

Hidden Treasures of the AAG

Some benefits of AAG membership, not as immediately evident as Annual Meetings or job postings, will reward those who spend a little time exploring the AAG's resources online. While most members are well aware of the newsletter, journals, specialty groups, and disciplinary visibility provided by the AAG, many might not be familiar with three such "hidden treasures," each of which is relevant to a broader swath of the membership than its title implies. These three are the AAG's Healthy Departments website, the EDGE materials for helping to improve graduate training and professional development, and the AAG's Statement on Professional Ethics. If they are not familiar to you, please treat yourself to a visit to the AAG website (now undergoing a transformation and soon to be even better). All three are valuable for professional development, which, ideally, should begin early in professional training and continue throughout one's entire careerspan.

As good nutrition, information, and lifestyle choices are the foundation of preventative health care, so good information, leadership, and vision are basic to the wellbeing of academic and other professional workplaces. This holds true for all economic climates, not only for good economic times. In fact, it is during the leanest times that strategic leadership and planning can be most essential. Healthy Departments, a presidential initiative of Victoria Lawson, continues to exist as an AAG standing committee, and to hold an annual summer workshop for current and potential leaders of academic departments. It also provides a wealth of reference materials online (www.aag.org/healthydepartments/healthy_resources.cfm). The resources posted on the Healthy Departments website can serve all of us, not just those in official leadership positions. They include information that can help us better inform ourselves and inform the broader public about the discipline of geography.

EDGE (www.aag.org/edge/index.cfm) is an ongoing, NSF-funded project (Michael Solem, project director; Ken Foote, Jan Monk, and Beth Schlemper, PIs) that has

produced research and reference materials to improve the process of professional development of graduate students. Even those who do not teach graduate students should find these materials useful. EDGE materials serve a wide range of readers, from those who teach and mentor graduate and undergraduate students, to students seeking careers either outside or inside of academia. Topics range from workforce needs of the employers of geographers to the social and academic climates of academic departments.

A recent report by the National Academies of Science and Engineering (www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=12695) noted the need to better train and mentor graduate students to meet ethical challenges in increasingly competitive and complex research environments. The more training and experience we have, the more skillfully we can navigate ethical dilemmas. In some ways, being ethical in practice is like driving a car with a standard transmission—at first, it requires your full attention, but, as you gain experience, the responses become deeply ingrained and don't require as much attention. The learning curve for professional ethics, as for other realms of professional development, can be shortened and the pathway cushioned by good mentoring, good examples, and open discussion. A good starting point for discussions of professional ethics is the AAG's own ethics statement.

It is unlikely that anyone has ever shopped around and joined the AAG because of the quality of the ethics statement, and it is possible that some AAG members have not been aware of the statement, but it is another treasure, and readily accessible if you know of its existence. Like the Healthy Departments and EDGE resources, the AAG's Statement of Professional Ethics (<http://www.aag.org/info/ethics.htm>) shares accumulated wisdom and saves us from having to re-invent the wheel. The current statement addresses

a wide range of professional relationships involving colleagues, the larger scholarly community, students, people, places, and things (in research), institutions and foundations that support research, and governments. Fortunately, most of our employers provide specific guidelines on some of these points

(e.g., fair hiring, confidentiality of student records). And, although it is our employers and sponsors, not the AAG, who wield rewards and sanctions and can access the necessary information should an ethical question arise regarding a professional activity, our statement provides carefully developed guidelines and an excellent resource for professional development.

Today, such issues as commitments to diversity, the sustainability of carbon and water footprints, access to electronic communication, and the availability of spatially explicit information add challenging new dimensions to old discussions of professional ethics. Societal and professional norms change over time and ethical boundaries are often fuzzy; therefore, discussions of ethics need to remain open. The AAG's ethics statement was developed in 1998 and revised in 2005. In spring 2009, the AAG Council charged a task force with re-examining the statement and making recommendations for any needed modifications in fall 2009.

This year of hiring freezes, layoffs, furloughs, pay cuts, and budget cuts brings a new level of motivation for exploring and appreciating the resources that *do* remain available. In recognition of the importance of professional development, at all levels, and as one strategy for obtaining first-rate resources for professional development in a resource-short year, remember to take advantage of the opportunity to find treasure on the AAG website. ■



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