

Diversifying Geography

It is a real pleasure and honor to address you from this column for the coming year. I am looking forward to the learning that will come from my travels and conversations with my geography colleagues. For all of us, there are one or two exchanges with students or colleagues that we will always remember, who challenged and perhaps even changed, the ways we think. I am reminded of bell hooks' argument in *Teaching to Transgress* that we learn best when we are confronted with ideas that push us off-center, perhaps even make us uncomfortable. For me, my most memorable and productive learning moments are indeed exchanges involving disagreement, but also respectful engagement. These moments often arise from difference: differences in experience, background, identity or intellectual perspective. These are the moments and ideas that have most provoked me to think creatively and to question my assumptions. For me, the central importance of diversifying our discipline is that our work will be more thoughtful, more all-encompassing, and more fully examined.

There is always a tension in organizations and institutions between foregrounding the work of diversifying geography by setting it apart as a separate item on our 'to do' list versus incorporating this important commitment into every aspect of what we do. The AAG is currently doing both—highlighting diversity and focusing our energy in the diversity task force and at the same time, incorporating the values and goals of the task force into all of their initiatives. The AAG Diversity Task Force (Chair Joe Darden, Samuel Aryeetey-Attoh, Lawrence Estaville, Vicky Lawson, Ines Miyares, Todd Rogers, Catherine Souch, and Ray Sumner), together with Doug Richardson, Patricia Solís, and Michael Solem at AAG headquarters, are exploring a range of ways to enhance diversity among K-12, undergraduate, graduate students, and faculty in the discipline of geography.

And yet, in our ever-more busy lives, we cannot achieve all our goals if each and

every one is an add-on, an additional something that we must make time to do. Our success in diversifying geography depends upon our ability to fold this goal into everything that we do. Each of us can identify some specific opportunities that we already have to build diversity while simultaneously enhancing our own work (in teaching, research, professional activities) and most profoundly our own learning.

I encourage all of us to think about what we can do to accomplish the goal of diversifying geography. We will make the greatest impact on our discipline if we each think about a set of 'doable activities' that build on work we are already doing. For example, some colleagues are encouraging undergraduates to take advantage of student volunteer and paid activities at our meetings that can eliminate the cost of registration. These opportunities can bring under-represented students to our regional and national meetings and learn more about careers in geography. We can participate in conferences such as the Race/Ethnicity and Place Conference at Howard University this September which brings geographic research on these themes to a broad audience. We can also share information about grants and programs that are successful in enhancing diversity by contributing success stories, models, grant opportunities and so on to the AAG Online Diversity Clearinghouse which is soon to be launched.

Through our teaching we can encourage a diverse range of students in our lower-division classes to become majors and we can raise students' awareness about the range of career opportunities geography provides. We can also be teacher/mentors, recognizing individual students who will most benefit from our focused attention. Our teaching can also bring attention to the ways that physical,

environmental, social, or political processes across scales have systematic and linked effects upon specific groups in diverse places and societies. Our teaching can inspire students to examine these geographical and societal differences in our own communities and across the globe.

For those of us who work with the National Science Foundation, we can bring additional talent to our projects

while simultaneously being strategic about diversity. There are some very accessible possibilities for bringing under-represented undergraduate students into projects funded by the NSF. For example, the Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) program is intended to expand student participation in research with the goal of

attracting "...a diversified pool of talented students into careers in science" (nsf.gov/home/crssprgm/reu). For researchers with a funded project, adding an REU is a streamlined process that brings new talent to the project, while also potentially supporting an under-represented undergraduate student who may then consider graduate school and a future in research or applied geographic work.

The new Research Experiences for Teachers (RET) program provides another exciting and equally accessible opportunity. Similar in approach to the REU described above, this program brings K-12 teachers onto our research teams. Teachers could be involved in, for example, summer research trips, and then take these experiences into their classrooms to convey the excitement and importance of geographic research. By incorporating teachers at schools with high percentages of under-represented students, we can broaden the range of students who hear first-hand about the research we are engaged in, getting them excited about a college education and the pursuit of geographic inquiry.

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Journals Commemorate the AAG Centennial with Special Issues

GeoJournal, an international journal on human geography and environmental sciences under the editorship of Max Barlow of Concordia University, has published a special issue focusing on the international impact and influence of American geography, to coincide with the AAG's 100th anniversary. Entitled "AAG@100," the recent *GeoJournal* issue (Volume 59, No. 1/2004) contains seventeen pieces by non-U.S. geographers

on the influence of American geography and/or geographers, at a global, regional, national, or personal level. Copies of *GeoJournal*, published by Kluwer, may be ordered from the Web site, www.kluweronline.com/issn/0343-2521/.

Geocarto International, a journal of remote sensing and geoinformation systems, also published a special issue entitled "Geographic Remote Sensing: A Special Issue Commemorating the Centennial of

the Association of American Geographers." The June 2004 (Volume 19, No. 2) issue features peer reviewed research papers by members of the AAG Remote Sensing Specialty Group (RSSG) and an introductory overview by journal editors Kamlesh Lulla and M. Duane Nellis along with Timothy Warner and Douglas Stow. More information about *Geocarto International* can be found at www.geocarto.com. ■

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Philadelphia to meet with the AAG Council and leading geography scholars as part of this developing relationship. We thank him and Howard University, as well as Binghamton University, for their leadership in helping to bring about this important conference on race/ethnicity and place this fall.

The conference will cover current research on the intersections of race/ethnicity and place in an interdisciplinary setting. Research presentations and posters will explore topics ranging from changing cultural landscapes, immigration patterns, diversity in employment, and disparities in health and housing, to race/ethnicity and place in geography's educational curricula. Perspectives from multiple disciplines will be featured with the participation of academic scholars,

researchers, professionals, students and others involved in race/ethnicity studies.

Featured plenary speakers from the geography community include Rickie Sanders (Temple University), Don Deskins (University of Michigan), John Frazier (Binghamton University), Sam Aryeetey-Attoh (University of Toledo), Vicky Lawson (University of Washington), Darryl Cohen (U.S. Census Bureau), Todd Rogers (ESRI), and Orlando Taylor and Rodney Green of Howard University. A luncheon keynote will be delivered by Rennard Strickland a legal historian of Native American heritage from the



Sanders



Aryeetey-Attoh

University of Oregon, and a pioneer in introducing Indian law into university curriculum. In addition to plenaries, pre-

sentations, and posters, the conference agenda includes a workshop on diversity mapping using census data, geographic tools, and several field trips to ethnic neighborhoods and attractions in Washington, DC, including to the historic LeDroit Park neighborhood, the U Street jazz district, and the new DC City Museum.

To register for the Race/Ethnicity and Place Conference or to view the preliminary program visit www.aag.org/meetings/place.html. ■

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In all of these activities we must practice diversity broadly. As society, and indeed our discipline, evolves we must continue to evaluate what are meaningful inclusions and practices for us. We need to think broadly about the people (embodying combinations of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, age,

religion, and so on) and ideas (including the full breadth of theoretical and methodological approaches) that comprise a diverse discipline. We must also think constructively about how to leverage our efforts to accomplish our goals. As such our challenge is to think of this work not as something we check off

our list, but as an ongoing and shifting process. It enhances all of our work when we continue to engage one another about what diversity means and how we may best accomplish our goals. ■

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