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AAG Launches New Website

The Association of American Geographers is pleased to introduce its new feature-rich website, developed during the past year to better meet the current needs of the Association and its members. As AAG membership and annual meeting attendance have grown, our website has become a central point of contact. The site averaged more than 126,000 visits per month during the last year. The increasing reliance of geographers on the AAG’s website as a source of information about the association’s projects, programs, events, and services means that we have to update our site regularly to ensure that its functionality, content, and technology are current.

A major step toward meeting that goal during our current upgrade was to implement a web-based content management system (CMS) that uses templates and databases to control the site navigation, functions, and content. A content management system is a decentralized tool that gives authorized AAG employees and members direct access to content on the site, enabling them to update information faster and more easily than before. In turn, members and other visitors receive the most current information.

The new website will make it easier for us to coordinate the AAG’s growing constellation of diverse activities, and will allow our members to better manage their membership information, register for the annual meeting and other events, and interact with the AAG’s many new programs and projects. Other new tools and resources will enable members from around the world to more easily connect with our dynamic community of scholars, educators, and practitioners. For example, improved discussion forums allow members to meet, network, and collaborate with other geographers and related professionals. These interactive specialty group forums will further facilitate the exchange of ideas across a broad spectrum of interests, disciplines, and regions.

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“The Mountain is Out”
National Jewels Crown Puget Sound

Ray that at least one day you spend in Seattle you will see the spectacular mountains surrounding Puget Sound. On that day, go to the top of the Space Needle. From there you will encounter the mountains that rise above it in all directions. Across Puget Sound on the western horizon, the jagged peaks of the Olympic Mountains from within the Olympic National Park outline the Olympic Peninsula. To the northeast, you will see the clustered peaks of the North Cascades including North Cascades National Park. To the southeast, Mt. Rainier, known to First Peoples as Mt. Tahoma, is preserved within the boundaries of Mt. Rainier National Park. On that one sunny day, you will hear the local population say “The Mountain is out” and understand why everything else becomes second in significance for residents of Puget Sound.

The mountain referred to in this colloquial saying is Mt. Rainier, an active volcano that last erupted approximately 150 years ago, its interior dome now rising to 14,410 feet. The mountain and its associated ecosystems were protected as the nation’s fifth national park on March 2, 1899. According to the National Park Service documents, Mount Rainier National Park encompasses 235,625 acres on the west side of the Cascade Range. The Park is approximately 97 percent wilderness and 3 percent National Historic Landmark District. One of the most beautiful and beloved national park lodges, Paradise Inn, is located on the edge of Nisqually Glacier.

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See the AAG Annual Meeting Call for Papers on pages 12-13.
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Several of the other enhancements made to the site improve how web pages and materials are found and accessed. A new design aesthetic organizes information visually to make it easier for users to scan for the information they need. Additionally, the navigation throughout the site has been streamlined and standardized to improve speed and accessibility.

An integrated, advanced search engine indexes all content on the site, making PDF, Word, Excel, and PowerPoint files searchable. Advanced options allow users to search using wildcards, Boolean searches (i.e., AND, OR, NOT), synonyms, and relevant phrases. The new site structure has also been optimized for search engines, making it more widely available to a broader audience through searches conducted on sites like Google and Bing. The enhanced search results will help increase access to information about the programs and services available from AAG and its members.

Members will have access to password-protected content, like all jobs in Geography listings, current and back issues of the AAG journals, the AAG Newsletter, membership directory, and specialty group forums. Members can visit the Members Only page to quickly find links to those frequently visited areas.

Members now can also upload and share files with colleagues through a document management module. This tool serves as a central repository, making the exchange of project ideas easier than before.

Having the new CMS in place now means that AAG staff and other contributors will be working over the next six months to develop and expand the content of each major section of the site. For instance, the AAG “Jobs & Careers” section of the website will be thoroughly updated and expanded in the coming months with job listings, and extensive information about professional development and career planning.

Members can now find detailed information about AAG research, grants, and core programs under the “Projects & Programs” and “Education” sections of the website. Other sections are devoted to key AAG initiatives supporting the work of geographers in the United States and internationally, as well as services for geographers and academic departments seeking to enhance diversity, obtain disciplinary data in geography, and conduct public outreach activities with the media and with policy-makers.

The AAG “Publications” section of the website not only provides direct online access to all current and past issues of the AAG journals, but also early access to individual AAG journal articles prior to publication. The “Publications” section will also highlight books published by geographers. Members who have recently published a book are invited to submit information about their new book to be featured on the site.

The changes to the site also brought enhancements to the “Annual Meeting” section. It is now easier to sign up online for field trips, workshops, and other annual meeting activities, even after registering to attend. The processes for submitting abstracts and organizing sessions for the annual meeting are constantly reviewed and improved as members and attendees provide feedback and new ideas.

In addition, several important topical clearinghouse sites, such as the AAG Geography and Human Rights Clearinghouse, the Geography and Climate Change Clearinghouse, the AAG Diversity Clearinghouse, and the Historical GIS Clearinghouse and Forum, provide a central resource and exchange
New Climate Modeling Software Released

The National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) has released new software they hope will shed light on some of the critical mysteries surrounding global warming, allowing scientists to study the complexities of climate change in greater detail. The Community Earth System Model (CESM) will be one of the primary climate models used for the next assessment by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

"With the Community Earth System Model, we can pursue scientific questions that we could not address previously," said NCAR scientist James Hurrell, chair of the scientific steering committee that developed the model. "Thanks to its improved physics and expanded biogeochemistry, it gives us a better representation of the real world."

The CESM builds on the Community Climate System Model, which NCAR scientists and collaborators have regularly updated since first developing it more than a decade ago. The new model enables scientists to gain a broader picture of Earth's climate system by incorporating more influences, including the interaction of marine ecosystems with greenhouse gases, the climatic influence of ozone, dust, and other atmospheric chemicals; the cycling of carbon through the atmosphere, oceans, and land surfaces; and the influence of greenhouse gases on the upper atmosphere. In addition, an entirely new representation of atmospheric processes in the CESM will allow researchers to pursue a much wider variety of applications, including studies of air quality and biogeochemical feedback mechanisms.

"Decision makers in diverse arenas need to know the extent to which the climate events they see are the product of natural variability, and hence can be expected to reverse at some point, or are the result of potentially irreversible, human-influenced climate change," Hurrell said.

The latest in a series of NCAR-based global models developed over the last 30 years, scientists and engineers at NCAR, DOE laboratories, and several universities developed the CESM with support from the Department of Energy (DOE) and the National Science Foundation (NSF).

The model is freely available to researchers worldwide. For more information, see the National Center for Atmospheric Research website at http://ncar.ucar.edu.

AAG Intern in Latin America

The AAG welcomed intern Astrid Ng this summer in Panama City, Panama, where she is working with AAG staff to assist with various outreach projects including the PASI on Climate Change and Hazards in the Americas, JRS Biodiversity Foundation activities, and the ALIGNED Diversity project. Astrid graduated in May of 2010 with a degree in Environmental Management and a second major in Latin American Studies from the University of Redlands in Southern California. She is interested in pursuing a career in international development and environmental planning in Latin America. Currently, in her free time Astrid enjoys dancing, running, spending time with her friends in Panama, and keeping track of her family, friends, dog, and hamster back in California.

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