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joint PGSG and SSSG preconference,  
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# Political Geography Specialty Group of the Association of American Geographers **N E W S L E T T E R**

October 2010

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**Jason Dittmer**  
President

**Mat Coleman**  
Secretary/Treasurer

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## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Jason Dittmer, Dome of the Rock, Palestine,  
Summer 2010

Dear Political Geography Colleagues,

As I enter the final year of my term as president of this fine specialty group, I am struck by the vibrancy of the community and the real sense of pleasure we take in one another. Our last business meeting was a perfect example of this; while we covered some real business in many ways it felt more like a touchstone, a ritual in which we all get together and say hello. As the AAG gets bigger and the sub-discipline becomes more fragmented (both good

things, in my estimation), those kind of rituals become more and more important. I always start my second year class in Political Geography and Geopolitics by defining political geography both as a literature, and as a group of people who produce that literature. Rituals like our business meeting are important in renewing that sense of the collective 'we'.

Yet, I cannot help but think that there is a large mismatch between the number who show up at the meeting (forty people or so) and our enormous membership list. Of course, not everyone can make the business meeting (or even the conference itself) for logistical or other reasons, and that is fine. But I think there must be a large segment of the PGSG membership that chooses to not participate actively in this form of sub-disciplinary life, and I wish it weren't so (although we're happy to keep your membership fees). Foremost, I think of all the great friendships I have made through my service to the PGSG and I wish that experience for everyone. More selfishly, I also realize that there are a lot of political geographers out there with whom I have not (yet) had

the chance to forge similar friendships and share ideas. Further, while the PGSG is a relatively active specialty group, I sense we could do far better. Not only is the pool of ideas for PGSG activity that much smaller, but the pool of energy through which good ideas are implemented is as well. Many of the same names are called upon year after year to review papers and dissertation proposals for our competitions; the organization of the pre-conference often falls to people living thousands of miles away from the pre-conference venue. These people serve and do so (largely) without complaining. But I think we, collectively, can do better, by broadening that collective 'we'.

I know we're all being asked to do more by our home institutions during this period of budgetary retrenchment, and sub-disciplinary engagement can seem like the least fruitful of service commitments. Unlike university or departmental service, it won't do much to get you promoted and it won't

ingratiate you with editors the way paper reviews will. But the paradox is that the more you invest in political geography the more intangible benefits you get out of it. That's certainly the lesson I've learned over the last five years of disciplinary service. In my last year as president, I will work to foster a greater sense of inclusiveness and service among the membership of the specialty group. In April I hope more of you decide to put off that first pint of the evening and turn up at the business meeting. Better yet, bring the beer. It might provide the liquid courage you need to raise your hand and offer up an idea, or volunteer to help out on a committee.

And of course there's no need to wait until the meeting if you have an idea or a yen to serve. Please don't hesitate to contact me, Mat, or any of the executive board members at any time.

Jason Dittmer  
London, UK

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## LETTER FROM THE STUDENT BOARD MEMBER



Necati Anaz, Medellin, Colombia, Summer 2010

Greetings to everyone and welcome to those who are excited to enter their new

semester as a geographer. I am delighted to address the PGSG newsletter again as the student representative! Hope this letter finds you well.

I would like to talk about graduate students' academic endeavors in their long and rough journey. I recently watched an episode of *The Simpsons* that deals with this very subject. In the episode, Bart acts out by cutting the pony-tail from a graduate student and then holding the purloined pompadour behind his head: "Hey! Look at me. I'm a grad student. I'm thirty years old and I just made \$600 last year!" His mother, Marge, steps in and warns Bart not to make fun of grad students. She says:

