

Political Geography Specialty Group of the
Association of American Geographers

NEWSLETTER

September 2008

Fiona Davidson
President

Jason Dittmer
Secretary/Treasurer

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Colleagues,

Sorry for the delay in sending out the summer newsletter. It is entirely due to my failure to turn out a President's column. However, I'm in the middle of some extensive medical treatments and am entirely too short on both time and clarity of thought to write anything worth reading at the moment...anyway I doubt any of you wants to read my thoughts on the American medical system as I watch my savings dwindle by the day. Thanks for your patience and with luck this will all be cleared up by January.

Cheers,

Fiona Davidson – University of Arkansas

LETTER FROM THE STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE

Greetings Graduate Students and Department Community,

My name is Kara Dempsey and I am honored to serve as this year's graduate student representative for the Political Geography Specialty Group (2008-2009). I am a doctoral candidate whose current research interests include place representation, landscape and societal power dynamics. While conducting my graduate research, I have noticed a general lack of knowledge or awareness regarding geography as a discipline within society today. In fact, one of the most common questions I am often asked from members of the general public (as well as some members of the academic community) is, "what actually is political geography?". I feel this general lack of understanding of geography demands that we engage the community more directly and offer additional avenues to increase public awareness of our work.

We, as political geographers, have much to offer the public and the greater academic community, in regards to general political awareness. This is particularly true in relation to the current political, economic and social situations in our world (whether it relates to the political and social importance of the Olympic Games or the conflict in the Caucasus).

It is important to consider some of the avenues that we, as graduate students, can pursue. Organizing academic round table discussions that focus on a current political situation is one effective example; especially if we invite academics from other disciplines to contribute. As social scientists, it is important to engage in cross disciplinary discussions, since they can enrich our academic knowledge and understanding. These contributions should also be shared outside of the university in order to engage the larger community. For example, such discussions can also be open to the general public by hosting them at local public libraries and announcing them in newspapers. Geography as a discipline has much to offer our community and we should therefore be interested in making a contribution.

Such interactions will not only allow us as geographers to share our knowledge, research, and experience with the larger community but also provide an opportunity for future recruitment to the field. This can also be fostered through the organization of community-wide department "open houses" that are designed for the general public and undergraduate students. I would also remind graduate students who are teaching classes to encourage their students to pursue other geography classes in future semesters. There are several students in my department, for example, who entered the discipline after a professor or graduate teaching assistant encouraged them to pursue additional courses in geography, based on their particular initial interests.

While it is important to engage the community at large, I would also like to highlight some ways in which we can best prepare ourselves for the future. For example, the July 2008 AAG newsletter discusses the importance of new faculty members' preparation and experience before entering the job market. As we juggle our class, work and own personal schedules, it is important to be mindful of some ways to navigate our own preparation process. I would encourage those beginning their graduate work to take advantage of any mentoring programs that may be available at your university (and if none are available, pursue contacts among graduate students or faculty members during coffee breaks or office hours). These contacts will not only help to create viable support networks during graduate school, but may also provide important connections after graduation. Additionally, joining or creating reading and discussion groups are also effective ways to stay abreast of current research and theory.

When I asked new faculty members for suggestions to offer graduate students regarding preparation for the job market, many stressed the importance of utilizing department resources, participating in group activities (such as department picnics or bike rides), as well as the importance of

publications. Therefore, I encourage you to join, attend and to contribute to the PGSG during the annual AAG meeting as well as the pre-conference. The specialty group offers an excellent opportunity to establish contacts within the political geography community, engage in current dialogue, and share your own research interests. In particular, submission to the PGSG student paper and/or research grant competitions offers an exceptional chance to begin the writing process and receive comments from scholars who are interested in helping develop your work. Please note the deadline for this year's paper and research grant competitions is Friday, February 6, 2009.

In the end, your ideas, experiences and contributions should not be limited to your university alone, so please feel free to contact me with any additional ideas or questions you may have. I also established a PGSG Graduate Student Blog (<http://pgsgradstud.blogspot.com>) as a forum space for you to share thoughts before and after the conference this year. Please email me at kedempsey@wisc.edu to contribute your suggestions (such as community engagement projects or round table discussions you may have coordinated) to the blog.

Best wishes!

Kara E. Dempsey
University of Wisconsin-Madison

PGSG Business Meeting Minutes

PGSG Business Meeting Minutes April 21th 2008 – Boston, MA

Meeting called to order by Fiona Davidson (PGSG President) at 7:06pm

- 1) Jerry Webster moved to have the minutes of the past year's meeting approved. This was so moved.
- 2) Bob Watrel announced the winners of the Dissertation Enhancement Award and the PhD paper competition.
 - a) Dissertation Enhancement Award: Sara Koopman (University of British Columbia)
 - b) PhD Paper Competition: There were two winners this year, Erinn Nicely (University of Illinois) and Kara Dempsey (University of Wisconsin)
- 3) Fiona Davidson announced the non-student awards.
 - a) Research Award: Derek Gregory (University of British Columbia) and Allan Pred (University of California at Berkeley) for their book, *Violent Geographies*
 - b) Young Scholar Award: Nick Megoran (Newcastle University), for his work promoting ethnography in political geography.

