

What If There Were No AAG?

As the Association of American Geographers enters its second century, it may seem almost perverse to ask where we would be without the AAG. Raising the question may nonetheless help us gain some perspective on our organization. This is of particular importance at a time when the meaning of membership in any scholarly/professional society such as ours is undergoing some sea changes.

The AAG was founded in response to a perceived need for a society of geographical experts. In its early years, the society (with the help of the American Geographical Society) sponsored meetings and sought to nurture geographical scholarship. Within less than a decade, the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* was launched and the size of the annual meeting expanded considerably. The AAG was thus set on a track that placed publications and the annual meeting at the core of the organization's activities.

The impact of these early developments was profound. To this day, the Association's journals and annual meetings rank at the top of the list of membership benefits in many geographers' minds. (In any given year, there is a strong correlation between the number of participants in the annual meeting and the overall number of AAG members.) The problem, of course, is that scholarly materials are increasingly available online at limited or no cost, and opportunities for participation in scholarly exchanges are proliferating as new interdisciplinary programs emerge and new forms of collaboration are fostered by the Internet. How does this leave the AAG?

"Vulnerable" might be the answer, if the AAG were only engaged in sending out journals and hosting meetings. Yet the AAG is much more than that. It is an organization that supports the production of geographical scholarship, not just its dissemination. It is an organization that gives geography a place at the table

of disciplinary societies. It is an organization that provides links between universities and the public and private sectors. It is an organization that facilitates communication and interaction among geographers.

The AAG is not altogether alone in playing these roles, but I firmly believe that the discipline's position in American education and society would be immeasurably weakened without the AAG. With growing online access to published articles, the receipt of journals may seem less valuable than it once was. Yet without the AAG there would be no *Annals* or *Professional Geographer*, nor would there be a Newsletter or website reporting on matters of discipline-wide concern and providing a forum for advertising position openings. The AAG Annual Meeting is certainly not the only place where one can practice and learn about geography, but without the AAG there would be no single moment when the entire breadth of our discipline is regularly brought together in one venue—with all that implies for intra-disciplinary dialogue and the cross-fertilization of ideas.

These things are just the tip of the iceberg, however. Consider a few hypothetical questions. Would geography's role in colleges and universities somehow be stronger if deans and provosts could not look to a scholarly society such as the AAG (or if they knew that such a scholarly society did not exist)? Would the profile of geography somehow be stronger in Washington, DC, if there were no DC-based disciplinary organization working to promote the visibility of geography at the National Science Foundation, the National Research Council, and countless government agencies? Would the position of geography somehow be enhanced within the disciplinary matrix if geography did not have an

organization with personnel who could meet and consult regularly with counterparts in other disciplinary organizations? Would geographers somehow have a wider range of opportunities if the discipline did not have a large scholarly/professional organization working to develop research partnerships or promote education and outreach initiatives?

Of course not—and those negative answers speak for themselves. When we join or renew our membership in the AAG, we are not simply paying to get a handful of publications or a discount rate at the annual meeting. We are making it possible for those publications and meetings to exist in the first place—and for an organization to exist that plays a crucial role in

ensuring geography's continued vitality. I ask you to consider this the next time you are tempted not to renew your membership for a year because you might not be going to a meeting or because you don't feel the need to receive hard copies of the Association's publications. I ask you to bring it to the attention of colleagues the next time you hear them say they have no interest in the AAG because the meetings and journals devote insufficient attention to their particular interests. If you or your colleagues believe that it is important to enhance geography's profile in education and society, becoming an AAG member or renewing your membership should be a debatable proposition only if (barring economic hardship) you feel the hypothetical questions raised above can be answered in the affirmative.

None of this is meant to suggest that the AAG is doing everything right. We presumably all have ideas about what the AAG can and should do better—and the



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Nominations Sought for 2005 AAG Honors and Nominating Committees

The AAG Council seeks nominations for candidates to serve on the AAG Honors Committee and the AAG Nominating Committee. The AAG Council will prepare the final slate of candidates for both committees from the nominations received, and committee members will be elected by a vote of the AAG membership.

Nominations for the *Honors Committee* can include persons 1) from the membership at large and 2) from those members who have previously received AAG Honors (a list of previous honorees can be found in the AAG's *Guide to Geography Programs in North America*). Honors Committee members serve for two years and are responsible for making recommendations of awardees for various AAG Honors for Council consideration.

Nominating Committee members serve for one year. The committee recommends to the Council the slate of candidates for the AAG Vice President, President, and National Councilor elections.

If you wish to nominate yourself or other qualified individuals for service on these committees, please contact AAG Secretary Kavita Pandit by June 30, 2004. Nominations should include the contact information of the nominee, a brief biosketch, and indication that the nominee is willing to be placed on the slate of candidates for election by the AAG membership. Please send nominations to AAG Secretary Kavita Pandit by email (pandit@uga.edu), fax (706-542-2388), or by mail to: Department of Geography, University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602-2502. ■

Award Deadlines

APRIL

2. AAG Travel Grants to IGU Meeting. www.aag.org/Grantsawards/igutavel.html.

MAY

1. Fulbright-University of Salzburg Distinguished Chair in the Natural Sciences. Visit www.cies.org/ab_dc/ab_dc2005/country/FulUniA3.htm.

15. Evelyn L. Pruitt National Minority Fellowship. Contact Ruth Shirey at rishirey@iup.edu.

JUNE

14. National Geographic Education Foundation Grants. www.nationalgeographic.com/foundation.

JULY

1. PERISHIP Dissertation Fellowship Awards. Contact periship@riskinstitute.org.

OCTOBER

1. Woodrow Wilson Center Fellowships. www.wilsoncenter.org.

30. Young Scholar's Prize in Romani Studies. Contact Sheila Salo at ssalo@capaccess.org. ■

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Postsecondary Education program, requesting funds to develop a Teacher's Guide to Modern Geography. If funded, the Teacher's Guide will, for the first time, provide a comprehensive suite of high-quality teacher-training products referenced to national standards and spatial thinking skills. The teachers guide will be designed for pre-service programs in geography education, but will also support early-career mentoring programs and mid-career recertification programs.

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AAG should always be open to those ideas. But frustration over this or that should not obscure the larger picture. The AAG is vital to the health of the discipline, and every member who joins or renews makes it possible for the AAG to do more. Against this backdrop,

Building Collaborations

The AAG prides itself on its accomplishments and new initiatives in geography education, but we recognize that the challenges facing us are much larger than can be reasonably taken on by one organization. One such challenge is reforming teacher professional development in geography. At this time, most geography teachers do not major in geography; African Americans and Latinos remain under-represented in the instructional workforce; many teachers

our recent growth in membership is encouraging. If we build upon that trend, we will also be building a stronger discipline. ■

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have no access to graduate programs in geography education; few Ph.D.'s are awarded in geography education in any given year; and research has yet to clarify how pedagogic expertise develops in geography. The scope of the problem requires a coordinated, broad-based, and interdisciplinary response from multiple institutions and organizations. I am pleased to report that the AAG submitted an

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Correction

In the February and March 2004 issues, the URL listed to purchase copies of the new *Guide to Geography Programs in North America* was incorrect. The correct URL is www.aag.org/publications/guide_form.htm.