“Bart! Don’t make fun of grad students. They just made a terrible life choice.” Meanwhile Lisa, who is the most prone to studying and dreaming about going to a graduate college, is sitting by the lake, deep in thought and feeding the ducks. As she throws crusts of bread for the ducks, grad students rush in to pick up the crusts just like the ducks. Then, their advisor shows up yelling in an overbearing voice: “No food for you grad students till you grade three thousand papers.” And he whips them away. The PGSG president Jason Dittmer can tell you more than I about popular culture’s ability to reflect the reality of daily life, but I find a strong correlation between what is reflected in the episode and the reality of what a grad student’s life looks like. Of course our advisors are not whipping us, nor are we collecting bread pieces from the ground. But, most of our reality is not far off from what has been implied in the episode. Wages that we get are not to provide a decent life; they are only to survive. Between subsistence wages, the search for a dissertation topic, and the merciless taunting of animated ten-year-olds, the burdens that we are expected to carry can sometimes reach an unbearable limit. Publications that we are expected to send out, classes that we need to teach, and papers that need to be read can quickly burn out all the excitement that we had at the beginning of school. By the time we truly realize what we’ve gotten ourselves into, it has mostly become too late to act upon. Several years might have gone by, and the future may not look too bright. Initial excitement may be replaced with a frantic sorrow and deep psychological turbulence in the blink of an eye. The stress of cutthroat academic competition, of trying to make a philosophical contribution to the

discipline, and the grim actuality of the job market outside of our cubicles—not to mention trying to maintain some small semblance of a life—continue to be the everyday realities of a grad student.

What are the exit strategies for all these? Or is there any way of dealing with these types of grad life issues? I don’t know and I don’t think I am in a position to write a prescription here. I am, indeed, one of those academic victims who need help as much as anyone else. However, I do have several questions to pose and suggestions to propose, at least for those who have just chosen to join the club of academia.

To me, grad life requires one to have at least two important prerequisites: commitment to hard work and financial security. Commitment necessitates a dedication and love of what you are doing. You should be more than excited to see your dream come true. If the metaphor of love is accurate, your graduate career should resemble a marriage more than a crush; that fire won’t burn as bright in the eighth semester as it did in the first, but the ember is still there, waiting to be flamed back to life. A crush, in many cases, does not last too long. Love does. Therefore, the fiery horsepower of first-semester passion must be converted into a steady-running battery that will take you to graduation. But this is not enough to mobilize you from point A to point B. You also need a road map. If the destination is not mapped out before the journey begins, then you must be prepared to get lost in the dizzying complexity of reality. This does not mean you must calculate every step of your academic life. This means that you must have cornerstones to guide you to your destination both day and night.

You can still make occasional stops to spice up your travel, but you must calculate carefully how much time you can mingle around these stops.

Another thing that you have to pay attention is financial security. This is perhaps the most problematic facet of the academic journey. How to attain grants, scholarships, or assistantships is a challenging task, and one that stands prominent before you. We all are aware that the academy and the market speak different languages when it comes to where funding should be allocated. What research questions should you have so that you can find funding? How can you find that are “important”, and thus more likely to be funded by scientific corporations and political agents? As the economic condition of the US stays troubling and more students continue to stay in schools (buying time, perhaps?), finding grants to sponsor your academic curiosity may become tantamount to—as they say in Turkey—getting your bread back from a lion’s stomach. It is too hard, too dangerous, and it requires careful timing and planning.

The reason why I am compelled to share all these pessimistic notions with you is that I truly wish and hope for all of you

have a great plan of action about what you are getting into and how to make complexities of grad life smoother and more productive. The grad part of your life constitutes a vital stage of your life. It makes up of your best years in terms of age, mental and physical health, and relative probability of getting invited to a really good party. Thus, I recommend you have a clear road map for your academic journey: From the beginning to the not-ending end. While we do all of this careful planning and executing, we never want to forget that we can only do so much, and grad years are the best portion our life. We must balance what is best for academic life as well as for our social life.

Though Bart Simpson’s statement will continue to resonate in our ears for some time, we, faculties and grad students, must make this life choice enjoyable and worth pursuing, and not a miserable life choice. I wish you all a happy and productive start. Please also do take every opportunity that the PGSG provides for us to ease our academic and non-academic endeavors.