- c) Outreach Award: Klaus Dodds (Royal Holloway), for his book, A Very Short Introduction to Geopolitics.
- 4) President's Report – Fiona reported in about the chair's lunch:
 - a) There are two new specialty groups (cyberinfrastructure and business).
 - b) New AAG President John Agnew wants to integrate the discipline better across the human/physical divide.
 - c) The Annals will continue to publish 5th issues annually on special topics.
 - d) There is a National Research Council session on strategic questions regarding the discipline.
 - e) There was the usual discussion of registration fees for the AAG.
 - f) There is no improvement of child care at the AAG.
 - g) There is the possibility of ending conflicts for specialty group meetings.
 - i) The consensus of the PGSG was that there should be no breakfast meetings.
 - h) There is an AAG initiative in gaining members in developing regions.
 - i) The consensus of the PGSG was that we should waive PGSG fees for potential members in developing regions.
 - i) The AAG is considering moving to convention centers beginning with the meeting in Seattle.
 - j) The AAG is not moving towards draconian measures to restrict the submission of papers.
 - k) The AAG will be highlighting one session by each specialty group in the program. The consensus of the PGAG was that we should highlight either the plenary or the current events roundtable every year.
- 5) Treasurer's Report – Jason reported in:
 - a) The current balance of our account is \$8670.90. This can be expected to be much lower by fall as the awards are given out and bills for the pre-conference come in.
- 6) Pre-conference Report – Phil Steinberg reported in:
 - a) The pre-conference ran a small deficit (if at all) this year. There were 34 registrations, and almost 50% of them were women.
- 7) Nominations: Fiona ran the nominating process:
 - a) There were four nominations for the student position on the board.
 - i) Adam Moore
 - ii) Mahmut Gokmen
 - iii) Kara Dempsey
 - iv) Joe Lewis
 - b) There were two nominations for the two open faculty seats on the board.
 - i) Tom Chapman
 - ii) Gabriel Popescu
- 8) Old Business – Fiona reported in:
 - a) Teaching award
 - i) The creation of a teaching award resurfaced as an issue in the meeting. Questions bandied about revolved around how to evaluate

nominations, and indeed how to get nominations. Fred Shelley cut the Gordian Knot by getting the four students nominated for the board to serve as an ad hoc panel to check with the National Council on Geographic Education to see how they do this for their teaching awards.

- b) Allocation of money
 - i) The AAG's pressure on specialty groups to spend down their bank balances is still there, but given that the PGSG has made progress in that direction (creating new awards, etc.) this was deemed to be no longer an issue.
- 9) New Business – Fiona requested new business:
 - a) Non-geographer award
 - i) The question was raised of whether or not the PGSG should give an award to a non-geographer who promotes political geography. Fred Shelley mentioned the possibility of locating each year's winner in the region in which the AAG is to be held.
 - ii) Stan Brunn talked to Doug Richardson about making this person honorary geographer.
 - b) Next year's pre-conference
 - i) Pauliina Raento will talk to people in Reno about hosting in Las Vegas. Fred Shelley will lead the coordinating effort.
 - c) Undergraduate paper award
 - i) Katherine Hankins requested that people submit their undergraduate's papers.
 - d) Thanks were offered for the service of the outgoing board members (Andy Wood and Robert Watrel).
- 10) Meeting adjourned at 7:59pm.

PGSG PRE-CONFERENCE 2009

AAG Political Geography Specialty Group Pre-Conference

The PGSG Pre-conference will be held at the Plaza Hotel in downtown Las Vegas. Generously co-sponsored by the Department of Geography at the University of Oklahoma, this year's meeting will be March 21-22 (immediately prior to the AAG annual meeting). There will be a social event on the evening of Friday, March 20, to kick off the week of hearing the latest research and getting together with old friends and colleagues (and perhaps a little gambling). Paper sessions will begin the next morning (the 21st) and continue until noon on the 22nd. Fred Shelley has negotiated a block of 30 rooms at the Plaza for Friday, March 20 and Saturday, March 21 at \$60/night for one or two people, \$75/night for three people, and \$90/night for four people. The block of

rooms will be held until February 18 (that is 30 days before the event). To reserve a room for these days, call 1-800-634-6575 and identify yourself as part of the "Department of Geography" group. The room block cutoff date is February 20.

Location: The Plaza is located at the intersection of Main Street and the Fremont Street Experience in downtown Las Vegas. The address is 1 S. Main St Las Vegas, NV 89101 (phone (702) 386-2110). The website address is <http://www.plazahotelcasino.com/>. The hotel is about 10 miles north of the airport and perhaps four miles north of the Riviera, where the AAG meeting will begin March 22.

Extended stays at the Plaza: Those who want to arrive earlier than the 20th or stay longer may talk to the hotel personnel about extended stays. Extended stays can be arranged for at the going room rate for each night requested at the time that reservations are made. The room rates are generally somewhat more expensive on weekends than during the work week; thus rooms may be available after the Pre-conference for less than \$60/night. (So that PGSG members and friends attending the pre-conference have first priority in securing rooms from our block, let me ask you not to share the room block information with people not associated with the pre-conference at least until mid-February.) There is free parking at the Plaza.

Registration cost: The registration fee, if any, will be charged to faculty members to defray any remaining portion of the room rental costs after subsidization by the PGSG and the Department of Geography at the University of Oklahoma. There will be no registration fee charged to graduate or undergraduate students.

Call for papers: A formal call for papers will be sent out shortly after the holidays in January (included in the next newsletter). The deadline will be set for sometime in early February.

"Truth gains more even by the errors of one who, with due study and preparation, thinks for himself, than by the true opinions of those who only hold them because they do not suffer themselves to think."

John Stuart Mill On Liberty
