

## Ten Ways in Which AAG Regional Meetings Advance Geography

One of my most interesting and educational activities as AAG President has been to travel to the meetings of many of the AAG regional divisions (I was able to attend all but two last fall). These travels gave me the opportunity to meet new colleagues, to revisit old friends across the country, and to sample the rich variety of research being conducted in different geographic settings. They also gave me the chance to observe and reflect on the unique roles that AAG Regional Division Meetings play in promoting our discipline. Based on my sampling of these meetings, I would like to share what I see are the "top ten" ways in which regional meetings advance geography.

*Promoting geography to administrators from local universities.* Regional division meetings are an excellent opportunity to showcase the breadth of our discipline to senior administrators at the host university. At several of the meetings I attended, deans, provosts, and even chancellors made remarks at the opening session, and sometimes even attended sessions. Involving senior administrators in panel sessions (e.g., on a "Healthy Departments" panel) can also add a unique and valuable perspective to the session.

*Facilitating information exchange amongst department chairs.* Most regional meetings that I attended had a time reserved for a meeting of department chairs. These meetings allow chairs to exchange information about trends in higher education in the region or in a specific state. At the Pacific Coast division (APCG) meeting, for example, the chairs of geography departments in the California State University system had a very productive discussion about system policies and how they affect their programs.

*Facilitating the professional development of graduate students.* Regional meetings have long served to introduce new graduate students to the professional community and to provide a friendly environment in which to make their first research presentation. The Great Plains-Rocky Mountain (GPRM)/West Lakes joint regional meeting had a "Breakfast with a

Mentor" session—an informal period during which graduate students could meet and chat with prominent geographers in the region. Many regional meetings included a social event specifically for graduate students that provided an opportunity for them to connect with others in their own cohort.

*Introducing undergraduates to the geography scholarly community.* Due to the relative ease of travel, regional division meetings typically draw large numbers of undergraduate students. The Geography Bowl competitions, in particular, have served as a superb way to involve undergraduate students in the meeting and to engage them in the discipline. Many undergraduates participate in poster sessions and are attracted by sessions on applying to graduate school or on job opportunities for geographers.

*Bringing together "stand alone geographers."* Regional division meetings provide a valuable opportunity for geographers working in non-geography departments to remain connected with the discipline, to exchange ideas with others working in similar contexts, and to identify colleagues in the region who could be valuable allies in promoting their work to their administrators. The presence of stand alone geographers at meetings also serves to remind us all about the diversity of settings in which the work of promoting geography takes place.

*Involving Advanced Placement (AP) geography teachers and students.* As the popularity of AP geography in high schools grows, there are increasing opportunities to involve local AP students and teachers in regional meetings. Attending and presenting posters at this year's Southwest division (SWAAG) meeting in Norman, Oklahoma, were several AP students from the local area. These students and their teacher were recognized at the banquet and received certificates from SWAAG. What a great way to welcome a future cohort of geographers into the discipline!



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*Bringing in geographers from across the border.* As the number of international members of AAG increases, regional meetings—particularly those located along the periphery of the United States—are increasingly attracting geographers from neighboring countries. Canadian geographers were well represented at this year's New England-St. Lawrence Valley division (NESTVAL) meetings in Burlington, Vermont. Members of the Southeast division (SEDAAG) are reaching out to Caribbean geographers, and this year the division provided travel support for several geographers from the University of the West Indies to attend the joint SEDAAG/Middle Atlantic division (MAD) meeting in Morgantown, West Virginia.

*Involving alumni working in non-academic settings.* At the GPRM/West Lakes joint meeting in Lincoln, the keynote speaker was Joe Sartore, a photographer for *National Geographic* who presented a riveting slide show. Mr. Sartore, an alumnus of the University of Nebraska, told me how honored he was to be invited back to his alma mater. Local geography departments should consider inviting their alumni, particularly those working in non-academic settings, to the regional meetings. Many will welcome the chance to visit the campus and to re-engage with the discipline and will surely add a rich dimension to the regional meetings.

*Providing meeting opportunities for local geography organizations.* Regional geography conferences often provide a venue for smaller embedded meetings of local or regional geography groups or networks. For example, the APCG meeting included a well attended luncheon sponsored by the Women's Network. Geographic Alliance coordinators from the various states in the region often use the regional meeting to meet and exchange ideas.

