

Take Advantage of Diverse Opportunities

A colleague at NSF recently told me that he had agreed to participate in a panel discussion at the upcoming AAG Annual Meeting in Boston. He expressed amazement at the preliminary program, adding, "No one can accuse geographers of limiting themselves to any one particular approach or methodology. The program is so broad in both topics and methods."

Those comments delighted me. I long have argued that one of geography's greatest strengths is our diversity. Common questions may unite us, but we savor our collective capabilities to develop and explore answers to those questions in various ways, with each approach offering different perspectives while also shedding new lights about the strengths and shortcomings of the ways we generate new understanding.

By the time you receive this issue of the *AAG Newsletter*, roughly a month will remain until we hold our 2008 AAG Annual Meeting in Boston. With more than 7,000 participants expected, the Boston meeting will be larger than our record-setting gathering a year ago in San Francisco. The good cheer and high energy levels we experienced beside San Francisco Bay will continue as we meet on land reclaimed from Massachusetts Bay. To get the most you can from the Boston meeting, start developing your strategy for making the most of your time there before you go.

If you're among the more than 5,000 people participating in the program, you'll build your calendar around the sessions you're involved in and other sessions on topics of deep personal interest. To fill the rest of your time in "The Hub," heed my colleague's observations and engage a variety of different activities. Based on my experience at 36 previous AAG Annual Meetings, here are some suggestions for your consideration:

Attend at least one plenary session

Much of our interaction at meetings occurs in one-on-one, small-group, or small-session formats. These settings can be great for communicating directly with colleagues who have similar interests, but the atmosphere in a large plenary session with one or more speakers

talking broadly to many hundreds of people generates a different kind of energy. Plan to attend at least one of Boston's three plenary sessions. The Tuesday evening opening session will feature economist Jeffrey Sachs, who will share his thoughts about sustainable development, poverty alleviation, and other facets of our contemporary world. The Presidential Plenary session early Wednesday evening will focus on interdisciplinary connections from within and outside geography. On Thursday evening, Past President Kavita Pandit will discuss the role geographers can play in the internationalization of higher education. If you can't attend a full plenary, try to catch one of the other highlighted sessions, such as the Friday afternoon conversation with Noam Chomsky or the Friday evening plenary, "Geography at work in Developing Regions."

Check out an illustrated paper session

In addition to traditional paper sessions, you likely will interact with colleagues in at least one poster session. The illustrated paper session is a hybrid format that you should experience. A dozen or more speakers will open the session with brief comments to summarize their display, but more than half of the session will be unstructured, with participants chatting informally with presenters beside the posters that previously were highlighted. The mini-presentations about different posters at the session's start lets you focus on the posters that interest you most. Illustrated paper sessions offer both the opportunity to communicate with a larger group and focused discussion with those who are really interested in what you're presenting, thereby making them a good candidate for special sessions at future meetings.

Attend a specialty group business meeting

Specialty groups offer wonderful opportunities for students and those at early stages

in their careers to interact with others who share common interests. Attend the business meeting of a group you belong to, and volunteer to help it accomplish some things over the coming year. Organizing sessions for future meetings and recognizing a range of accomplishments through awards and honors are worthwhile, but explore other ways in which you and other members of the group can better interact with each other, with other geographers, and with those outside our field.

Explore the city on foot

Boston is a fascinating place, so spend some of your time exploring its intriguing geography. If you can spare a few hours, go to the Boston National Historic Park Visitor Center at 15 State

Street across from the Old State House. Ask for the "Volksmarch Box" (or "Walk Box") at the information desk and sign up to walk one of 11-, 10-, and 5-KM trails that wander through different parts of Boston and nearby communities. The trails are interesting and safe, and the instructions will be both easy to follow and informative. Earn credit for your walk as part of the international volksmarching program, or just walk to get some exercise at the same time you're getting an up-close look at the nation's oldest major city.

Have fun

Our meetings can be intense, but they are also a great place to relax, refresh, and enjoy yourself. Toast old and new colleagues with cold liquids. Sample classic Boston cuisine or food from exotic locales. Attend a few presentations that just sound interesting. Above all else, make Boston a place to remember for scholarship, camaraderie, and some really good times. Enjoy the meeting in every way you can!

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