

## Reflecting on Lessons Learned

I can hardly believe that this is my last column. This has been a full and fun year in which I have enjoyed reconnecting with old friends and meeting new ones. During the course of the year I have learned a great deal from working with you and I come away from the experience with a very upbeat and optimistic view of the health and dynamism of geography and the AAG. Now I am going to be predictable and spend time in this last column looking back at what I have learned, and thinking about the work ahead. I want to briefly highlight some challenges that I think we should continue to work on, both at the Association and within the discipline.

The AAG has historically focused on serving its members and representing the discipline. I believe that it is time to shift our focus from serving ourselves to serving society (see my April 2005 column). One element of this service would be to provide geographical interpretations and analyses of societal/planetary events and processes such as the tsunami and its social/political aftermath, events in the Middle East, conflicts across the globe, the less publicized social and environmental devastation associated with neoliberal restructuring around the globe, and so on. Our geographical work provides a much-needed critical perspective on a vast range of issues and we can work through the AAG to create spaces for first interacting with each other, and second for disseminating our insights. Members can publish commentaries and responses in our newsletter, as well as op/ed pieces in newspapers and magazines. The AAG staff are working with Alec Murphy to develop a media relations section of the AAG website. This can be a high-profile site for communicating with our diverse audiences, including the public at large. We can contribute by sending press releases to the AAG reporting insightful findings from our research that can be rapidly communicated to a wide audience. As Alec Murphy has urged us, we first need

to think of ourselves as important contributors to public debate and then we need to take action to ensure that it happens.

We need to become much more comfortable with active and engaged commentary and debate about our research and teaching. I have long been fascinated by the ways in which professional niceties often shut down open (but civil and respectful) debate about ideas. For example, too often at conferences, we listen passively to a paper and then move on (thanks to Sriram Khee for some observations). Part of this is the way our meetings are structured, but I think it also has to do with a culture of (non)engagement. Our regional and specialty conferences could provide one venue for enhancing more active debate. These smaller and more intimate conferences have the advantage of being less packed and rushed than our national meeting and are ideal venues for developing more creative (dare I say different) forms of interaction since there is more time for discussants and the ensuing discussion (SEDAAG provides one model — they routinely referee papers and have a discussant for every presentation). We can also encourage more printed dialogue in the pages of our journals to create open conversations about ideas.

We also need to create improved channels and practices for understanding the challenges facing our Association. As members of the AAG we all have a responsibility to become informed about, and think through, the full range of ramifications from our collective decisions about the stance and actions of the AAG. Our AAG staff and executive officers have a fiduciary responsibility to protect the health of the Association, and their responses to issues must reflect this. Let me take a current example, at our Denver council meeting we unanimously approved a resolution giving preference to

union hotels for our national conferences (see forthcoming minutes from Denver council meeting). Now we must prepare ourselves for the real possibility that we might face a union action at our meeting hotel in the coming years. As we learned from the American Anthropological Association, the decision to cancel or move their meeting in the face of union action in San Francisco in fall 2004 had

substantial costs (both financial and in terms of goodwill towards the AAA). The health of our Association will depend upon educating ourselves fully about the pros and cons of canceling our meeting before we each take a position about the appropriate action for us. When we are faced with

issues that will affect the future of our Association, we need to find ways towards open and constructive dialogue between all parties to ensure we understand the full range of impacts from our decisions.

Finally, I have been heartened to find out how deeply concerned you are with the inclusiveness of the AAG and geography at large. This has many dimensions including reaching out to stand-alone geographers, improving services to non-academic geographers, bridging gaps between geographic subfields, improving our mentoring and support of students and junior colleagues and our long-standing desire to diversify geography. We are making headway on these issues through the formation of Affinity Groups (Graduate Students, Stand Alone Geographers, Public/Private Sector Geographers) that bring people together, in Richard Marston's new initiative that builds connections between physical and human geography, and through the work of the Diversity Task Force and the new EDGE project on graduate education. The AAG can play an important leadership role by encouraging

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## AAG to Work with UPI on Geography News

The AAG together with the Coalition for National Science Funding and United Press International (UPI) are initiating an effort to bring more news to the general public about developments in science and technology. Individuals are invited to submit material for consideration by UPI's News Track service. News Track publishes roughly twenty-five short stories every business day on all aspects of science and technology including discoveries, innovations, health, medicine, issues, trends, budgets, and policy.

