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## The International Geographical Union: Appreciation and Change

As geography becomes more central to understanding and analyzing a rapidly globalizing world, the collective interaction of scholars, researchers, and practitioners from many nations and regions is becoming a necessity, not only a pleasure. The International Geographical Union (IGU), an evolving organization which occupies a unique niche in geography's panoply of institutions, plays an historic role in attempting to address this need.

The IGU—and all of us interested in geography—have been fortunate to have had the leadership of Ron Abler at the helm of the IGU, as its Secretary General, for the past six years of the organization's search for an identity and a viable *modus operandi* for the 21st century. During Abler's tenure, which just ended with his recent retirement, the IGU has undertaken necessary structural changes to streamline its bureaucracy. It also has enhanced the influence of geography in international science, primarily by nurturing and strengthening linkages to major international natural science and social science organizations. Abler also identified, prioritized and grappled with some of the key obstacles IGU faces to assuming the role of a truly international organization capable of understanding and acting in concert with geographers from all corners of the discipline, and all continents of the world.

Ron's experience, energy, and leadership abilities were invaluable to IGU during this stage of its development, both to its recent accomplishments and in identifying critical needs for its future viability and relevance. And although the position of Secretary General is an unpaid appointment, Ron recently wrote that serving the IGU "has occupied me more than full time since 2000." Please

join me, on behalf of the AAG, in congratulating Ron Abler for his extraordinary work and many contributions while at the IGU, a fitting capstone to his life-long career of supporting geography in myriad ways.

Succeeding Ron Abler as Secretary General of the IGU is Woo-ik Yu of Seoul, South Korea. Dr. Yu is Director of the Institute for Korean Regional Studies, and Professor of the Department of Geography at Seoul National University. Foremost among the challenges facing Woo-ik Yu, and identified as priorities by Abler, will be broadening the participation in IGU by geographers from low-income countries. This



Richardson

participation has always been very low, and has actually declined rather than grown during recent years.

To accomplish its objectives of international geographic study and cooperation, the IGU organizes International Geographical Congresses every four years. Regional conferences are held biennially between major congresses. The IGU also sponsors Commissions and Task Forces for the study of specific problems or for the accomplishment of a task that requires international collaboration.

The IGU's upcoming meetings will be held in Tunis, Tunisia in 2008, in Tel Aviv in 2010 and in Koln, Germany in 2012. The 31st International Geographical Congress in Tunis will be hosted by the Association of Tunisian Geographers from August 12-15, 2008. The theme selected for the congress is "Building Together our Territories," a topic intended to embrace physical, human, and environmental concerns and to demonstrate the integrating role of geographic science toward reflection and common action. A major Parallel Theme is directed toward the "Evolution of Geographic Thought." Within these main

*Continued on page 4*

International Geographical Union from page 2

themes there will be technical sub-themes, such as Physical Geography; Economic Geography; Urban Spaces; and Concepts, Tools and Geographic Techniques.

The 2010 IGU Regional Conference in Tel-Aviv, Israel, will take place during the US summer months on dates to be determined. The Israeli National Commission for Geography serves as the organizing and hosting institution. The 2012 IGU Congress in Koln, Germany, will be sponsored by the University of Koln.

The AAG provides substantial financial support to geographers for travel to IGU meetings through an AAG program entitled "Enhancing Scientific Leadership and Geographic Research Through International Collaboration," and funded by the National Science Foundation. I urge you to consider attending one of the upcoming meetings and perhaps becoming involved in one or more of the IGU Commissions which focus on topics ranging from indigenous peoples to applied geography.

The IGU also maintains a coordinative office called the "Home of Geography" in an historic villa in Rome. The space there

houses IGU archives, a small conference room and offices for several staff members. The villa is located in a pleasant park near the Coliseum in Rome, and the IGU conference room is available for use by geographers from around the world upon request. The AAG also has provided financial support to assist the IGU with the cost of maintaining these facilities.

It is clear that the IGU is still evolving and attempting to adapt to changes in the world of geography, as well as to changes in the geography of the world. While the IGU has long suffered a reputation as a "Euro-centric club," in recent years it is beginning to transcend that parochial focus and limitation. International geography requires a robust and inclusive international organization if we are to contribute to the needs of world in meaningful ways, and IGU has the *potential* to be a leader in this process. The progress made during the last several years during Ron Abler's tenure at the IGU is



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Yu

encouraging and we hope this trajectory will continue as we all work together to help create an organization that is truly international and focused on the needs of geographers and societies on all continents.

We welcome Woo-ik Yu to his new position of responsibility in this important organization, and pledge the support of the AAG to help make the IGU's potential a reality in the years ahead.

You can learn more about the IGU by visiting [www.igu-ugi.org](http://www.igu-ugi.org), or by attending the AAG's upcoming Annual Meeting in San Francisco (April 17-21, 2007), during which many activities relating to the IGU and more broadly to international research and collaborative activities in geography will take place.

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## Jobs in Geography Career Fair at Annual Meeting

The "Jobs in Geography" career fair at the 2007 annual meeting will be multi-faceted. As with previous years, the JIG career fair will host representatives from numerous colleges, universities, private companies, and government agencies. Space will be provided for these organizations to meet and greet our conference participants. In addition to employment opportunities, internship and graduate assistantship opportunities will also be featured. Graduate programs will display recruitment information. Registered conference attendees may post resumes using the AAG 2007 Attendee Bank, and resumes will be accessed by organizations recruiting at the meeting.

The 2007 JIG career fair will also feature four special panel sessions: 1) career opportunities and challenges in communi-

ty colleges and universities; 2) pursuing careers in the government and non-profit organizations; 3) taking your geographic advantage to the private sector; 4) packaging your transferable skills with a geographic edge. The first three sessions are designed to provide a high-level comprehensive view of all the career opportunities for all geographers in different industry sectors. The fourth session will be led by a professional career counselor, and the objective is to help geographers leverage their transferable skills into careers not traditionally sought after by professionals with geography education.

Networking is one important element to job-searching success. The 2007 JIG career fair will also provide an opportunity to meet professional geographers in government agencies, non-profit organi-

zations, and private companies. A select group of these successful geographers will make themselves available to talk to other conference attendees about how they chose their professions and provide invaluable career advice.

The AAG will also unveil the new online AAG Careers in Geography Guide at the JIG career fair. Built upon the lessons learned from the Geospatial Industry Workforce Information System (GIWIS) and the Enhancing Departments and Graduate Education in Geography (EDGE) projects, the new online Guide will feature added functionalities and contents for students, parents, guidance counselors, and employers. To inquire about the 2007 Jobs in Geography Career Fair activities, please contact Ivan Cheung ([icheung@aag.org](mailto:icheung@aag.org)).