Reluctantly Transitioning to the Inevitable: Online Publications

All AAG publications are now available both online and in hard copy print. For several years, the AAG Council has been examining whether to continue to produce both the hard copy and online versions of some publications such as the AAG Newsletter, the AAG Guide to Programs in Geography, and journal book reviews.

It also has been evaluating options for holding AAG elections online rather than by paper ballot only, and for transitioning AAG’s annual meeting programs from paper books to interactive online meeting programs for use on computers and mobile hand-held devices. Recently, the AAG Council has passed resolutions addressing several of these publications and programs, and these decisions are summarized below.

AAG Annual Meetings

The AAG will begin offering online electronic versions of its bulky Annual Meeting Program book, for use on mobile hand-held devices and laptops, beginning in 2013 at the AAG Los Angeles meeting. The program will also still be available in printed program books as before, for those attendees who wish to have the hard copy version in Los Angeles. In future years, based on the experience in Los Angeles, a decision will be made whether to continue with both the paper print version and the online version of the program, or to move to online only.

The AAG Guide

The Guide to Geography Programs in the Americas is a useful resource for students, faculty, and geographers throughout the world. The new 2011-2012 edition of the Guide will now be published also as an online publication, access to which will be free for all AAG members.

Published annually for the past 43 years, the Guide has evolved from its early editions, as the Guide to Graduate Programs in the U.S. and Canada, to include bachelor and associate degree programs. In 2005, it was expanded once again, this time to incorporate Latin American institutions, and became the Guide to Geography Programs in the Americas.

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The new 2011-2012 Guide describes a total of 108 academic institutions throughout the Americas known to offer a doctorate in geography. The volume also contains information on 79 institutions in which the master’s is the highest degree offered, and 266 that offer bachelor’s degrees in geography. Departmental listings offer additional information as degree requirements, curricula, faculty qualifications, program specialities, financial assistance, and degrees completed. The Guide also lists information on government agencies, private firms, research institutions, and related organizations that employ geographers. The AAG Handbook and the Directory of Geographers, which have been included in the published Guide since the early 1990s, are invaluable sources in themselves, and are also a part of the new online edition of the Guide.

AAG members can now access the AAG Guide online by visiting www.aag.org/publications, and login with your member username and password. Participating departments with listings in the Guide will also be provided free online access for all faculty and all geography students to use, via a departmental username and password.

Limited hard copies of the Guide will still be printed and be available for purchase.
this year at http://www.aag.org/aag_book
store. Arrangements for print-on-demand
copies of the Guide will also continue to
be available in future years. Online copies
of the Guide will also be updated more fre-
quently, and will be archived annually. For
questions regarding accessing the Guide
online, please contact Megan Overbey at
moverbey@aag.org.

AAG Newsletter
The Council recently passed resolu-
tions directing the AAG to begin tran-
sitioning the AAG Newsletter content to a
set of interactive and interrelated online
communication vehicles. This transition
will occur within the next year, and will
make AAG news and op-eds, as well as
Jobs in Geography listings, available on
a far more timely basis, and enable wider
and more in-depth coverage of news about
our discipline. A great deal of the Newsletter
information is already conveyed online via
the AAG Smartbrief, AAG Geograms, the
AAG website news section, AAG's online
Jobs in Geography listings, and other
channels. Multiple online means of com-
unication will be developed to convey
the news and other information currently
contained in the hard copy AAG Newsletter.

AAG Journals
There are no plans to discontinue
the hard copy versions of the AAG's
flagship journals, the Annals of the AAG
and The Professional Geographer. Currently,
all AAG members automatically receive
both hard copy and online access to
our leading AAG journals. While some
members feel that these journals eventu-
ally will go online only, that time is not
here yet, and I don't see it happening in
the near future.

However, those members who wish to
receive their AAG journal subscriptions
“online only” may already elect to do so on
an individual basis. Many AAG members
have now chosen this option, for personal
convenience or due to concerns about
impact on the environment of printing
and mailing the hard copy issues. If you
wish to receive your AAG journals online
only, rather than both online and hard
copy, you may do so by logging on to
your AAG website profile, and checking
the box at the bottom of the page to
opt out of receiving paper copies of the
AAG journals. Or you may simply contact
AAG membership director Adam Thocher
at athocher@aag.org, or by phone at
202-234-1450, and he can make the
arrangement for you.

The AAG Review of Books
The AAG Council has also passed a
resolution to include AAG journal book
reviews in a new online AAG publica-
tion, The AAG Review of Books, which
will contain scholarly book reviews
as formerly published in the Annals of
the AAG and The Professional Geographer,
along with reviews of significant current
books related more broadly to geography
and public policy and/or international
affairs.

As mentioned above, the AAG's
flagship journals will continue to be
published both in hard copy and online.
Book reviews will be referenced in the
hard copy versions of the Annals and
The PG, but the reviews themselves
will move to and will be available only in
the new online companion publication,
The AAG Review of Books, beginning in
2013. A great deal of discussion by our
journal editors and the AAG Council
went into this decision, which was not
made lightly. Overriding considerations
included the opportunity to include
many more worthy geography books
for review, and the ability to publish
these reviews in a timelier manner. In
addition, it is also hoped that the new
AAG Review of Books will reach a much
broader interdisciplinary readership, as
well as make important geographical
contributions to policy and international
affairs.

AAG Elections
The 2013 AAG Election also will be
conducted online, rather than with paper
ballots only as in the past. The AAG
has been thoroughly researching online
election software systems for some time
now, and we have narrowed the options to
two companies that provide these systems.
We are currently testing each of these two
finalist online voting systems, and evaluat-
ing factors such as security, cost, ease of
use for voters, and flexibility for use in
multiple types of AAG elections, includ-
ing potentially for AAG regional divisions
or by other AAG entities as well. Before
implementing this new voting process, the
AAG will provide training and orienta-
tion materials for members, which will be
distributed well in advance of the election.
An option will still be provided for any
member to receive a paper ballot should
that be needed. Based on the experience
of many of our peer organizations, we hope
this move also will increase participation
by AAG members in the annual AAG elec-
tions for officers and councillors.

The AAG Council recognizes that
questions of online vs. paper hard copy
publications are often controversial and
that strong opinions and good valid argu-
ments are represented on both sides of
the debate. I would like to emphasize that
the AAG Publications Committee and
the AAG Council has approached these
decisions with a great deal of thought,
research, and input from the membership.

Please bear with us as we continue to
transition AAG publications and adminis-
trative functions online over the next few
years, as this process is complex. We are
confident that over time you will experience
many benefits from this accommoda-
tion to the new digital publishing world,
as well as a wistful sense of loss that I do
share with many of you.

Doug Richardson
drichardson@aag.org

From the Meridian columns are archived at www.aag.org/publications.