

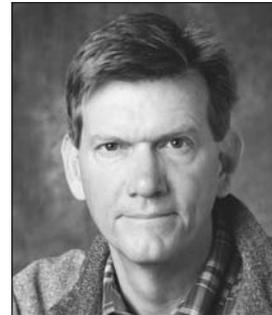
A Sabbatical for Doug Richardson

At its last meeting the AAG Council voted unanimously to award executive director Doug Richardson a six month sabbatical during 2011 in recognition of his outstanding leadership and commitment to the Association. Since becoming executive director in January 2003, Doug has worked tirelessly and without any substantial break or vacation on a remarkable range of projects and special initiatives which have had a dramatic effect on the intellectual vitality of our discipline and financial health of our association. At the recent Council meeting Doug also agreed to continue as executive director of the AAG for at least five more years. The Council felt very strongly that a sabbatical was long overdue both as an affirmation of what Doug has achieved to date and as an investment in his vision and leadership for the future. The sabbatical will give Doug time for some of his own research and writing projects, as well as a break from the demanding work pace he maintains on behalf of our membership.

I cannot emphasize enough how much Doug has accomplished. I was serving as a national councillor when Doug was appointed as executive director and have had the opportunity to work with him on a number of projects. Perhaps Doug's greatest strength as a leader has been his ability to foster innovative projects not just in one or two areas, but across the entire discipline in research, education, service, outreach, and policy. He has a broad vision of the important roles geography can play in science, scholarship, government, business, education and society. This vision and a genuine passion for geography have produced exceptional results, not the least being the open, inclusive and welcoming atmosphere he has created within the AAG in support of scientific and humanistic intellectual exchange across all our many subfields.

Although I can't possibly list all that Doug has accomplished during in his eight-year tenure, I can draw attention to some of the most recent and important projects:

- The new *International Encyclopedia of Geography, People, the Earth, Environment, and Technology*, which Doug has negotiated with Wiley-Blackwell. This fifteen volume, five million word project will, I think, be one of the most ambitious and potentially far-reaching publication projects in the discipline. Its influence will last for years to come and its writing will serve as an important community-building project, both nationally and internationally.
- The growing membership of the Association—now at about 11,000 when membership is down among other associations due to the recession.
- The success of recent annual meetings. These have been exciting, interactive events with many high-profile presentations and thematic tracks which draw large national and international participation. The meeting last spring was particularly notable for the presentation of the first Atlas Award to Dr. Jane Goodall and the reception hosted by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdoğan.
- The continuing success and impact of the *Annals* and *Professional Geographer*, particularly the new special issues of the *Annals* and the increase in pages published annually, essentially an increase from 4 to 6 in the number of *Annals* issues per year. The ten-year contract Doug negotiated with Taylor and Francis assures a firm financial foundation for our publications for years to come.
- The network of productive contacts Doug has established in Washington, DC, in support of the AAG's mission with organizations such as AAAS, the Library of Congress (including finalizing the archiving and digitization of Wes & Nancy Dow's "Geographers on Film" project), NSF, NIH, COSSA, NAS, NGS, NEH, and other key organizations.



Footnote

- The international projects Doug has cultivated particularly in support of geographical scholarship and education in developing regions of the world, as evidenced in programs such as the AAG Developing Regions Membership Program, and the establishment of an extensive new network of collaborative AAG projects and programs throughout Africa, Latin America, and Asia, while also maintaining AAG's traditional scholarly ties in Europe and North America.
 - The high quality of the staff Doug has recruited in support of current and future projects. The AAG now has the capacity to undertake research and service projects on a scale never before possible.
- The attention Doug and the Meridian Place staff have focused on important policy issues, such as the "Blueprint for Geography Education" and the AAG resolution on K-12 geography education, his effective promotion of research funding for geography, and his leadership roles in the creation and ongoing development of the AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition.
- Doug has the ability and contacts to reach out fluently and effectively across disciplines and sectors to engage the larger intellectual community at the highest levels on behalf of geography. From GIScience to "Geography and the Humanities" he has forged strategic AAG research initiatives and institutional relationships which are now opening new doors for research and collaboration for all geographers.