Best of luck!

Necati Anaz  
Norman, Oklahoma



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## POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY AND SEXUALITY AND SPACE SPECIALTY GROUPS PRE-CONFERENCE, UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON TACOMA, APRIL 10-11, 2011

This year the Political Geography and Sexuality and Space Specialty Groups are co-sponsoring a pre-conference on the University of Washington Tacoma campus immediately prior to the start of the Association of American Geographers conference in Seattle. The pre-conference will begin midday on Sunday, April 10 and will feature a Keynote Address by **Dr. Lynn Staeheli, Professor of Geography at Durham University** in the United Kingdom. The conference will continue through Monday, April 11. Registration details, including fee and fee payment details, will be available soon at [http://www.tacoma.washington.edu/conference/pgs\\_conference.html](http://www.tacoma.washington.edu/conference/pgs_conference.html). To submit a paper or session proposal, **please send a title, abstract, and complete author/organizer contact information to Larry Knopp** ([knoppl@uw.edu](mailto:knoppl@uw.edu)) or **Mark Pendas** ([pendras@uw.edu](mailto:pendras@uw.edu)) no later than **March 1, 2011**.

The [University of Washington Tacoma](#) campus is located in downtown Tacoma's vibrant and beautifully renovated museum district. Accommodations within walking distance include the Courtyard by

Marriott (<http://www.marriott.com/hotels/hotel-information/travel/seatd-courtyard-tacoma-downtown/>) and the Hotel Murano (<http://www.hotelmuranotacoma.com/>). The Best Western Tacoma Dome (<http://www.bestwesternwashington.com/hotels/best-western-tacoma-dome-hotel/>) is a very short (2-3 minute) free tram ride away. All three offer room rates that are considerably cheaper than hotel rates in downtown Seattle (including AAG conference rates). In addition, downtown Seattle and Tacoma are accessible to one another via commuter train and express busses from early morning until late evening. The trip takes less than an hour.

Special thanks to the two specialty groups, UW-Tacoma administration, and the UW-Tacoma Office of Advancement, for their support of this pre-conference. Thanks also to the local organizing committee comprised of geographers and fellow-travelers in the [Interdisciplinary Arts & Sciences](#) and [Urban Studies](#) programs at UW-Tacoma and the [Department of Geography](#) at UW-Seattle.

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## 2011 POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY SPECIALTY GROUP DISSERTATION ENHANCEMENT AWARD

The PGSG Dissertation Enhancement Award of \$800.00 is to be granted annually to a PGSG student member. Interested students should prepare a mini-dissertation proposal for submission to the Dissertation Awards Committee. Guidelines for the DEA are as follows:

1. The competition is open to all Ph.D. students who are members of the PGSG.

2. The DEA proposal should be 8-10 pages in length total (single or double spaced) and include sections covering the research question(s), theoretical issues, conceptual framework, methodology, relevance to political geography, and a budget describing how the \$800.00 would be used.
3. A proposal submitted for the PGSG DEA award may NOT be submitted to any other AAG Specialty group's dissertation enhancement award.
4. If a student has already incurred expenses listed in the budget by the time of the award announcement, the student may use the DEA to cover those expenses.
5. The DEA proposal should be crafted from the student's dissertation proposal which has been or will be submitted to the Ph.D. committee within the 2010-2011 academic year.
6. To enable full consideration of all submissions, entrants should send copies of their DEA proposals to each member of the Dissertation Enhancement Awards Committee listed below. Electronic submissions are welcome. Final acceptance date for submissions is 5pm, March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011.
7. The results of the DEA competition will be announced to the winner March 29, 2011 prior to the annual AAG meeting in Seattle, WA and the winner will be invited to attend the annual AAG Awards Luncheon at the expense of the PGSG. The award will be formally announced at the PGSG business meeting in Seattle, WA, and the \$800.00 award will be distributed to the winner at that time. The winner's name and dissertation title will be forwarded to the AAG for publication in the AAG Newsletter.
8. Questions concerning the competition may be directed to the members of the Dissertation Enhancement Awards Committee.