Raw material for stories on all subjects is welcome and should be of interest to an audience of non-specialists with roughly two years of college. Material must be timely. Something significant and news-

worthy must have happened with regard to the story within a day or two of it being submitted. It is fine (even preferable at times) to submit material in advance of an event. UPI will not release the story until the day and time set.

It is not necessary to write a story, only to send a summary of your information. Points should be clear and concise. Layman's terms are preferable wherever possible and scientific jargon should be kept to a minimum. The following information must be included for the story to be useable for News Track: (1) the location where the story took place or the location of the institution/s that did the research (when there is a large collaborative effort the location of the

leading organization may be used), (2) the name/s of a person or organization integral to the story to which the story can be attributed, and (3) the name, phone number and email of a person to contact in case we have a question. Submissions should be no more than two pages and preferably only one page.

Stories selected will be put out on the UPI wire. UPI estimates the potential audience for any given story is ten million people via radio, the Internet, and digital media as well as regular print publications. **Material should be sent by email to [newsletter@aag.org](mailto:newsletter@aag.org) with "UPI Story" in the subject line.** ■

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survey report with more detailed analysis and recommendations is scheduled for release by 2006.

Of the seventy-four departments that responded to the survey, all report efforts to enhance student and faculty diversity and curricular offerings. Most departments actively try to attract a diverse group of undergraduate majors from introductory courses or through major or career fairs. However, few departments report partnerships with local community colleges or high schools where more minority students may be enrolled, and none who responded described relationships with Historically Black Colleges or Hispanic Serving Institutions.

The AAG's Diversity Clearinghouse contains model programs for increasing student diversity, such as GeoDiversity, an NSF-funded project of the California State University - Long Beach departments

of geological sciences, geography, and anthropology. The project creates an innovative collaborative partnership among the university, several community colleges and local high schools to improve the research and educational experiences of underrepresented students in geology, physical geography, archaeology, and environmental science ([www.csulb.edu/depts/geography/gdep/](http://www.csulb.edu/depts/geography/gdep/)).

From the AAG's survey, departments also report that most of their special efforts on minority recruitment at the faculty level focuses largely on targeted advertising. However, of the seventy-four departments that responded, approximately two-thirds have no Black, Non-Hispanic faculty; more than 80% no Hispanic faculty; and more than 97% no Native American faculty. While only 4% of the departments have no women faculty, more than half the departments

have four women or less in full-time academic positions. The under-representation of minority faculty is most evident in the senior ranks. Among the respondents none reported Black, non-Hispanic, or Native American women at the rank of Professor. The greatest challenges to recruiting/retaining minority faculty cited are the size of the pool of potential applicants, campus and community climate (non-urban campuses reported this frequently), and salaries.

The AAG's Diversity Clearinghouse also contains links to resources that can aid in faculty recruitment and retention, such as to the California University of Pennsylvania's Best Practices for Recruiting Faculty of Color and many others. The AAG Diversity Clearinghouse is available at <http://communicate.aag.org/eseries/Diversity/Intro.cfm>. ■

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and facilitating collaboration with interested communities but we will all need to act as agents of change. It is my hope that departments, specialty group networks and individual mentors will all take up the

challenges as we work to engage those who have been excluded and as we build new mechanisms of change and inclusion.

Thank you for this opportunity to serve as President of the AAG. It has been a

real pleasure to work with, and learn from, all of you. ■

Victoria A. Lawson  
[lawson@u.washington.edu](mailto:lawson@u.washington.edu)