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of the
**Association of American
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Douglas Richardson, Publisher
and Managing Editor

Jim Ketchum, Editor

AAG Voice 202-234-1450

AAG Fax 202-234-2744

newsletter@aag.org

www.aag.org

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Building and Sustaining Disciplinary Support for New Scholars

The rapidly changing landscape of higher education presents many new challenges and opportunities for geographers, especially those who are just getting started in an academic career. Since 2002, the AAG has sponsored many programs for graduate students and early career faculty with funding from the National Science Foundation and other sources. Starting next month, the first wave of publications stemming from those efforts will be released.

In April 2008, Pearson Prentice Hall will publish two AAG books for enhancing the preparation of academic professionals in geography and related disciplines. The books represent a culmination of six years of workshops and research on geography faculty development by the NSF-funded Geography Faculty Development Alliance (GFDA) and Enhancing Departments and Graduate Education in Geography (EDGE) projects.

EDGE Publications

Aspiring Academics: A Resource Book for Graduate Students and Early Career Faculty (edited by Michael Solem, Kenneth Foote, and Janice Monk) is intended as a primer for individuals who are beginning careers in higher education, focusing on a broad range of issues relevant to the work of faculty in two-year, four-year, and graduate institutions. Research in faculty development clearly shows that while graduate programs mostly succeed in providing strong research training, they often rely on "self-help" approaches to career development that frequently result in stressful transitions from the Ph.D. into a faculty position – transitions which are often hardest for those who begin their careers with little or no preparation in course design, time management, professional ethics, academic publishing, interdisciplinary collabora-

tion, grant writing, and career planning (to name just some of the topics addressed in *Aspiring Academics*). Rather than viewing these aspects of academic work as separate and unrelated, *Aspiring Academics* aims to help graduate students and faculty understand how teaching, research, service, outreach, and personal lives intersect and interconnect.

Research in many disciplines also reveals that teaching is often the most daunting responsibility for graduate students and faculty, yet one which for many brings the most reward and satisfaction. Although many academic institutions provide instructional development support through interdisciplinary teaching and learning centers, many geographers report difficulty in connecting educational theory with the subject matter and learning objectives of the courses they teach.

For this reason, a second volume was produced to focus solely on teaching and learning issues in the context of geography. That book, *Teaching College Geography: A Practical Guide for Graduate Students and Early Career Faculty* (edited by Michael Solem and Kenneth Foote), addresses "nuts-and-bolts" issues of teaching (such as syllabus design, writing effective questions, and grading) in the context of new technologies, student demographics, and institutional expectations that are the hallmarks of higher education in the 21st century. Other chapters explore topics of particular interest to geography educators: effective teaching in the field; supporting critical thinking with GIS and mapping technologies; engaging learners in large geography classes; and promoting awareness of international perspectives and geographic issues.



Solem

Continued on page 9

I moved to Boston in 1994 to accept a position at Boston University. Obviously, one of the attractions of the post was that the campus is only a few feet away from historic Fenway Park, home to the now Champion Boston Red Sox, who will be in town April 18-24 during and after the AAG meeting. However, during my first year in Boston, I was captivated by a different type of sport.

It all started when I riding the "T" down Beacon Street on Patriots' Day, which is a Massachusetts state holiday on a Monday each spring. Early that morning, people had put living room couches all along the street leading to downtown. Next to these couches sat 30-packs of the owners' favorite beverage. Evidently, many people were planning a big party. In the center of town, there were Jumbotron TV screens and huge tents inhabited by emergency medical personnel. Stands were erected near a freshly painted finish line. It was "Marathon Monday." I had never seen a marathon in person. I thought I'd give it a look. What I saw brought me to tears.

The Boston Marathon is the world's oldest marathon, and 2008 will be the 112th annual running. According to www.bostonmarathon.com, "In terms of on-site media coverage, the Boston Marathon ranks behind only the Super Bowl as the largest single day sporting event in the world." It regularly attracts the sport's best athletes, who are the fittest humans on the planet. Whereas baseball has players of a game, the marathon has athletes of a sport. The marathon is remarkable in that anyone who has the dedication to train for this event can participate in the same race with these top athletes. I know of no other sport where this is true; for example no matter how much I practice, I will never play in the same baseball game as Red Sox flame-thrower Jonathan Papelbon.

Even participants in wheelchairs compete in the marathon. In fact they begin the race shortly before noon, in the town of Hopkinton, 26.2 miles to the west of Boston. The wheelchair competitors get the show on the road and then come the elite runners, competing for more than a half million dollars in prize money. After the elite athletes comes a massive wave of humanity. Usually

about 20 thousand runners from all over the world make their way through the suburbs of Boston. Lined along the streets are the fans, cheering and screaming, seemingly exerting as much energy as the runners. The remarkable thing is that everyone is cheering for everyone! I have never seen this in any other sporting event. The fans truly want each runner to do his or her best. Each runner is competing foremost with himself or herself and not with the other runners. In fact, each runner is hoping for the best in every other runner. This is truly inspiring.

I was so inspired that I decided that I must run. I put it on my list of things to do before I die. I realized that it was not something that I should put off until after retirement, although many runners are retirement age. I began training. What a boring waste of time! When you run as slowly as I do, it takes a long time to go a long distance. I needed something else to do. I figured that I would derive mathematical equations in my mind while I ran, or maybe I would juggle 3 balls while I ran. I ended up doing both.

The act of running while simultaneously juggling is called juggling. Some jugglers are recreational; while most that I know are serious athletes. Juggling has become a well-organized sport with its official records and super stars. A few years ago, a world's juggling record was set at the Boston Marathon where two jugglers went head to head. That record has since been broken by one of those runners, Michal Kapral, who juggled the Toronto Marathon in 2 hours 50 minutes. I was not concerned about records. My goal, like the goal of many runners, was to finish.