Dissertation Enhancement Award Committee:

Dr. Robert H. Watrel, Department of Geography, South Dakota State University, 246 Scobey Hall, Box 504, Brookings, SD 57007; [robert.watrel@sdstate.edu](mailto:robert.watrel@sdstate.edu)

Dr. Shannon O'Lear, Department of Geography 1475 Jayhawk Blvd, 213 Lindley Hall University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045; [olear@ku.edu](mailto:olear@ku.edu)

Dr. Gabriel Popescu, Department of Political Science, Indiana University South Bend, P.O. Box 7111, South Bend, IN 466634; [gpopescu@iusb.edu](mailto:gpopescu@iusb.edu)

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## **POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY GRADUATE STUDENT PAPER COMPETITIONS**

Description: The student paper competitions are open to all students who have written and presented a research paper on a topic in political geography. Guidelines are as follows:

1. The competition is open to all students, however a student may not receive a Student Paper Competition award more than once during her/his tenure as a student. See also 8a below.
2. The entries must be research papers and not complete theses or dissertations. Papers must not be longer than 15 pages plus bibliography.
3. Entries must be on a topic in political geography.
4. Paper entries must have been presented at a professional meeting during the period beginning with the first day of the previous AAG Annual Meeting and concluding with the last day of the next AAG Annual Meeting.
5. Hard or digital copies of papers must be submitted to all three members of the PGSG's Student Paper Award Committee by 5pm, March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011. No late papers will be accepted.
6. Submissions will normally be divided into Masters and Ph.D. student divisions.
7. Submissions will be judged on their written clarity, methodological and theoretical soundness, and their contributions to research in political geography.
8. All monetary prizes are awarded at the discretion of the Student Paper Award Committee. Awards will normally include:
  - A). A regional student-paper award: for a paper presented at a Regional AAG meeting; award will be \$100 for the top paper(MA or Ph.D. level, only one award); a student may not win both student paper awards;
  - B). Doctoral Student Award (\$100 + reimbursement of next year's AAG Annual Meeting student registration fee),
  - C). Master's Student Award (\$100 + reimbursement of next year's AAG Annual Meeting student registration fee),
  - D). up to three Honorable Mention awards (reimbursement of next year's AAG Annual Meeting student registration fee).
9. The results of the Student Paper Award competitions will be announced to the winner just prior to the annual AAG meeting in Las Vegas and the awardees (including any Honorable Mention awardees) will be invited to attend the annual AAG Awards Luncheon at the expense of the PGSG. The awards will be formally announced at the PGSG business meeting in Las Vegas Payment will take place shortly thereafter. The

awardees' names and paper titles will be forwarded to the AAG for publication in the AAG Newsletter.

10. Any questions pertaining to eligibility will be resolved by the Student Paper Award Committee.

Graduate Student Paper Award Committee:

Darren Purcell, Chair, University of Oklahoma, [dpurcell@ou.edu](mailto:dpurcell@ou.edu)

Helga Leitner, University of Minnesota, [helga.leitner-1@umn.edu](mailto:helga.leitner-1@umn.edu)

Katrinka Somdahl-Sands, Rowan University, [somdahlka@gmail.com](mailto:somdahlka@gmail.com)

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## **POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT PAPER COMPETITION**

Description: The undergraduate student paper award will go to the best paper on a political geography topic written by an undergraduate student, regardless of membership in the AAG or participation at the Annual Meetings. Papers submitted for awards to other AAG-affiliated organizations are not eligible. This competition is open to all undergraduate students who have written a research paper or senior thesis on a topic in political geography. Guidelines are as follows:

