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of the
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AAG Launches Model Program to Support and Enhance Diversity

Where do we look to attract a more diverse group of students to our program? And what do we do once we find them?

These are common questions asked at the departmental level, the reproductive core of our discipline and the place where students enter and engage with universities through their majors. Despite growing national support for broadening participation in higher education, increasing university-level commitment to pursue goals of inclusion at their institutions, and widespread agreement with the goal of enhancing diversity within departments, undergraduate and graduate advisors can often find themselves at a loss for where and how to engage potential students from traditionally underrepresented populations. Answering questions which include the interrogative "where" are quite familiar to many geographers, although in too few instances have we collectively directed this valuable academic perspective to applications for recruitment and retention of underrepresented groups within departments. A rich set of knowledge and results from geographic research and information systems thus awaits application to the design of knowledge-based, place-specific, locationally-informed strategies to enhance diversity in geography programs, enabling departments to define appropriate collective visions of diversity and devise effective and feasible plans to reach recruitment and retention goals.

To support a process of collecting our disciplinary insight to improve diversity in geography, the AAG has proposed and received funding from the National Science Foundation's Opportunities for Enhancing Diversity in the Geosciences Program for a \$199,276 project "Addressing Locally-tailored Information Infrastructure & Geoscience Needs for Enhancing Diversity." The ALIGNED project, a three-year pilot study, seeks to align the needs of university

departments and underrepresented students by drawing upon the intellectual wealth of the discipline to inform and transform ways in which departments envision and realize their own goals to enhance diversity.

The pipeline principle—that is, building relationships among educational institutions serving students at different stages from grade school, middle school, secondary, community colleges, undergraduate to graduate levels—is fairly well understood as a framework for recruitment efforts in higher education. However, it is often overlooked how such pipelines are spatial in nature,

and how characteristics of place impact recruitment outcomes and retention rates. Where universities are, where prospective students are coming from or might come from, and the dynamic of these origins and destinations matter a great deal. It is also important to recognize the varied starting points for many departments: a small liberal arts school in the rural Midwest will have different realities to contend with concerning recruitment and retention than an urban commuter school on the east coast.

With this in mind, the ALIGNED project will consolidate the set of resources and studies developed over the past five years by the AAG to design a toolkit that can support departments in their efforts to enhance diversity. This toolkit will include, among other items, linkages to an expanded AAG Diversity Clearinghouse (www.aag.org/diversity), an annotated bibliography highlighting cutting-edge research by geographers and related scholars that offer understanding about how spatial dynamics and place-based realities relate to efforts to attract and keep underrepresented students; careers information resources that promote broader inclusion; and outcomes from the AAG's recent research on graduate education



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conducted through the EDGE project. It will also feature a mechanism to query spatial data and georeferenced information that can help departments identify their recruitment catchment areas, design diversity goals in relation to characteristics of communities of potential underrepresented students, and elaborate appropriate plans for how to best engage prospective young geographers. ALIGNED will also expand the opportunities for underrepresented students in geography to participate in professional networking through organizing special activities at the AAG Annual Meeting and through providing supplemental support for attending the conference to students with disabilities, community college students, and AAG Diversity Ambassadors. It will also support more participation in the Visiting Geographical Scientist Program for faculty to visit Historically Black Colleges & Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges & Universities. To evaluate the toolkit design, the AAG will work closely with an institutionally-diverse, geographically-distributed set of seven pilot hybrid geography/geosciences departments and will reach out to synergistic programs and resources from the National Association of Colleges and Employers, American Association of Persons with Disabilities, American Association of Community Colleges, White House Commission on Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities, and American Indian Higher Education Consortium, among other organizations.

Development of this model program will integrate geographic knowledge of, from,

and about places and the realities of various demographic groups living in them and will identify and incorporate research about migration patterns, commuting patterns, and choices and preferences that lead to geographic behavior, among other subjects that geographers have led the way towards understanding. The project will also highlight the unique advantages of our discipline for underrepresented students, including the high growth of jobs in GIS and geospatial technology fields, multiple exit pathways into employment, the opportunity to make a difference, interesting research subjects such as environmental justice, and many other benefits. The integrative subject matter of geography that spans human and physical sciences will be harnessed to encourage students to see the relevance of all geoscience fields and draw them into disciplines and to colleges and universities that they may have not otherwise considered.

ALIGNED is led by AAG Director of Outreach and Strategic Initiatives, Patricia Solís, along with co-investigators Inés Miyares (City University of New York), Dawn Wright (Oregon State University), Chrys Rodrigue (California State University—Long Beach), Michael Solem (AAG), and Doug Richardson (AAG), and 14 other advisors with expertise in geosciences, education, diversity, spatial analysis and other relevant fields who will contribute their extensive experience working with diversity enhancement on their campuses, including from community colleges to doctoral universities at a broad set of geographic locations across the country. The diverse team itself repre-

sents traditionally underrepresented groups, including women, ethnic minority, gay, and foreign-born researchers in recognition of the value of multiple perspectives to help mobilize and retool departments with better ways to learn where to find and how to connect with underrepresented groups, including how to convey the relevance of geography and geoscience careers.

NSF reviewers called the effort “an innovative and potentially transformative project with substantial merit, a refreshingly creative approach to understanding how we might improve recruitment and retention of underrepresented students in the geoscience-related fields.” For more information about the ALIGNED project, including how to participate as a pilot department, please contact Patricia Solís (psolis@aag.org). ■

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The ALIGNED Board of Advisors includes the co-investigators named above and Greg Chu and Cynthia Berlin, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse; Darryl Cohen, US Bureau of the Census; Leslie Duram, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale; Ken Foote, University of Colorado and AAG Vice President; Wendy Jepson, Texas A&M University and AAG Committee on the Status of Women in Geography; Al Kuslikis, American Indian Higher Education Consortium; Victoria Lawson, University of Washington; Lisa Marshall, North Carolina State University and AAG Enhancing Diversity Committee; Pablo Monzon, GIS Planning, Inc.; David Padgett, University of Tennessee; Renee Pualani Louis, AAG Indigenous Peoples' Specialty Group and IGU Indigenous Peoples' Knowledges and Rights Commission; Alex Ramirez, Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities; Rickie Sanders, Temple University; Rebecca Torres, University of Texas at Austin.