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of the
**Association of American
Geographers**

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Is it Time for an AAG “Developing Regions” Membership Program?

For years, the AAG has talked about the need to provide support and lower cost memberships to geography departments and geographers in the poorest regions of our world. We do maintain a limited fund to subsidize occasional fee waivers on an ad hoc basis, but it is not a large fund nor widely implemented geographically. Our association's financial foundation is now strong, and as a result perhaps we can afford to share some of our membership benefits more broadly with those who do not have the resources to access our journals and other membership benefits through normal channels. I believe it is time that we take action to establish a systematic, clear, and workable program to make low cost membership in the AAG available to those geographers and also to geography departments in the developing world that might wish to access our publications and other membership benefits.

With the concurrence and support of AAG officers and the Council, I have begun the process of developing a conceptual outline for how such a program might be structured and implemented. Based on conversations we have had with geographers from many of the poorest parts of the world, there seem to be needs which must be met at both the geography department level and at the individual geographer level within these regions. One example of how a “developing regions” membership program might be structured and priced is illustrated below.

Such a program, of course, would also have to define explicitly which countries comprise “developing regions” and would be eligible to participate. Several organizations, including the United Nations and the World Bank, generate economic data and national poverty rankings based on fairly widely accepted criteria, generally per capita income. These rankings could

form useful starting points, however imperfect, for beginning the program. While it is important that we consider this question of definition carefully, we should not let the impossibility of arriving at the perfect definition of “the poorest regions” prevent us from moving forward at all.



Richardson

Example: Developing Regions Departmental Memberships

Upon written request, the AAG might grant eligible geography departments or programs in developing regions a departmental membership for a small fee (e.g., perhaps \$40 per year), renewable on an annual

basis. This departmental membership package might include the following benefits:

- One hard copy of all AAG quarterly publications, the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* and *The Professional Geographer* for the departmental library
- One hard copy of the monthly AAG *Newsletter* for circulating among faculty and students
- Reduced rate on other third party geographic journals offered by the AAG
- Reduced prices on AAG publications (according to normal individual membership benefits)
- Free listing in the *AAG Guide to Geography Programs*
- In addition, a departmental membership might allow the department to add individual faculty as individual AAG members for a small incremental rate (such as only \$10 per year per person), to receive full individual membership benefits, except that journals and newsletters would be provided online, in digital format only, not in hard copy. Reduced rate

Continued on page 5

registration fees at the AAG Annual Meeting and other AAG-sponsored meetings, along with other standard benefits would also be included with the individual membership.

Example: Developing Regions Individual Memberships

Individual geographers in developing regions with income of less than \$20,000 per year might be made eligible for AAG membership at the price of \$20 per year. This category would include all regular membership benefits, except that publications would be provided only in digital format:

- Online access to AAG publications, the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, *The Professional Geographer* and *AAG Newsletter*
- Reduced registration fees (member rates) at the AAG Annual Meeting and other AAG-sponsored meetings
- Reduced rate on other third party geographic journals offered by the AAG
- Reduced prices on AAG publications (according to normal individual membership benefits)
- Option for hard copy journals or newsletter for incremental fee, to cover cost of production and especially shipping

The examples provided above are illustrative of what could be done now, with

the new financial strength of the AAG, and with our current online technologies. They are only one approach, but are included here to give a concrete idea of how such a program might be implemented. They also are administratively fairly easy to implement.

Greater international networking, information sharing, and interaction is becoming increasingly common in the work and lives of most geographers, both in so-called "developing regions" and in wealthier countries. As both the AAG membership and the attendance at our

Continued on page 6

annual meetings have grown in recent years, international geographers' participation in the activities of the AAG has grown at an even faster rate than that of domestic U.S.-based geographers. With over 5,500 attendees already registered for the AAG Annual Meeting to be held in San Francisco next April (2007), nearly 25% are from countries other than the U.S., up from approximately 20% during the past few years. Yet most of our current international membership and participation is still from the wealthier countries in Europe, Asia, and North America.

An AAG developing world membership category would recognize the obvious:

that vastly different financial resources are available in different parts of the world. This proposed new category of membership, while recognizing the more extreme financial needs of geographers in the very lowest income countries, is not wholly inconsistent with the AAG's current general membership fee approach for the U.S. and other wealthier countries, which also recognizes income level differences among individual members in establishing membership fees.

And, of course, encouraging greater participation of geographers from the "developing regions" of the world in activities and networks of the AAG has the

potential to enrich the experience, research, and scholarship of the AAG and its current members in myriad ways, providing benefits to us far exceeding the financial subsidies we might extend to our colleagues in some of the poorest regions of the world.

I look forward to receiving your thoughts, suggestions, and ideas on this proposal. ■

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