

AAG Newsletter of the Association of American Geographers

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USPS 987-380 ISSN 0275-3995

The AAG Newsletter ISSN 0275-3995 is published monthly with July/August combined, by the Association of American Geographers, 1710 16th Street NW, Washington, DC 20009-3198. The cost of an annual subscription is \$25.00. The subscription price is included in the annual dues of the Association. Not available to non-members. Periodicals postage paid in Washington, DC. All news items and letters, including job listings, should be sent to the Editor at the address below or to newsletter@aag.org.

All Newsletter materials must arrive at the Association office by the 1st of the month preceding the month of the publication. This includes job listings. Material will be published on a space available basis and at the discretion of the editorial staff.

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AAG Initiates Program for Senior Geographers

A large cohort of U.S. academic and professional geographers is now approaching retirement age. As I have traveled the country over the past few years, attending AAG regional meetings, visiting universities and geography departments, and speaking with groups of geographers from all corners of the discipline and the nation, I have been struck by the enormous reservoir of talent, experience, and caring that soon will be lost to American geography as these geographers retire.

Two years ago, when offered the position of Executive Director of the AAG, I published in this newsletter a set of what I saw then as "Challenges Facing the AAG" (AAG Newsletter, August 2002). The challenges identified were wide ranging, and I am proud to say that we have made very substantial progress on most of them during the past two years. One of those that remains was the pledge to "make greater use of the talent and resources of our membership in outreach," and in particular "finding more meaningful ways to engage the extraordinary experience and skills of our retired geographers in the AAG's on-going outreach and related programs."

Since that time, I have explored this issue at great length in discussions with many members, and through an advisory group convened by myself and former AAG President Janice Monk, and which also includes Richard Morrill, former AAG President and current President of the Retired Geographers Affinity Group; former AAG President John Adams of the University of Minnesota; James McConnell, University at Buffalo, SUNY; Lydia Pulsipher, University of Tennessee; and Sandra Shaw, formerly of the U.S. Department of State. The result of these

discussions has been a decision to establish an innovative program, the AAG Senior Associates initiative, designed to engage senior members of the profession in new opportunities for stimulating work that recognizes their talents and experience and that directly supports the work of the Association and the discipline.

Activities are envisioned at several levels. Nationally, the Associates' networks and experience could assist the AAG staff in such tasks as developing "talent banks" (e.g., for media outreach); preparing print or online resources to support numerous existing programs such as departmental support efforts, diversity initiatives,



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or international collaborative work. Associates could provide a valuable resource to on-going leadership development and mentoring programs for early and mid-career geographers, or by assisting with selected activities related to AAG's annual meetings, publications, and membership recruitment programs. Assistance developing proposals to foundations and federal agencies, and with AAG's special fundraising activities are also areas in which some Senior Associates may have special and much-valued expertise to share. Regionally and locally, Associates might also help build bridges to geographers working in small or interdisciplinary programs or at community colleges, and contribute in multiple ways to efforts to strengthen geography's position in education, governmental, and private sectors.

Other opportunities for potential engagement in important work by Senior Associates might include liaison with the AAG's new public policy program. Activity in this arena could involve interaction with local Congressional

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representatives on issues such as funding for national geography education programs or for geographic research at NSF, USGS, and other federal agencies, as well as letter writing campaigns and other grassroots support activity at the federal, state, or local level on key geography issues.

While still in the formative stages, plans call for the Senior Associates initiative to be coordinated by a core leadership group that works closely with AAG headquarters staff to recruit Senior Associates, identify appropriate projects and tasks, and seek sources of funding to cover AAG program administrative costs as well as honoraria and travel expenses for Associates. The initiative will seek to offer opportunities for meaningful engagement in AAG projects and programs by a roster of Senior Associate volunteers, and to provide honoraria, special recognition, and expenses support to participants in the program.

I am excited about this new program, and believe it will address genuine needs of both the AAG and senior geographers. I have asked Janice Monk and AAG Deputy Director Patricia Solís to work with me to help coordinate the new AAG



Janice Monk to help lead AAG Senior Associates program

Senior Associates initiative as we get it up and running. If you would like more information on the program, have suggestions to share, or have an interest in participating in the program, please feel free to contact Jan at jmonk@email.arizona.edu, Patricia at psolis@aag.org, or me. Progress updates on activities of the new AAG Senior Associates program will be made available on the AAG Web site (www.aag.org/senior-associates) and in the newsletter in the months ahead.

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