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**Elizabeth Chacko**, associate professor of geography and international affairs at George Washington University (GW), was named the 2006 Carnegie Foundation for the Advance-



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ment of Teaching District of Columbia Professor of the Year by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE). The CASE Professor of the Year program recognizes undergraduate professors for extraordinary dedication, as demonstrated by impact on and involvement with undergraduate students; scholarly approach to teaching and learning; contribution to undergraduate education in the institution, community, and profession; and support from colleagues and current and former undergraduate students.

An editorial by **Harley Johansen**, professor of geography at the University of Idaho, appeared in the October issue of *Foreign Direct Investment*, a magazine for the foreign investment community worldwide. It can be viewed online at [www.fdimagazine.com/news/categoryfront.php/id/9/think\\_tank.html](http://www.fdimagazine.com/news/categoryfront.php/id/9/think_tank.html).

**John Rennie Short**, a professor at the University of Maryland Baltimore County, gave the 2006 Philip Lee Phillips Society Lecture in the Map Library of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. on October 26, 2006. The lecture "Cartographic Encounters in The New World" outlined a new way to understand interaction between indigenous people and settlers in the colonial era and the early national period in the U.S.

**David Knight**, retired professor of geography and former dean of social sciences at the University of Guelph, was quoted in an *Ottawa Citizen* article about the history of locating Canada's capital in Ottawa. The article, "Creative Thinking Helped Make Ottawa Capital" by Patrick Dare appeared on November 3, 2006 and may be viewed at [www.canada.com/ottawacitizen/news/story.html?id=ae0b5d81-6584-4fbc-bfd2-bc46a140e1b9&k=14627](http://www.canada.com/ottawacitizen/news/story.html?id=ae0b5d81-6584-4fbc-bfd2-bc46a140e1b9&k=14627).

**M. Duane Nellis** was among six new chief academic officers elected to a three-year term as a member of the executive committee of the National Association of State Universities & Land Grant Colleges

(NASULGC) Council on Academic Affairs. The council serves as the coordinating body for the provosts and vice presidents of NASULGC universities.

A book by **Jim Newman**, emeritus professor of geography at Syracuse University, entitled *Imperial Footprints: Henry Morton Stanley's African Journeys* (Brassey's/Potomac 2004), was recently released in French as *Stanley: Entre Couronne et Empire* (Luc Pire) and Dutch as *Stanley Ontdekkingsreiziger in Afrika* (Lannoo). To celebrate the events Newman was invited to Brussels by the King Baudouin Foundation for interviews with newspapers *De Morgen*, *De Tijd*, and *Le Soir*, plus *Mo-magazine*, *The Bulletin*, and VRT Radio. He also gave a presentation entitled "Stanley and the Congo" at the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren, where he is a member of the King Baudouin Foundation's Archives Stanley Comite Scientifique.

**Iain Hay** (Flinders University, Australia) received the Prime Minister's Award for Australian University Teacher of the Year. This is the most prestigious tertiary education teaching award in Australia and comes with a total prize of AU\$75,000 that can be used for professional purposes. ■

#### AAG Honorary Geographer Jeffery Sachs from page 1

is a research associate of the National Bureau of Economic Research. Prior to joining Columbia, he spent over twenty years at Harvard University, most recently as director of the Center for International Development. A native of Detroit, Michi-

gan, Sachs received his BA, MA, and PhD degrees at Harvard University.

Each year the AAG selects an individual as Honorary Geographer. Past recipients are Barbara Kingsolver, Stephen Pyne, J. Keith Ord, Cynthia Enloe, John McPhee,

John E. Gould, Calvin Trillan, Herman Daly, and Stephen Jay Gould.

For AAG Honorary Geographer nomination information see [www.aag.org/Grantsawards/honorary\\_geographer.cfm](http://www.aag.org/Grantsawards/honorary_geographer.cfm). ■

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*Building disciplinary leadership.* Finally, AAG regional meetings (and regional divisions more generally) provide superb opportunities to engage in disciplinary service and build leadership. I know that for me, regularly attending SEDAAG meetings naturally led me to begin participating in SEDAAG governance. This in turn motivated me to become involved in the AAG. Thus, like

specialty groups, regional divisions act as important "stepping stones" for those interested in engaging in disciplinary leadership activities at the national level.

Regional division meetings can and do advance geography in singular ways that are not easily replicated at the national meetings. If you have not participated in a regional division meeting lately, I strongly

encourage you to attend one this year. You will be impressed by its vibrancy and the opportunities it presents for professional growth! And to all of you that helped to organize last year's regional meetings, thank you for being such wonderful hosts for my travels across the country. ■

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