Perhaps surpassing all of these accomplishments is Doug's financial stewardship of the AAG. Even during these poor economic times, Doug's outstanding financial and management skills have not only enabled the AAG to weather the

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Digitally Mapping the Republic of Letters

Stanford University humanities professors Dan Edelstein and Paula Findlen are currently working with academic technology specialist Nicole Coleman and other colleagues to map the flow of tens of thousands of letters across Europe sent by key Enlightenment thinkers during the eighteenth century. By utilizing the power of new digital technologies and geographic imaging, their project seeks to examine the social networks through which ideas traveled and gain new insights into the intricacies of the Enlightenment's evolving intellectual geography.

What's significant about the project, says Edelstein, is that mapping the flows of this enormous amount of correspondence allows researchers the opportunity to gain new

understandings of "not only how these networks intermingled, but how they evolved over time."

The project "Mapping the Republic of Letters" is an example of the extent to which geographic technologies and perspectives are being embraced across the humanities in ways that equip scholars to ask new questions about traditional subjects by mining vast datasets in previously unimaginable ways. Voltaire's correspondence alone numbers more than 18,000 individual pieces and, in print, takes up 15 volumes. One application of this project allows users to see the volume and direction of one writer's letters and compare it to that of another writer, and to see how

the flow of these correspondences changes across time.

Dr. Edelstein discusses the project in a brief video at <http://shc.stanford.edu/intellectual-life/video-podcasts/detail/tracking-18th-century-social-network-through-letters>.

More about "Mapping the Republic of Letters" may be found at <http://republicofletters.stanford.edu/>, including a series of interactive maps.

"Geography and the Humanities" will be a featured topic at the Association of American Geographers (AAG) upcoming Annual Meeting, to be held in Seattle, April 12-16, 2011. For more on the 2011 AAG Annual Meeting see www.aag.org/annualmeeting. ■

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photography and other forms of remote sensing compiled across large regions. We use our new GPS units as we drive across state lines on vacation. We use Google Earth, or we sell the maps and aerial photos to Google. Lots of people are checking the product every day. Screw up much and people stop paying you. That's a pretty good check-and-balance component.

Property boundary surveys may need more regulation, because the average consumer may not be able to tell whether it was done properly. Perhaps the construction industry offers a solution here, too, something like a state certified plat inspector to review the survey products before they are filed at the courthouse.

What I am really saying is that we need to quit worrying about something that might happen because it already has happened. The surveying profession, as it was defined 20 years ago, is gone. It is now part of something bigger: the geospatial profession. This is a good thing for those of us who have seen a shrinking marketplace and declining revenues. We now have a big world open before us, a new world where we can define who we are, what we do, and how it should be done. Change is hard, but the world is going to change whether we want it to or not. We will change with it or go extinct. It's your choice whether you want to be a dinosaur or a bird.

In my opinion, an early step is to declare that most of what we do is part of interstate

commerce and should not be subject to state regulation. Math and science, and the technology and methods based on them, are not different in each jurisdiction. It seems reasonable for each state to declare what it wants on a boundary survey or other legal documents, but everything else should be for the geospatial profession to declare. That means you and me.

Let's get started defining our future. Agree or disagree, I want to hear from you. We need to talk. ■

Al Butler is capital program manager for Ocoee, Florida and operates a part-time GIS consulting business. He is past-president of the GIS Certification Institute.

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current recession (while other associations are cutting programs and staff), but to actually improve and expand the level and quality of AAG services, programs, and projects without increasing the cost to members. Additionally, through his determined development and careful shepherding of our assets, Doug has been able to continue building the AAG's Endowment Fund for Geography's Future while many other organizations' endowments have been falling.

Although Doug has not yet worked out all the details of his sabbatical, it is likely to begin in May just after the Seattle annual meeting and run into the fall. This means that he will be on duty as usual during the busy spring and fall seasons. Doug also is preparing the AAG staff for his time away in advance by rescheduling several critical AAG functions for completion prior to or after his sabbatical, and will work to ensure that his remaining responsibilities at Meridian Place will be covered by his senior staff

with perhaps some assistance, as needed, by members of the executive committee. We will make every effort to ensure that the AAG's many initiatives and programs continue seamlessly during Doug's sabbatical. In the meantime, I hope you will join me in thanking Doug for all he has done for the AAG and for his decision to continue as executive director. ■

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