

AAG Newsletter
of the
**Association of American
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Faculty and Teacher Professional Development at the AAG

Geographers work in a variety of settings in higher education, government, and the private sector. The progression from student to accomplished professional is one that the AAG now supports through a host of broad-based initiatives for individuals at different career stages. This column discusses current AAG professional development programs for geographers in teaching fields; a future column will report on the efforts the AAG is leading to improve the preparation of geographers for careers outside of universities and these schools.

Enhancing professional development of early career faculty in higher education is foundational to the health of every academic department. The AAG's approach to faculty professional development focuses especially on programs for graduate students and new faculty, but also views the efforts of more experienced faculty and department chairs as vital for achieving long-term change that enhances the quality of geography teaching and learning at all levels of education. At the core of the AAG's educational programs is a focus on developing the pedagogical skills of future educators while situating that information within the context of geography. The idea here is to marry general concepts in education with the discipline-based issues that geography educators need to know, making it easier for them to understand and align relationships between teaching methods and learning outcomes.

A good example of this approach is the highly successful Geography Faculty Development Alliance (GFDA) workshops, directed since 2002 by Ken Foote at the University of Colorado. GFDA workshops provide doctoral students and untenured faculty with theoretical and practical preparation on the key issues of time management, career planning, writing grant proposals, academic publishing, course design, and many other topics that, although central to faculty work, are often not discussed

systematically in graduate curricula. In 2008, JW Harrington joined Ken as co-director of the GFDA workshops, which drew a full cohort of participants under a new fee-based model following the end of NSF support. The AAG now helps to administer and support this important program to ensure its sustainability in future years.

The AAG, through the NSF-funded EDGE program, is also sponsoring workshops at 2008 regional meetings, based on the books *Aspiring Academics* and *Teaching College Geography*. EDGE workshops will also be conducted at the 2009 Annual Meeting in Las Vegas. These books and a companion website offer research-informed advice as well as substantial content for use in graduate seminars,

workshops, and mentoring programs for graduate students and new faculty. Indeed, participants in GFDA and EDGE workshops are also using *Aspiring Academics* and *Teaching College Geography* to support professional development in several academic departments during the 2008-2009 academic year.

Professional development does not end once faculty earn tenure. It is a life-long, career spanning process that recognizes how faculty expectations evolve into mid-career and later stages. This is one of the reasons why the AAG established the Healthy Departments initiative in 2002 and subsequent annual workshops for strengthening departmental leadership. Through regular and sustained communications with department chairs, the Healthy Departments initiative and workshops support important departmental goals such as strategic planning, growing student enrollments, securing external funding and other financial resources, establishing effective working relationships with other departments, and documenting student learning outcomes.



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The AAG's professional development initiatives also include a strong and integrated set of successful materials, research projects, and ongoing programs for pre-service and in-service K-12 teachers. With support from FIPSE in the U.S. Department of Education, the AAG developed a *Teaching Geography* CD, which is distributed directly by the AAG and is also included in the second edition of the book by Phil Gersmehl, *Teaching Geography* (Guilford Press). Through engaging multimedia units, the AAG Teaching Geography CD illustrates how spatial thinking concepts directly support the geography, math, history, and science standards in every state. As many of you know, the 1994 national geography standards are currently being revised and updated through a process managed by the AAG in coordination with GENIP. The new standards will be published in 2009 and will reflect more

recent work in geographic learning and spatial cognition, as well as the use of geographic technologies in education.

The scope of the AAG's professional development opportunities extends beyond the United States through our internationalization efforts. Since 2003, the AAG's Center for Global Geography Education project has sponsored workshops in places as far-flung as Chile, Scotland, and Tunisia to help geographers practice international collaboration in their teaching. Founded in 2001, the AAG's My Community, Our Earth: Geographic Learning for Sustainable Development Program (MyCOE) has similarly supported elementary, middle school, and secondary teachers around the world to learn how to use geographic technologies and concepts as a framework for improving geography, math and science, and environmental education.

Outreach and learning materials developed in nine languages are provided free of charge through an online library that emphasizes hands-on, project-based, and inquiry-driven pedagogy. In 2008 alone, the AAG conducted MyCOE workshops for teacher and faculty professional development for educators from 18 countries, with three regional events held in Panama, Tunisia, and the Philippines.

For more information about these and other AAG professional development programs and publications, please visit www.aag.org/education/aag/edu_project_main.cfm. We welcome your feedback and comments on the research, materials, and programs undertaken by the AAG in these areas. ■

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