

AAG Newsletter of the Association of American Geographers

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AAG Expands Geography Education Initiatives

Greetings. At Doug Richardson's invitation, I'm pleased to have this opportunity to update the membership on the AAG's geography education initiatives.

In the February 2004 issue of *The Professional Geographer*, Bob and Sarah Bednarz provide a succinct and apt description of geography education's status as of 2004 – "the glass is half full and it's getting fuller." In this column, I'd like to describe some of the ways the AAG is replenishing geography education's glass by building on past successes as well as responding to new challenges and opportunities.



Solem

Advancing Postsecondary Geography

The AAG is renewing its dedication to supporting geography in higher education through several new initiatives. As reported in the January 2004 issue of this newsletter, our NSF-funded Online Center for Global Geography Education project is developing modules designed to support international collaboration in teaching and learning using the Internet. The first three modules on Population, Global Economy, and Nationalism will be unveiled at the International Geographical Union's Glasgow Congress in August 2004. Texas State University at San Marcos is providing the online center with administrative and technical support.

The preparation and future success of new faculty members is of central importance to geography's long-term health as a discipline. Maintaining a well-trained professoriate will therefore remain a high priority for the AAG. Ken Foote's Geography Faculty Development Alliance (GFDA) project at the University of Colorado is providing support to hundreds of early career professors through workshops and seminars exploring topics such as active pedagogy, course planning, student assessment, winning grants, tenure and promo-

tion issues, field study, time management, publishing, and ethics. Over the next several years, the AAG will work with Ken to study the value of the training to the participants. We will also evaluate what departments and universities are doing to promote the abilities and well-being of early career faculty. The AAG's Committee on College Geography is also focusing on faculty development and will help expand the reach of the GFDA through workshops, panels, and paper sessions at our regional and national meetings.

Supporting K-12 Education

The AAG is continuing efforts to improve the teaching and learning of geography in American schools. As you may know, the AAG has a contractual agreement with Holt, Rinehart, and Winston (HRW) to distribute the AAG's ARGUS and ARGWorld CDs. The AAG has set aside 70% of its share of royalties to establish a geography education materials development fund, which will support updates to ARGUS and ARGWorld as well as provide partial funding for new projects. This is a significant accomplishment, yet ultimately the impact of these materials will be far greater if we can also strengthen teacher preparation programs in geography.

Indeed, the need for such "highly qualified" teachers is recognized in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, which designates geography as one of ten core subjects in American education. Nevertheless, No Child Left Behind legislation provides *no funding* to support teacher professional development in geography; in fact, geography is the only core subject to lack such funding. Last month, the AAG, with support from Phil Gersmehl, submitted an invited proposal to the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of

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Postsecondary Education program, requesting funds to develop a Teacher's Guide to Modern Geography. If funded, the Teacher's Guide will, for the first time, provide a comprehensive suite of high-quality teacher-training products referenced to national standards and spatial thinking skills. The teachers guide will be designed for pre-service programs in geography education, but will also support early-career mentoring programs and mid-career recertification programs.

Building Collaborations

The AAG prides itself on its accomplishments and new initiatives in geography education, but we recognize that the challenges facing us are much larger than can be reasonably taken on by one organization. One such challenge is reforming teacher professional development in geography. At this time, most geography teachers do not major in geography; African Americans and Latinos remain under-represented in the instructional workforce; many teachers have no access to graduate programs in geography education; few Ph.D.'s are awarded in geography education in any given year; and research has yet to clarify how pedagogic expertise develops in geography. The scope of the problem requires a coordinated, broad-based, and interdisciplinary response from multiple institutions and organizations. I am pleased to report that the AAG submitted an invited proposal in February to the NSF Centers for Learning and Teaching program, requesting \$10,179,220 to develop a Center for the Advancement of Geography Education. This proposal marshals the talents of faculty at Howard University, Texas A&M University, and the University of Oregon to develop and implement new teacher-training and graduate programs in partnership with local school districts, the Geographic Alliance network, Environmental Systems Research Institute, the Dutton Institute for e-Education at Penn State, the National Council for Geographic Education, the National Geographic Society, JES and Co., and the American Geographical Society.

In the coming months, the AAG will prepare another large multi-institution NSF proposal to examine the science of spatial learning. These proposals have already yielded new ideas and constructive relationships among organizations that share a strong interest in geography education.

The AAG is also working closely with other geography organizations to monitor federal policy developments of interest to geographers and geography educators. With a recent donation of \$150,000 and additional support from GENIP, the AAG will devote one FTE of staff time to policy monitoring and analysis, and will allocate a minimum of 0.25 FTE staff to geography education-related issues, including No Child Left Behind. GENIP and the AAG are currently exploring strategies for securing funding for geography under the current provisions of NCLB, as well as building political support and presence for geography education when NCLB comes up for reauthorization in 2006.

Please visit the AAG's website for more information about its geography education initiatives, and let Doug and me know how we're doing and what we could be doing better. With your help, the AAG can ensure that geography education's glass will someday truly spillover.

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