

April 2005

## From the Meridian

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Douglas Richardson, Publisher  
and Managing Editor

Megan D. Nortrup,  
Editor

AAG Voice 202-234-1450

AAG Fax 202-234-2744

newsletter@aag.org

www.aag.org

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## AAG Launches Study on Graduate Education in Geography

The National Science Foundation, through its Research on Learning and Education (ROLE) program, has awarded the AAG a \$980,393 grant for "Enhancing Departments and Graduate Education (EDGE) in Geography," a three-year project to study the process of professional development in graduate geography. With this funding, the AAG will considerably expand its commitment to strengthening the quality of geography education at the graduate level.

Headed by AAG Educational Affairs Director Michael Solem and co-investigators Ken Foote (University of Colorado) and Jan Monk (University of Arizona), the EDGE project will develop a methodology to interpret the social and academic climates of MA/MS and PhD geography programs, while simultaneously evaluating the guidance and support that departments provide to graduate students. Particular attention will be given to the experiences of women, ethnic minority, gay, and foreign-born students who often become marginalized in traditional academic environments.

Though much of the available research considers academic professionalization from the perspective of the individual and that person's abilities and attitudes, much less is known about how professional skills develop in relation to departmental and institutional culture. This information is needed for two reasons. First, it can help graduate students understand the types of courses, educational experiences, and social relationships that will support and nurture them from the first day in a department through the final defense of a thesis or dissertation. Second, it can clarify for departments what can be done to create environments that foster creativity

and collegiality among all members of a department.

The EDGE project builds upon research currently underway with the Geography Faculty Development Alliance (GFDA), a faculty enhancement project that focuses on early-career faculty and advanced doctoral students. A recent report from the GFDA reveals that new professors are more

likely to be satisfied and productive if they received comprehensive training during their graduate program and feel professionally and socially engaged in their present department (Solem and Foote 2004). The EDGE study will extend this analysis to graduate students, but also focus on strategies for

preparing graduates for non-academic professional careers.

Using information compiled from the study, the AAG will develop practical resources that departments can use in orientation programs, advising programs, and professional development courses. The "EDGE Guide" will include four components:

- A **printed manual** with chapters dedicated to topics that many departments do not currently include as part of the formal graduate curriculum (e.g., course design, professional ethics, time and project management, career planning, writing grant proposals, and preparing manuscripts for publication).
- A **multimedia CD** of instructional and career-development resources that draw on principles of good practice in teaching and research.
- A set of **programmatic assessments** that departments can use to implement the recommendations outlined in the manual and CD.

*Continued on page 4*



Solem

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## Social Science PhDs—Five Years Out

PhDs who earned their degrees between July 1, 1995 and June 30, 1999 in anthropology, communication, geography, history, political science, and sociology may soon be asked to participate in a national survey focused on job search, work/life choices and dilemmas, and doctoral program evaluation. The survey, "Social Science PhDs—Five Years

Out" is funded by the Ford Foundation. Five to nine years out is an ideal time to reflect on career choices and doctoral education because in that time PhDs have had opportunities to see how well their education has prepared them for their careers.

Invitations to participate will be sent by electronic and postal mail. If you receive an invitation, please complete the survey. The

information gathered from this survey will guide doctoral program re-assessment efforts across the country. The survey is administered by the Center for Innovation and Research in Graduate Education (CIRGE), located at the University of Washington in Seattle. For more information about the survey, visit CIRGE's website at [www.cirge.washington.edu](http://www.cirge.washington.edu).

*Graduate Education in Geography from page 2*

- An **interactive website** that students can use to develop professional networks in the U.S. and internationally, share and exchange resources for improving their professional skills, and discuss issues related to life and work in graduate school.

In the coming months the AAG will invite departments and students to participate in all phases of the research, from materials development to pilot testing.

Volunteers in the first year include departments in Georgia, New York, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Utah. For added perspective on women and minority concerns, the PIs will consult with local chapters of Supporting Women in Geography, the Committee on the Status of Women in Geography, the Geographic Perspectives on Women Specialty Group, and the AAG Diversity Task Force.

For more information about the EDGE project, please contact Michael Solem ([msolem@aag.org](mailto:msolem@aag.org)), Ken Foote ([k.foote@colorado.edu](mailto:k.foote@colorado.edu)), or Jan Monk ([jmonk@email.arizona.edu](mailto:jmonk@email.arizona.edu)).

Michael Solem  
[msolem@aag.org](mailto:msolem@aag.org)

Solem, M.N., and Foote, K.E. 2004. Concerns, attitudes, and abilities of early-career geography faculty. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 94(4): 889-912.

*An AAG Mission from page 3*

In recent decades we have witnessed an efflorescence of civil society groups working across scales and an enormous range of societal issues. Reworking our mission statement would provide an opportunity to talk about a broader set of relationships that the AAG can foster. This would serve to include those geographers working with non-governmental organizations, foundations, community activist and advocacy organizations, and think tanks. If we as members of the AAG explicitly articulate our relationships to these groups, this is a first step in strengthening and expanding those relationships and the possibilities for collaboration with these different partners. If we build relationships with independent donors, foundations, and institutes, we can create new spaces for basic research, critical thinking, and the advancement of knowledge that critiques the status quo.

Let me be clear that this is in no way a criticism of the superb work our Association is doing (see my January 2005

column). Further, our long-range plan for the Association, lead by Susan Cutter from 2000 to 2003, does include some of the arguments I make here. The plan notes the importance of building diverse connections to informal educators; to social groups and non-governmental organizations; and of encouraging geographers to engage in public debate about the most pressing issues of our times. But shifting institutional culture, and the way we all think about the role of the AAG, takes time. Language matters, and we can articulate these values and goals succinctly and put them front and center in our Association through our mission and goals in our materials, on our website, and in ways that permeate all of our work.

Starting from a rearticulation of our values, goals, and mission we can continue the ongoing work of designing activities and services that reflect this vision. For example, we should ensure that our AAG jobs network and career advice pages

reflect careers in community service, non-profits, advocacy, and activism. We can ask council (as suggested by Mitchell in the centennial *Annals* in 2004) to commission white papers each year to provide summary information on pressing geographical issues for the media, congressional staff, and other audiences. We can follow Alec Murphy's advice to challenge ourselves to write opinion pieces for our newspapers and we might start by adding an Op/Ed page to the *AAG Newsletter*. Writing articles on world-shaping events for the newsletter would both articulate what geographers have to contribute, and would provide experience in this different form of writing. And of course, I rely on all of you to tell me how else can we revision our mission and goals and how we as geographers can serve the public through our work.

Victoria A. Lawson  
[lawson@u.washington.edu](mailto:lawson@u.washington.edu)