

Geographers Speak, People Listen

Until geographic education in grades K–12 becomes much stronger, many educated adults, including legislators, teachers, successful business owners, and voters, will have received little training in geography. We must help them. In part, we can help by finding opportunities for stealth teaching. In the past year, I've answered questions posed by strangers sitting next to me on airplanes on such topics as how glaciers can exist in the tropics and why volcanoes erupt in some places but not others. In a given day, I encounter adults who love to travel, people of all ages who simply like to "know stuff," and numerous chances to informally share my geographic knowledge and perspectives. As I have become more conscious of these windows of opportunity, I've also recognized how easy it is for academic geographers to be so focused on new knowledge that we overlook the public's interest in and need to know basic elements of general geographical knowledge.

The Internet is a primary source of geographic information for broad audiences. Are academic and professional geographers contributing enough to this resource and adequately supporting those who do? As I explore the blogosphere, I am impressed by the volume and variety of material with geographic content and find myself using information from blogs as points of entry into new topics. Quality control is variable compared to that of peer-reviewed journals and major newspapers, but the more prominent blogs have good intentions and cite their sources. You may remember that Matt Rosenberg, who has covered geography at About.com for over a decade, received an NCGE Geography Excellence in Media Award. Other well-established, geography-oriented sites include Very Spatial, My Wonderful World Blog, Geographic Travels, and Geo Lounge.

Beyond the Internet, how do you share geographic research and knowledge with

the public? The AAG staff expertly handles numerous media interactions, interviews, and referrals each year on our behalf. But what about the rest of us? Accounts from academic geographers who have successfully attracted media attention for their research or teaching contain common elements: a university intermediary and relationships developed over time with reporters. Henri Grissino-Mayer (Tennessee), whose tree-ring research has been featured on the Discovery, Learning, History, and Weather channels (also True TV, CNN, and National Geographic), began by pitching a story to the university's media group, which linked him to a local newspaper reporter who writes for the Associated Press. Now, he contacts the AP reporter directly when he has a new story.

Chris Renschler (Buffalo) had established a good relationship with his university press office. After the earthquake in Haiti, the office prepared a press release about the participation of UB geography students in remotely sensing and classifying damage in Haiti. The press release led to multiple contacts, including an ABC-affiliate TV station and an interview with Chicago Public Radio. Ross Meentemeyer's research on Sudden Oak Death ("the "bird flu" of the plant world") was recently featured in the Charlotte Observer and highlighted in BioScience. He, too, credits his university (UNC Charlotte) for its press releases and also notes that a contact between a former student and the reporter strengthened the reporter's understanding of the relevance of the work. Keep those networks open.

An academic project can blossom into something larger. Robin Datel (Cal. State Sacramento) assigned students a service learning project that led to a collaboration with a Capital Public Radio reporter on a

series about international cuisine and then to further involvements in a current affairs radio show and calls from other journalists.

Promoting the work of others is effective, too—a rising tide lifts all boats. Andy Walter (West Georgia) has developed a series of "What does Geography have to do with..." posters to capture the attention of potential geography majors. Each poster highlights a current issue (e.g., spread of swine flu, the economic crash), cites a geographer or media source, perhaps with a geographer commenting on the issue, uses good graphics, and lists courses an interested student could take. This concept is easy to replicate, and we certainly have a wealth of topics to choose from.

Following the November column about working with the media, I received a number of OpEd success stories. Here are two: more than 100 OpEds written by Sriram Khé (Western Oregon) have been published in newspapers, and a submission on area studies by Bill Moseley (Macalester College) appeared in the Chronicle of Higher Education last November.

Some success stories appear in the "Geographers in the Media" section of the AAG newsletter. How do they get there? Does AAG have a roving reporter? Nope. Someone, generally the protagonist, drafts the piece and sends the text to the AAG newsletter. Of course, there's not space to print everything that arrives. But, take heart and catch these messages: 1) think of yourself as an oak tree and recognize that not all acorns will germinate; 2) understand that is not only okay, but productive, to send out stories about your own work; and 3) yes, "stories." ■



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Summer Internships at AAG

The AAG is currently accepting applications for summer internships. Summer interns participate in AAG programs and projects such as education, outreach, website, publications, and research. A monthly stipend of \$500 is provided. Interns will be expected to make their own housing and related logistical arrangements. Applicants should forward their resume, a brief writing sample, and a list of 2-3 references to Candida Mannozi, cmannozi@aag.org. Enrollment in a Geography or closely related program is preferred but not a prerequisite for this opportunity.