Each year the events really begin on the Wednesday before Marathon Monday. During the days before the marathon, I recommend you walk to the park along the Charles River. When you see a cluster of people in sweat suits, gliding through space with grace far beyond all other pedestrians, you are probably looking at a group of elite runners. They are likely making their way to one of the many carbo-loading parties in Boston. You can join them. Pasta producers sponsor dinners where athletes stock up on the energy that they will need come Monday.

On the Monday that I ran, I awoke with one mission in mind: to reach the finish line, while juggling. The first step was to get in the car to drive from my home in Boston to the starting line in Hopkinton. It took a long time just to drive! Could I actually juggle all the way home? The starting line was swamped with runners of all types: the elites, the serious hobby runners, and then people like me. I found my place in the back of the line, with the guy dressed like Grouch Marx (including plastic glasses, nose and cigar), a parent pushing an occupied baby carriage, and then me, the juggler. We waited for the starting gun. It fired. Where I was, at the end of a line of tens of thousands of runners, no one moved. Then slowly, we surged forward. It took me 15 minutes just to cross the starting line! Elbow to elbow, runner to juggler, we progressed towards Boston. I thought of my juggling friends who have completed numerous marathons without a drop. How could they do it with fellow runners constantly bumping into them? I actually managed 10 miles among the traffic without a drop, then it suddenly I entered a less congested passage so I could relax a bit, which prompted the first drop. From that point, I could focus on simply finishing. More than 2 hours into the race, the winners had already crossed the finish line, while I was less than half way through.

The best part was the fans lining the course. By far, the loudest fans were women of Wellesley College for whom this is a fundamental annual campus event. After hearing their screams, I was ready to turn the corner at Cleveland Circle to head down Beacon Street for the final entrance to Boston. Where was it? It was not coming up as soon as I had wanted it to, but there was nothing to do but to tough it out, as my legs pumped along, my juggling balls circulated before my eyes and I just tried to focus on those mathematical derivations in my brain. Finally, Boston became into sight. Around the corner was the finish line. I took the turn. When I crossed the line, I was hit by an emotional tsunami. With exhaustion and elation, tears flowed. The medical crew

Continued on page 9

From the Meridian from page 2

Enhancing Academic Practice through Individual and Collective Action

Both *Aspiring Academics* and *Teaching College Geography* were written by a diverse group of early career and tenured professors from all types of academic institutions, with considerable input from faculty development professionals. The books promote a vision of community-based support that enhances the work of new professors while engaging faculty of all ranks in the long-term health and vitality of departments and the discipline. Toward this end, both books feature a substantial amount of supplementary resources available through a companion website, including a collection of activities for workshops, courses, seminars, brown bags, and informal gatherings among graduate students and faculty. These activities provide suggested procedures, recommended readings, worksheets, and other supplementary materials that can help graduate students and faculty get started with applying new skills and ideas in their professional practice.

The following are examples of activities available on the website:

- Creating logs for improving time management
- Developing a plan for achieving personal and career goals
- Understanding the manuscript review process and how to effectively respond to reviews
- Writing competitive grant proposals
- Designing effective field experiences for undergraduates
- Building an inclusive classroom community

- Using ethical concepts to analyze teaching and research scenarios
- Strategies for enhancing collegial working relationships

The website also features discussion boards for the exchange of perspectives and advice about professional development issues. The discussion boards also support private forums for groups organized by teaching assignment, academic department, research network, or other interest area. Moreover, the website enables individuals to share their own classroom activities and professional development resources.

Creating a climate of support for new scholars in geography departments also means engaging the talents of senior faculty and department chairs. New publications are now available on the Healthy Departments website (www.aag.org/healthydepartments) exploring themes of working effectively with the campus administration, establishing faculty mentoring programs, managing interdisciplinary programs, and communicating the value of geography to the public. The AAG will also continue to update and expand the AAG "disciplinary data hub" page with data collected by AAG projects and links to third-party sources. And on June 20-22, the 5th annual AAG Department Leadership workshop will take place on the campus of the University of California in Los Angeles, where early career professional development will be among the topics discussed.

Proceeds from the sale of *Aspiring Academics* and *Teaching College Geography* will be used to establish a fund to support future AAG professional development initiatives. Both volumes will be on sale at the AAG Annual Meeting in Boston, where Pearson Prentice Hall will sponsor a reception with the edi-

tors on Thursday, April 17 from 5:00 – 6:00 pm. You can also order copies through the AAG website, the Pearson Prentice Hall online bookstore (www.mypearsonstore.com), or from your favorite bookseller.

Expanding Professional Development Resources

In the coming year the AAG will continue to expand the number of professional development resources available to geographers on our website and through our regional and annual meetings. Geographers interested in careers in business, government, and non-profit sectors will be a focus of these future activities, beginning with an exciting "Jobs in Geography" exhibit and many careers-related sessions at the 2008 AAG Annual Meeting in Boston.

EDGE-sponsored sessions and workshops based on *Aspiring Academics* and *Teaching College Geography* may be found in the Meeting program (available on-line at www.aag.org), and are also featured on page 12 of this issue. Workshops are also being planned for AAG regional meetings later this year (the schedule will be announced in a future issue of this newsletter and at www.aag.org/edge). Graduate students and early career faculty are especially encouraged to attend these sessions and workshops. **Participants in EDGE workshops at the Annual Meeting will receive a complimentary copy of one of the books and \$100 for completing an evaluation questionnaire following the workshop.**

For further information about AAG professional development initiatives, please contact me at msolem@aag.org. ■

Michael Solem