

**AAG Newsletter**  
of the  
**Association of American Geographers**

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## Supporting Geography in Tough Economic Times

**T**hese are tough economic times. Why should geographers donate to the AAG? It is because having a strong, active AAG can help us all get through these tough times and to emerge from them even stronger. It can help geography to continue its recent growth in importance and relevance, both within the university and in society. It can enable us to position our discipline strategically, so that when the economy recovers, geography will be at the forefront of that recovery.

Donating to the AAG now will also support the continuation of the many new initiatives we have undertaken, and ensure our ability to move geography forward on a dozen varied frontiers. It will provide a means for us as a discipline to continue to enhance diversity, provide support for departments, strengthen scholarship, help attract top students, engage public policy, advance research, and develop new opportunities facing geography in both society and in the university.

### Recent Progress and Long-term Needs

The past decade has been an outstanding one for geography and the AAG. This decade marked major steps forward at the AAG in establishing a solid financial and organizational foundation needed to meet the challenges our discipline faces in the future. Financially, the AAG formally retired all its debt in 2004 and posted many consecutive years of very strong financial performance, while at the same time initiating many new programs.

Our annual meetings have grown in attendance and international influence. There is something for everyone at these open, inclusive, and dynamic meetings--which is just the way it should be in a discipline as rich and diverse as ours.

Work has been completed on the new computerized online membership management systems and the online meeting registration and abstract submission system infrastructures at the AAG, and new applications and benefits of these online system infrastructures are now being realized across the board, from our publications to international outreach activities. Substantial cost savings and new efficiencies have also been achieved with these management systems.

Recent years also saw significant increase and re-orientation of our educational and outreach efforts, through expansion of the "My Community, Our Earth – Geographic Learning for Sustainable Development" program, through continued support for and participation in a wide range of specialty conference and international exchange activities, as well as the AAG's innovative Center for Global Geography Education program, and an array of new NSF and Department of Education funded projects and proposals, increasingly focused on higher education and graduate programs in geography, as well as on K-12 education.

A new AAG Office of Public Policy has been established, which means that geography now has eyes, ears and a voice on Capitol Hill and within the federal agencies whose policies can so directly impact our future. The building and training of a new AAG core staff with the professional and technical skills necessary for the 21st century has also progressed well, and internal work flows continue to be carefully analyzed and defined to increase efficiency and to enhance continuity of operations as normal staff turnover occurs in the future. I am also very pleased to report that our programs to increase AAG membership have produced record membership in our association of over 10,000 individual members.



Richardson

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But with the approach of a new decade, we cannot be satisfied with reflection on the successes of the past decade alone. We require plans and resolutions about the future as well. With your support, what might these resolutions be? As a new year, and a new decade approaches, here are a few of my suggested resolutions:

Let's do more to continue to strengthen our Association's membership, financial foundations, annual meetings, and publications, and let's all work to together to improve these core programs at every opportunity. Let's find new ways to support geography's academic programs and to expand its outreach to society, to other disciplines, to policy makers, and to engage the larger intellectual enterprise of which we are an integral and essential part. Let's continue to represent the needs and interests of geographers from all corners of our diverse discipline. New efforts are already planned for programs to support physical geography and for exploring ways to foster a growing synergy between geography and the humanities. Bolstering geographic science and interdisciplinary geographic research

programs at NSF, USGS, AAAS, and other leading science institutions will be a continuing priority, as will nurturing to success our many new AAG initiatives such as the Diversity Task Force, the Senior Associates program, the Healthy Departments Workshops, our public policy activities, and many others. Remembering to appreciate the hard work of our excellent staff at the AAG, and thanking our members for the wonderful opportunity to work with you all, however, will be at the top of my own list.

