

# Enhancing Diversity in Geography

**D**uring the past five years, the AAG has undertaken a comprehensive survey of the state of diversity in geography, and initiated a focused set of actions to enhance diversity within our discipline.

While these activities have been broad based and included many AAG members, the core organizing force behind those efforts has been the AAG Diversity Task Force, chaired by Joe Darden. It is fitting that two significant milestones relating to these diversity initiatives will occur at this year's AAG Annual Meeting.

First, the AAG Diversity Task Force will present its "Final Report and Recommendations for the AAG and for Departments as Agents of Change." Second, Joe



*Darden*

Darden, long a leader in diversity research, mentoring, and actions, as well as the chair of the AAG's current Task Force, will be honored as recipient of the AAG's 2006 Enhancing Diversity Award.

## 2006 AAG Enhancing Diversity Award

Since beginning his career in academe as a young assistant professor in 1969, Joe Darden has been both a personal and professional role model for African-American geography students, and he has long provided leadership for AAG efforts to achieve greater inclusion of African-Americans, Latinos, and women in our society

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and in the discipline of geography. His research has been at the forefront of diversity and equity issues in geography for three decades. Darden has worked beyond academia to bring local, state, and national attention to the inequalities forced on African-Americans in the U.S. This work included serving as a consultant for the NAACP in assessing the status of blacks in higher education, for the Chicago Board of Education in evaluating Chicago's potential for desegregation, and for the U.S. District Court in reviewing county school desegregation plans.

A leading scholar in urban social geography, Darden's extensive publications include landmark studies analyzing race relations in three North American cities: *Afro-Americans in Pittsburgh: The Residential Segregation of a People* (1973); *Detroit: Race and Uneven Development* (1987); and *The Significance of White Supremacy in the Canadian Metropolis of Toronto* (2004). Darden's research has been highly influential in urban social geography, and addresses both basic theoretical questions in geography and applications to practical problems. He is also author or co-author of a lengthy list of technical reports on a variety of racial issues, including school desegregation, housing discrimination, and the status of African-American women, for such entities as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the U.S. Census Bureau, and the Rockefeller Foundation.

The AAG's Enhancing Diversity Award will be presented to Joe Darden at the AAG Awards Luncheon on Saturday, April 21, 2007, in San Francisco.

### Diversity Report Focuses on Departments as Agents of Change

The AAG Diversity Task Force (DTF), created by AAG Council in 2003, will present its final report and recommendations at the AAG Annual Meeting in San Francisco. The report culminates a three-year effort to enhance diversity in geography, reflecting the most recent organized institutional effort by the AAG to promote a more diverse discipline.

The DTF focused its efforts on better understanding the status of diversity in the discipline and on development and recommendations for

achieving substantial progress in diversifying geography. It also undertook action on a set of doable activities by working in close coordination with AAG staff and AAG Council, including co-sponsoring race/ethnicity and place conferences; establishing a diversity clearinghouse; developing strategic relationships with Howard University and other minority serving institutions; developing career information to promote geography to underrepresented groups; conducting a survey on the state of diversity in departments; continuing outreach that promotes diversity in the AAG newsletter; encouraging participation of underrepresented undergraduates at the AAG annual meetings in part through the AAG Conference Assistants Program; supporting AAG funding proposals that enhance diversity at various points of intervention from K-12 through university levels; and bridging to existing initiatives ongoing throughout the discipline.

The resulting final report documents progress made toward these ten targets and provides geography programs with a variety of strategies to alter "business as usual" to mark "measurable change" in increased representation of women and minorities. The Task Force recommendations draw from past experience with diversity initiatives, incorporate information gathered from departments, consider the current national demographic context of underrepresentation, and take into account elements of other model disciplinary initiatives that have affected change.

The DTF concludes that departments— as the reproductive core of the discipline— are best positioned to break the historical cycle of underrepresentation in geography. Detailed recommendations for departments address recruitment strategies, departmental climate, mentoring, student financial support, curriculum offerings, and other topics.

The AAG's Diversity Task Force Report will be presented in a special session on Thursday, April 19 at 3:00pm in the Mendocino Room of the Nikko Hotel, directly across from the San Francisco Hilton.

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Richardson

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The Diversity Task Force includes members Joe Darden, Michigan State University (Chair); Samuel Aryeetey-Attoh, Loyola University; Amanda Coleman, University of Oregon; Lawrence Estaville, Texas State University; Victoria Lawson, University of Washington; James Marston, University of California Santa Barbara; Ines M. Miyares, Hunter College; Doug Richardson, AAG; Todd Rogers, ESRI; Michael Solem, AAG; Patricia Solís, AAG; Catherine Souch, Indiana University; and Ray Sumner, Long Beach City College.

