

AAG Newsletter of the Association of American Geographers

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Building a Foundation for the AAG's Future

I am pleased to report that 2006 was a very good year for the Association of American Geographers. We have made extraordinary progress in our efforts to build and consolidate a strong financial foundation for the AAG, increasing net assets by over \$1 million during FYE 2006. In addition, our membership development efforts again achieved an increase in AAG membership this year, finally reaching and exceeding the milestone mark of 10,000 members.

While the graphs you see in this column below are worth a thousand words, I will add a few more here. These are words of thanks to the AAG membership and to the Council for your support, guidance, and friendship, and especially to the AAG staff who have worked hard to implement the management changes and new programs we have put in place here, which have made possible the progress we are now seeing. These efforts are reflected not only in impressive numbers, but in those areas not so easily quantified: the dynamism, quality, range and inclusiveness of the AAG's many new programs, activities, and initiatives.

Finance

Today, just four years after we began work on these challenges, nearly all of the goals of the AAG's current Long Range Plan have been achieved. The financial position of the AAG has now been restored, and is still improving. After a complete overhaul of the financial management and workflow of the organization, including a renewed fundraising effort and new resource development initiatives, combined with re-staffing and cost containment, the AAG has paid off all of its debts and has seen four consecutive years

of positive change in net assets, with a gain in net assets of \$1,106,250 in FYE 2006 alone, and a cumulative gain in net assets of \$3,146,171 during the past four years (2003-06). This achievement has been the result of a combination of systematic cost-saving measures, strengthening traditional revenue sources while also developing new ones, implementation of new management systems and technologies, and fundraising. These new resources are being invested in a host of new programmatic initiatives, as well as in protected endowments to ensure the long-term financial viability of the organization.



Richardson

The AAG also professionalized its in-house accounting and bookkeeping, hiring highly capable financial professionals to ensure the timely and accurate financial reporting needed for overall management and planning, and for handling our expanding grants and contracts. The AAG conducts full audits by external CPA firms each year, and works closely with its auditors to ensure accountability and to implement strong internal financial controls.

Membership

Developing our membership base has also been a key focus of our strategy to strengthen the AAG for the long term. A successful and sustained effort to recruit lapsed members, attract new members, and retain existing members has increased AAG membership dramatically, from fewer than 6,500 in 2001, to over 10,000 at the end of 2006. Keeping membership fees low, and subsidizing lower-income members are important features of this membership program.

Continued on page 4

2007 AAG Healthy Departments Workshop To Be Held in Louisiana in June

AAG members who want to help make their departments healthier are invited to participate in the 4th AAG Healthy Departments workshop. The 2007 workshop will be held on the weekend of June 15-17. Workshop sessions will take place in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, the home of Louisiana State University (LSU), on Saturday, June 16, and on the morning of Sunday, June 17. For those able to arrive a day earlier, an all-day field trip will be conducted on Friday, June 15, to enable participants to view the rebirth of New Orleans.

The Department of Geography and Anthropology at LSU is helping to host this workshop. LSU geographers will help lead the field trip and help identify special places for workshop participants to visit and dine during their stay in the region. In addition to being the home of LSU, Baton Rouge is the capital of Louisiana and is a major port on the Lower Mississippi River. Baton Rouge is served by American, Continental, Delta, and Northwest airlines. Other carriers can be used to access the airport at New Orleans, which is seventy miles away down I-10.

While all geographers love to explore new and different places, and a visit to New Orleans within two years of its inundation by Hurricane Katrina offers special opportunities to explore the rebirth of a very special place, the primary emphasis of the weekend will be on workshop sessions. The 2007 workshop will use a format that has proven popular and successful during three earlier workshops. Geographers who have served as department heads and university administrators will kick off each session with comments regarding the session focus, but significant time in each session will be given to questions, answers, and discussions among all of the workshop participants. Time also will be allocated to allow participants to exchange ideas and experiences with each other in more informal sessions.

The workshop is designed to be valuable to all geographers who want to help make their departments healthier and stronger, although it is especially well suited for individuals who have or soon will assume the position of department head. Among topics to be addressed in sessions are aligning your department's activities and plans with those of your college and university, attracting and

retaining students and majors, providing support for new faculty members, and generating support from outside the university to help in your department's activities.

The 2007 workshop is being coordinated by AAG Vice President Thomas Baerwald. He is being assisted in this effort by AAG Past President Richard Marston, Paul Farnsworth and Craig Colten of the LSU geography department, members of the AAG Healthy Departments Committee, AAG Executive Director Doug Richardson, and staff members at the AAG central office.

Additional details regarding panel members, a tentative workshop agenda, travel and lodging information, and registration information will be posted on the AAG website (www.aag.org/healthydepartments/healthy_content.cfm) by mid-January and will be summarized in an upcoming issue of the *AAG Newsletter*.

In the meantime, mark your calendar and give strong consideration to attending the 2007 workshop. If you don't see yourself as a likely participant, talk up the value of participating with other members of your department who you think might benefit from attending.

Building a Foundation for the AAG's Future from page 2

Annual Meetings

Annual meeting attendance has also grown to record numbers over the past four years, from about 3,700 in 2002, to over 6,500 for the annual meeting which will be held this spring in San Francisco. This was achieved by increasing our total membership, re-invigorating the annual meeting content and format, and by emphasizing inclusiveness within our organization as a whole, as well as in our community and international outreach programs, and in our annual meeting activities and programs specifically.

Keeping meeting registration fees low, and subsidizing student attendees and those with special financial needs are key

components of our annual meetings program. The AAG also has worked hard to find ways to respect the rights of union hotel workers while planning and conducting our annual meetings.