1. The competition is open to all undergraduate students, or those who have completed an undergraduate degree since the last award has been made.
2. The entries must be research papers or theses, and not reviews. Papers must be longer than 10 double-spaced pages plus bibliography, but less than 15 pages plus bibliography. Margins must be 1" on all sides and 12 point font must be used.
3. Entries must be on a topic in political geography.
4. Each university may only submit one undergraduate paper or thesis for consideration.
5. Hard copies of papers must be received by all three members of the PGSG's Undergraduate Student Paper Award Committee by June 15 to be included in that year's competition. They must each be endorsed with the signature of the applicant's department chair. This signature will indicate that the submission is the department's chosen applicant (see #4 above).
6. Submissions will be judged on their written clarity, methodological and theoretical soundness, and their contributions to research in political geography.



7. All monetary prizes are awarded at the discretion of the Undergraduate Student Paper Award Committee.

A). Up to three Honorable Mention awards will be given (award of \$50 each).

B). The winner of the Award will receive \$100 cash and registration to the next year's AAG conference (the registration fee component is contingent on continued study of geography).

C.) If no acceptable entries are made the committee can decide to not give the award in any given year.

8. The results of the Student Paper Award competitions will be announced in the fall PGSG newsletter. The awards will be formally announced at the PGSG business meeting and the cash awards and registration reimbursement will be distributed to the awardees at that time. The awardees' names and paper titles will be forwarded to the AAG for publication in the AAG Newsletter.

9. Any questions pertaining to eligibility will be resolved by the Undergraduate Student Paper Award Committee.

Undergraduate Student Paper Award Committee:

Mat Coleman, Chair, The Ohio State University, [coleman.373@osu.edu](mailto:coleman.373@osu.edu)

Katherine Hankins, Georgia State University, [khankins@gsu.edu](mailto:khankins@gsu.edu)

Andrew Wood, University of Kentucky, [andrew.wood@uky.edu](mailto:andrew.wood@uky.edu)

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## POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY NON-STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

Awards are as follows:

- **Julian Minghi Outstanding Research Award.** This award will be given to the author(s) of a journal article, book chapter, or book published during the previous calendar year that makes an innovative, original contribution to the conceptual and/or methodological embrace of political geography.

- **Stanley D. Brunn Young Scholar Award.** This award will be given to an individual who has received her/his Ph.D. within the past ten years, in honor of contributions that have generated new interest in the subfield and/or opened up new areas of inquiry for political geographic research.

- **Richard Morrill Public Outreach Award.** This award will be given to an individual who has used her or his political geographic expertise to affect change (in public thought or public policy) beyond the academy.

## General Information:

1. All awards will be based on nominations made to the President of the PGSG, with award decisions to be made by the PGSG Board.
2. For all awards, the field of political geography will be defined according to the breadth of topics covered in the Political Geography chapter of the “Geography in America at the Dawn of the 21st Century” volume.
3. For each award category, a maximum of one award will be conferred each year, with the announcement to be made at the PGSG Business Meeting taking place the next Spring. For each award category, if there are no nominees whom the Board views as deserving of merit, no award will be made.
4. Each award recipient will receive a \$50 check to honor her or his achievement.
5. Decisions regarding who receives awards will be made by the PGSG Board. The PGSG Board reserves the right to determine whether a nominee (or a nominated publication) falls within the scope of political geography.
6. Nominations by Board members are permitted.
7. Awardees need not be PGSG or AAG members, although awardees will be strongly encouraged to join both groups if they are not already members.

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**For more details on PGSG events and competitions (plus the PGSG blog) visit**

<http://www.politicalgeography.org/aagsessions.html>

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**“BOUNDARY, *n.***

In political geography, an imaginary line between two nations, separating the imaginary rights of one from the imaginary rights of the other. ”

Ambrose Gwinnett Bierce, *The Devil’s Dictionary* (1911)

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