	3494	36.8
Undetermined ³	245	12.0	399	16.1	465	15.0	292	7.0	572	11.7	770	13.4	2134	98.5	1698	98.7	630	97.8	2671	31.9	2669	29.4	1865	19.7
Total	2035	100.0	2476	100.0	3094	100.0	4178	100.0	4889	100.0	5745	100.0	2166	100.0	1720	100.0	644	100.0	8379	100.0	9085	100.0	9483	100.0

¹ Because many individuals list anticipated degrees in the database, degree totals include only cases where the date of degree is listed.

² This is the percentage of each gender per degree category in a given year (e.g. in 2003 32.9% of female members had master's degrees).

³ This category includes cases where degrees were not reported or highest degree was not clear.

AAG Membership¹ by Gender and Employment Status, 2003-2005

Employment Status	Females						Males						Gender Not Reported						Total					
	2003		2004		2005		2003		2004		2005		2003		2004		2005		2003		2004		2005	
	N	% ²	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	% ³	N	%	N	%
College/University ⁴	707	24.4	744	25.5	717	25.4	2075	71.5	2076	71.2	2066	73.2	119	4.1	94	3.2	39	1.4	2901	34.6	2914	32.1	2822	29.8
K12 ⁵	13	35.1	13	50.0	13	44.8	22	59.5	13	50.0	16	55.2	2	5.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	37	0.4	26	0.3	29	0.3
Student	638	37.4	679	38.1	744	44.0	737	43.1	861	48.3	885	52.3	333	19.5	241	13.5	62	3.7	1708	20.4	1781	19.6	1691	17.8
Federal Government	65	30.5	65	28.9	69	30.5	124	58.2	139	61.8	145	64.2	24	11.3	21	9.3	12	5.3	213	2.5	225	2.5	226	2.4
State/Local Government	50	26.6	47	23.0	54	26.9	129	68.6	141	69.1	139	69.2	9	4.8	16	7.8	8	4.0	188	2.2	204	2.2	201	2.1
Other Government	7	77.8	5	50.0	4	30.8	2	22.2	4	40.0	9	69.2	0	0	1	10.0	0	0.0	9	0.1	10	0.1	13	0.1
Military	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	9.1	20	83.3	17	94.4	19	86.4	4	16.67	1	5.6	1	4.5	24	0.3	18	0.2	22	0.2
Nonprofit	34	40.5	37	41.1	34	41.5	35	41.7	45	50.0	42	51.2	15	17.86	8	8.9	6	7.3	84	1.0	90	1.0	82	0.9
Research Center	35	31.5	35	31.0	32	33.0	71	64.0	75	66.4	61	62.9	5	4.5	3	2.7	4	4.1	111	1.3	113	1.2	97	1.0
Private Industry	71	26.1	68	24.5	86	30.1	164	60.3	195	70.1	195	68.2	37	13.6	15	5.4	5	1.7	272	3.2	278	3.1	286	3.0
Staff	9	45.0	79	61.2	84	62.2	7	35.0	12	9.3	15	11.1	4	20	38	29.5	36	26.7	20	0.2	129	1.4	135	1.4
Self-Employed	34	37.0	28	34.6	28	37.3	56	60.9	52	64.2	45	60.0	2	2.2	1	1.2	2	2.7	92	1.1	81	0.9	75	0.8
Unemployed	29	53.7	23	56.1	21	60.0	24	44.4	18	43.9	14	40.0	1	1.852	0	0.0	0	0.0	54	0.6	41	0.5	35	0.4
Retired	50	12.3	48	12.5	43	11.6	352	86.7	330	85.7	326	87.9	4	1.0	7	1.8	2	0.5	406	4.8	385	4.2	371	3.9
Not Reported ⁶	293	13.0	605	21.7	1163	34.2	360	15.9	911	32.7	1768	52.0	1607	71.1	1274	45.7	467	13.7	2260	27.0	2790	30.7	3398	35.8
Total	2035	24.3	2476	27.3	3094	32.6	4178	49.9	4889	53.8	5745	60.6	2166	25.9	1720	18.9	644	6.8	8379	100.0	9085	100.0	9483	100.0

¹ Membership information is based on data for the AAG *Guide to Geography Programs*, which is accessed in late November of each year, and thus varies slightly from year-end totals.

² This value represents percentage of each employment category per gender status in a given year (e.g. in 2003 37.4% of students were female).

³ This value represents the percentage of members in each employment category in a given year (e.g. in 2003 20.4% of members were students).

⁴ This category includes faculty and researchers affiliated with research institutions, colleges and community colleges.

⁵ This category includes teachers and administrators at the elementary and secondary levels.

⁶ Note the percentage of members who did not report a gender and/or an employment category in each year (e.g. in 2003 25.9% of members did not report a gender).

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data. This site would be available in early 2007.

As you can see, we have a substantial project before us. Fortunately, the AAG has established a financial foundation that enables us to provide these services to the

discipline. Your help with comments and suggestions will ensure that we do the best possible job of it, within the constraints discussed above. We hope to have the AAG's revised data collection and dissemination system ready for launch by the beginning of

the 2007 calendar year. Thanks in advance for your advice and support. ■

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