Initiatives

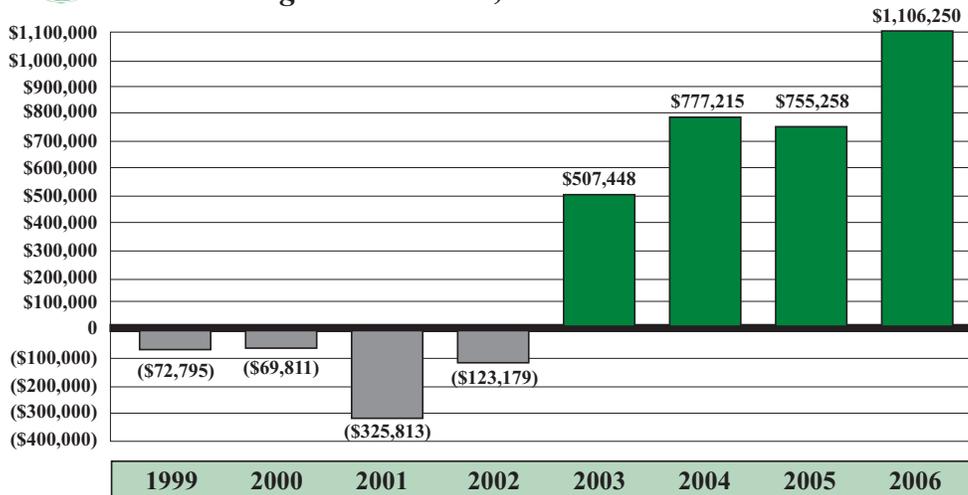
In addition to addressing core financial and membership needs, the AAG has also pursued many new initiatives that have benefited the overall membership in more profound ways by developing dynamic and inclusive programs, and by advancing the discipline broadly. Many of these have been described in detail in previous columns of this newsletter. A few representative examples include:

- New specialty conferences, including: Geography and the Humanities; Race, Ethnicity and Place; Mapping the News; Geography and Drug Abuse; Geography and the Law; USGS Geography Summit; and others.
- Creation of the AAG Diversity Task Force, with a suite of clearly focused, specific action items.
- Development of strategic relationships with institutions such as Harvard University, Howard University, University of Virginia and others, to create new inroads for geography.

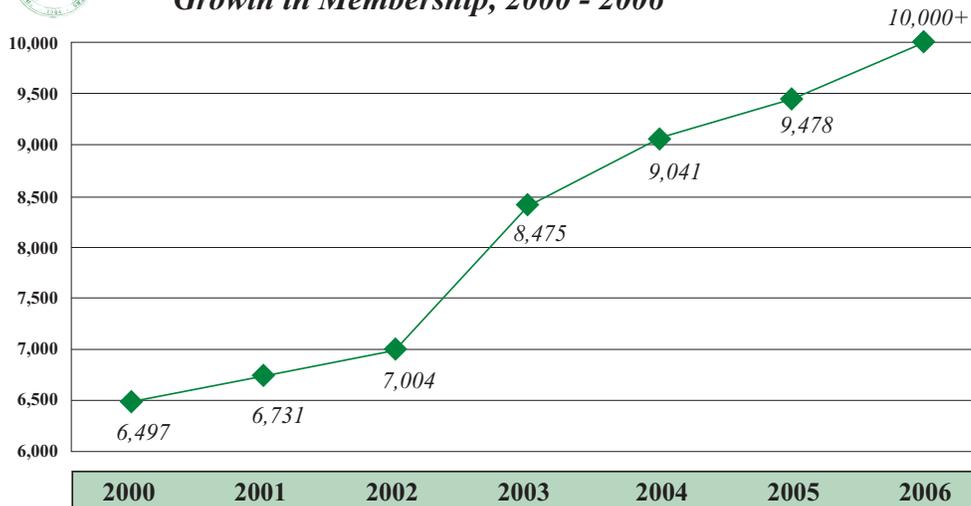
Continued on page 5



Change in Net Assets, 1999 - 2006



Growth in Membership, 2000 - 2006



- Engagement with Hispanic educational and community organizations.
- Expanded support of AAG specialty groups and regional divisions.
- New international initiatives, including funded programs in Latin America, the Middle East, and other regions, and several studies and surveys on internationalization of the discipline.

- Dozens of innovative education, research, and outreach programs, including My Community, Our Earth (Geography Education for Sustainable Development); the NSF EDGE (Enhancing Departments and Graduate Education) Project; and the AAG Center for Global Geography Education.
- Establishment of an AAG Senior Associates Program, which taps into the tal-

ents of retiring geographers, drawing upon their expertise and experience to assist with special projects.

- A Healthy Departments initiative, which provides resources to and supports existing geography departments and programs.
- Creation of a new Office of Public Policy to monitor, research, and address policy issues which impact the discipline.
- Development of many new career resources for students, universities, and private and public sector employers.
- Many new publications, ranging from a forthcoming book, *Geography and the Humanities*, to the recently published *Geographic Information Science and Technology Body of Knowledge*.
- An outreach focus on growing the discipline, not just the AAG, and as a key means to that end, engaging the larger intellectual enterprise, not just the discipline.

Management

We have attempted to implement a comprehensive, integrated management approach of continuous improvement at the AAG to produce tangible results in all areas of operations, including financial management, resource development, staff development, membership engagement and growth, scholarship and research, community involvement, outreach, inclusiveness, and communications. To date, these efforts have produced substantial qualitative change, and growth unprecedented in the history of the organization. I hope the ultimate result of this effort will be a solid foundation that can sustain a vital and responsive AAG well into the future, an AAG that will create a more central place for geography in both society and the university, and one that will enhance geography's ability to contribute to the many needs of our world.

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