### AAG Survey Results Support DTF Recommendations

The DTF report draws in part upon information gathered by the AAG in a departmental survey conducted in 2005. The survey was designed to form a baseline understanding of gender, race, and ethnic diversity in undergraduate and graduate geography programs in order to assess progress in the future. Seventy-four departments from public and private colleges and universities completed the survey. The report analyzes demographic patterns and assesses challenges in recruiting and retaining women and minorities in geography programs. A survey for AAG's EDGE project complements the DTF survey by examining how women and minority graduate students perceive the social and academic climate of geography programs.

Sixty-six respondents to the DTF's survey provided information on the number of undergraduate and graduate students in their programs and their race/ethnicity. Minority student numbers in geography are small, both in absolute and relative terms. In aggregate, 3.2% of graduate students in the reporting geography departments were Black, which is the same proportion as for Black undergraduates but less than the 3.6% for Black faculty. Hispanics comprised 4.2% of the departments' graduate students, compared to 6% for undergraduates; yet the percentage was substantially higher than the 1.1% tenure-line Hispanic faculty. The proportion of Asian graduate students (4.8%) was about the same as undergraduates (4.6%), but notably lower than faculty rates (7.0%). The number of Native-American graduate students (0.2%) was lower than that of undergraduates (0.6%) but matched faculty rates (0.2%). In terms of white, non-Hispanic undergraduate students, males outnumbered female undergrad-

uates by a factor of 1.8 but numbers of male and female Black, non-Hispanic, Hispanic and Asian undergraduates are approximately equal.

Departments indicated that the greatest challenges in recruiting and/or retaining minority students were related to contextual characteristics, such as the program's geographic location being in an overwhelmingly white rural or suburban area or the overall lack of diversity at the university as a whole. Other obstacles included a perceived lack of interest in geography by minority students compared to non-minority students, and the need to convince minority students and their parents that geography is a degree that can lead to a good job or career.

Preliminary findings from EDGE interviews and surveys further indicate that both underrepresented students and women report higher amounts of financial stress and social isolation in graduate programs, and as a result are more likely to discontinue their studies.

Thirty percent of the departments responding to the DTF survey said they make special efforts to recruit and attract Black, Hispanic, and Asian graduate students and 19% of departments make special efforts to recruit women students. According to preliminary EDGE findings, women do believe, more so than men, that their programs should place more emphasis on supporting diversity and multiculturalism in hiring and curriculum practices. Non-White students are also more likely to think departments should place a greater emphasis on diversifying programs.

Understanding these dynamics, the DTF report recommends actions and resources that address the needs and contexts of individuals and departments. For example, the AAG's Diversity Clearinghouse contains resources for promoting careers in geography that are particularly geared toward underrepresented students, such as a Careers in Geography poster has been designed to address the desire to "make a difference" through the discipline.

The Clearinghouse also contains links to scholarship and fellowship opportunities for minorities and women, and describes effective mentoring practices, including peer mentoring, known to support and retain underrepresented students.

Complete results of the DTF survey are included in the report, available on the AAG

**Diversity Related Sessions** in San Francisco that will benefit departments seeking to enhance diversity include the following:

**The AAG Diversity Task Force: Final Report and Recommendations for the Association and for Geography Departments as Agents of Change** is scheduled on Thursday, 4/19/07, from 3:00pm - 4:40pm and is organized by Joe T. Darden, Michigan State University.

**Healthy Departments Panel Discussion** (aimed at strengthening geography programs) is scheduled on Thursday, 4/19/07, from 5:00pm - 6:40pm and is organized by Victoria Lawson, University of Washington.

**NSF ADVANCE: Lessons for Geography Departments** (toward increasing participation of women in science and engineering workforce) is scheduled on Thursday, 4/19/07, from 5:00pm - 6:40pm and is organized by Beth Mitchneck, University of Arizona.

**Professional Development Resources for Graduate Students, Early Career Faculty, and Departments** is scheduled on Thursday, 4/19/07, from 1:00pm - 2:40pm, and is co-sponsored by AAG's EDGE project and the

Geography Faculty Development Alliance (GFDA), organized by Michael Solem, AAG.

Diversity Clearinghouse website at <http://communicate.aag.org/eseries/Diversity/Intro.cfm>. The EDGE website is available at [www.aag.org/EDGE/index.cfm](http://www.aag.org/EDGE/index.cfm).

One of the key lessons learned at the AAG is that diversity issues and efforts need to be integrated into all phases of our activities, from developing research proposals to planning our annual meetings, and from careers outreach to our publications programs. As a discipline, broad-based approaches which enhance diversity in all of our programs will be necessary to achieve and sustain real progress in diversifying geography. ■

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