

Building Healthy Departments: An Investment Model for Success

One of the most important services the AAG can provide is to bring academic leaders of our discipline together to share concerns and solutions for building healthy geography programs. This benefits students, faculty and ultimately those in business and government who would hire geography students who graduate from healthy departments. As one of her initiatives, Past President Vicky Lawson organized the first AAG Healthy Departments Workshop in Seattle in June 2004 (see her President's Column in the September 2004 AAG Newsletter). That workshop was such a great success that Alec Murphy and I decided to do it again, this time on June 24-26, 2005, in Freeport, Maine. University of Southern Maine Provost and Geography Professor Joe Wood hosted twenty-eight participants and nine panelists at a beautiful USM facility on the Maine coast. The group gathered to discuss relationships between geography programs and university administrators, student learning outcomes assessment, development and outreach, diversity issues, and program/department building. Discussions were started by panelists Rod Erickson, John Frazier, Susan Hanson, Vicky Lawson, Tom Maraffa, Alec Murphy, Nancy Wilkinson, Joe Wood, and me. Participants ranged from stand-alone geographers at community colleges to members of large PhD producing departments. Most participants work in geography departments but roughly one-third are employed in departments where geography is combined with another discipline.

Deans and provosts have made it clear that universities are moving toward utilizing an "investment model" for making difficult decisions about budget priorities. At a time when university budgets are tightening nationwide, departments are not necessarily "entitled" to receive university resources. Programs

need to explain what they are doing to deserve these resources by documenting credit-hour production, degrees awarded, grants and contracts received. Joe Wood reminded us that the most important sources of permanent funds for new activities are not tuition increases or state budget increases, but rather higher enrollments and reallocations among units. Penn State Provost and Geography Professor Rod Erickson scrutinizes programs with a QDCT rubric. Q = Quality...in terms of teaching and learning, your department should be on a list of quality departments, remembering that students now pay the majority of costs. D = Demand...students need to be attracted to the program. The cost of the program per student credit hour produced is a central measure of demand. C = Centrality...the program must be viewed as essential to the university. All of us in academia—from stand-alone geographers at community colleges to those in PhD programs—need to emphasize the unique roles that geography plays in education and research. T = Trouble...departments must avoid causing a disproportionate amount of problems for the upper administration to solve. Universities are moving toward more reliance on external evaluation. The next ranking of PhD programs by the National Academy of Sciences will have serious repercussions at universities who employ the investment model.

Universities must invest in their faculty. One of the most highly acclaimed means by which this is being accomplished in our discipline is through the NSF-sponsored Geography Faculty Development Alliance (GFDA), led by Ken Foote at CU-Boulder. Soon to become self-sustaining, the GFDA consists of summer workshops and follow-up communications with

early-career faculty. Within departments, senior faculty should be awarded for helping junior faculty develop their record of publications and grants. I urge each geography program to find a way to send early-career faculty to the GFDA.

Students must also be a target of investment. Geography programs must develop a means to assess overall student learning in their degree programs, as opposed to mere grading in individual classes. Student learning outcomes assessment is a process that has been undertaken at about one-third of geography programs nationwide, but is spreading as a new requirement for



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accreditation. Measures of student learning are outlined in detail and curriculum is redesigned as an ongoing part of assessment. My involvement with recruiters from the private sector and government agencies brings to mind the demand to teach ethics and integrity to today's students. At least one scientific organization (American Institute of Hydrology) requires a witness to testify to a candidate's ethics and integrity before granting professional certification. How can we assess this as a programmatic outcome in geography? Undergraduate student advising and graduate student mentoring has been proven effective in improving recruitment, retention and graduation rates, but much of this is informal and undirected. Another achievement for which AAG members can be proud is the significant support being provided by the NSF to the AAG for a three-year project to study the process of professional development in graduate geography titled, "Enhancing Departments and Graduate Education (EDGE) in Geography." Ken Foote,

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Michael Solem, and Jan Monk are serving as co-PIs. This project promises to identify key factors for effective learning at the graduate level.

One program that has worked hard to develop a shared vision is found at San Francisco State University, where Nancy Wilkinson provides leadership in the Department of Geography and Human Environmental Studies. In her department, growth was achieved through insisting on quality teaching, rewarding active research, improving diversity, and selecting foci for the curriculum based on what they do well. Deans and provosts at the 2005 Healthy Departments Workshop reported that they seek quantitative measurements to assess the quality of graduate students, evidence for how the bar is being raised for tenure and promotion, and an improving ratio of the graduate degree production per full-time employed faculty member. The best advice for individual faculty members is to seek collaboration within your department and across campus; do not

become entrenched. Create a "culture of possibility," a sense that if the department as a whole succeeds, all faculty members benefit. Adopt strategies that help the entire department move forward. Find moments to celebrate faculty success stories—we have a big story to tell! The Department of Geography at Kansas State University has a media liaison to relay good news to the campus news center and beyond. Nominate each other for awards on campus and those sponsored by the AAG.

Space limitations preclude a full review of the workshop discussions here. However, the AAG website will soon post materials and notes from the first two workshops. AAG Vice President Kavita Pandit has generously offered to organize a third Healthy Departments Workshop next year. Affinity groups have been established for AAG members at community colleges and for stand-alone geographers to enhance communications and to share concerns and ideas with one

another. The AAG is already accomplishing much in the area of promoting healthy departments. The AAG Healthy Departments Committee has been presented with requests to provide an electronic clearinghouse for templates and/or examples for student learning outcomes assessment, strategic planning, program reviews, faculty development, and more. I would like to hear of your concerns and suggestions on how the AAG can best move forward in the area of promoting healthy departments.

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Those interested in participating in the 2006 Healthy Departments Workshop should contact Kavita Pandit at pandit@uga.edu.

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Attendance at the NIDA/AAG Geography and Drug Addiction Symposium will be open to all and will be free of charge to anyone registered for the AAG's Annual Meeting. Those interested in participating in the symposium as a presenter should submit a one-page summary of their proposed topic, describing relevant research conducted, along with a brief resume or CV to Yonette Thomas, PhD, Chief, Epidemiology Research Branch, NIDA Division of Epidemiology, Services and Prevention Research, at yt38e@nih.gov, and to me (Doug Richardson, AAG Executive Director) at drichardson@aag.org. Poster submissions are also welcome; poster applications need only be accompanied by an abstract. Applications for paper or poster participation in the symposium should be received no later than November 8, 2005,

though earlier submission is encouraged. Participation in the symposium as a presenter will be limited to approximately thirty researchers.

Results of the symposium will help guide the development of Requests for Proposals (RFPs) at NIH, and future research agendas within geography and GIScience. A book or special journal issue publication of the symposium results, including selected research papers, is planned for early 2007. Symposium participants should be prepared to develop a full paper for publication if requested by the editors.

The "connections" forged between the topics of geography and drug addiction—and between the AAG and NIDA—will provide geographic context and analysis to support NIH's on-going efforts to

understand the complex processes of drug addiction. I believe it will also create an extraordinarily fertile new arena for geographic research, one which has significant potential for real-world benefit through better understanding and treatment of the scourge which is drug addiction.

For more information on attending or presenting at the NIDA/AAG Geography and Drug Addiction Symposium, visit www.aag.org/nida-aag/research. The Director of the NIH's Institute on Drug Abuse, Dr. Nora Volkow, will deliver the symposium's keynote address. I hope to see you in Chicago!

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**Reminder: Nominations for AAG Honorary Geographer are due by September 15, 2005.
See www.aag.org/grantsawards/honorary_geographer.cfm for details.**