### **The AAG: also supporting others in need**

Reasons for supporting the AAG extend beyond the benefits that will accrue for current AAG members, or for our discipline. We need to remember that even during these tight economic times in the US, Canada, and Europe there are many, both geographers and others, around the world whose hardship vastly surpasses our own. The AAG has taken leadership roles in a number of important efforts to recognize and act on these needs of others, in ways that are relevant to what geography has to

offer. These programs rely on your support, both financial and otherwise, to thrive and succeed. I'd like to mention briefly two such AAG efforts, which I think are particularly worthy of our support.

#### *AAG Developing Regions Membership Program*

This new program will not only benefit those geographers from developing regions who wish to participate, but it also benefit our current membership. Greater international networking, information sharing, and interaction is becoming increasingly common—and necessary—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 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 6,500 attendees already registered for the AAG Annual Meeting to be held in Washington, DC, next April

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(2010), over 30% are from countries other than the U.S., up from approximately 15% several years ago.

Of course, supporting greater participation of geographers from the “developing regions” of the world in activities and networks of the AAG also enriches the experience, research, and scholarship of the AAG and its current members in myriad ways, providing both personal and professional benefits to us far exceeding the financial subsidies we might extend to our colleagues in some of the poorest regions of the world.

#### *Geography and Human Rights*

The AAG has played a leading role with the AAAS and a team of other scientific and professional associations to help develop the conceptual and organizational framework for a new international Science and Human Rights Coalition, hosted by AAAS. The AAG has been very active in making this Coalition a reality, and I currently serve as chair of its Steering Committee. The new Science and Human Rights Coalition, with a membership already of nearly fifty scientific associations ranging from physics to anthropology, works to promote human rights awareness and programs within scientific associations, and works together with human rights organizations to address human rights needs around the world.

As part of our work on human rights, the AAG also has developed specific “Geography and Human Rights” resources, including a bibliography of research on geography and human rights issues, an updated ethics statement, many sessions on these topics at our annual meetings, and the new AAG Geography and Human Rights Clearinghouse website ([www.aag.org](http://www.aag.org)).

#### **Keeping AAG Costs Low**

Finally, the AAG has worked very hard to be cost-efficient in its activities and programs, and to keep costs as low as possible for AAG members. The AAG membership fees also are based on a sliding scale related to income, to support early career faculty

as well as unemployed or underemployed members.

Both AAG membership and AAG annual meeting registration fees are a bargain compared to most other geography organizations. Additionally, the AAG has not increased either its membership fees or annual meeting registration fees for several years, in recognition of difficult economic times, despite substantial rising costs of doing business during this same time period.

We also have greatly expanded AAG funds to subsidize student travel and attendance at AAG meetings, special programs for retired members, and new programs to help members in special financial need. Your donations to the AAG help maintain and expand these services and programs during tight financial times.

#### **Honoring and Recognizing AAG Donors**

The AAG recognizes and honors the financial contributions of its members in many ways for their continued support of crucially needed AAG programs that help advance our discipline. Both new donors and donors who have previously made contributions in the amount of \$1,500 or more are eligible to name a commemorative brick, which will be placed in the new walkway of Meridian Place (AAG headquarters) in Washington, D.C. Proceeds go to the AAG fund of your choice; and all contributions are tax deductible.



Add your brick to the AAG's commemorative walkway at Meridian Place.



AAG Past Presidents Dick Marston and Kavita Pandit place the first brick (dedicated to Duane Nellis) in the AAG's new commemorative walkway.

Some suggestions for naming bricks in support of geography are your name and organization, or the name of a professor, colleague, or mentor you wish to honor. Personalized bricks express your support of geography, and also make a unique and lasting retirement or honorary gift for colleagues. They can also be a way to remember and memorialize someone important in your life or career who has passed away. Buying a brick is a great way to make your mark at Meridian Place while you support efforts to advance geography.

Opportunities for making a tax-deductible donation to the AAG this year are described on the page which follows this column. Additional information on specialized gifts or on bequests, or on other funds available for support at the AAG, please visit [www.aag.org](http://www.aag.org), or feel free to contact me directly at 202-234-1450. Thank you for your support of geography, and of the AAG, in so many ways. ■

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