

# Political Geography Specialty Group of the Association of American Geographers

## NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2009

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Jason Dittmer  
President

Mat Coleman  
Secretary/Treasurer

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### LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Jason Dittmer, Reykjavik, Feb 2009

Dear Political Geography Colleagues,

I begin this letter with both great joy and great trepidation. Great joy because it is my first presidential column for the newsletter, and I am very pleased to be

sitting here in the PGSG Secret Compound, dictating this letter to my Deputy Assistant Undersecretary (the Undersecretary herself is on a diplomatic foray to visit the fabled exotic lands of the Geomorphology Specialty Group). Great trepidation ensues, however, as for years I've read these columns and thought – "whatever would I say?" The moment of truth has arrived, and alas I am predictably short of ideas.

Nevertheless, being short of ideas has never stopped me from writing before, and today is no different. I'd like to offer a challenge to the membership, sparked by a recent exchange on the listserv. Recently members exchanged a flurry of emails about the health care debate in the USA. I

read the emails, which quickly consolidated into two or three positions that fairly readily mapped onto positions within the center to left side of the political spectrum (fully recognizing that those labels are problematic, but work with me here). I certainly would put my own views on the issue somewhere in that spectrum as well.

This debate started me thinking about Nick Megoran's recent article in *Geopolitics* (vol.13, #3, pp.473-497) in which he argues for critical geopolitics to adopt a position of pacifism, noting that most authors writing in the critical geopolitical tradition have a fairly ambiguous set of moral underpinnings when it comes to war and conflict. Since reading his article I've become quite sensitive to how his critique applies to my own work, and I thought of it again when reading the email exchanges on the listserv. I think that any kind of political or moral orthodoxy is the last thing political geography needs (in fact, I think we could do with a little more heterodoxy), but Nick's article is important because it grounds his claims regarding pacifism in overt philosophical and moral positions.

What can political geography, writ large, offer the public in regard to this kind of fundamental clarity? In the case of the current American health care debate much of the opposition is about the role of the state in everyday life, which is ultimately a

normative opposition – yet much of the argument for 'health care reform' (whatever it might end up being) takes the form of a technocratic pragmatism that is ineffective at convincing those whose opposition is normative. Political geography is, in my estimation, similarly predisposed to wonky debates but poor at enunciating why, on philosophical and normative grounds, the state *should* be involved in something like health care (or should not, which returns to my earlier point about heterodoxy).

In short, I would like you all to join me in thinking about the fundamentals – not of just the role of the state, but of everything we study in political geography. We are all good at acknowledging that we come at our research and teaching from particular positionalities, but we are not necessarily that good about thinking through those positionalities. Why do we think what we think? If confronted on our base assumptions, can we make a considered argument about these first principles?

In closing, I wish everyone a wonderful fall semester. The marching bands are drilling and the freshmen are still attending class. It must be September.

Jason Dittmer  
London, UK

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**LETTER FROM THE STUDENT BOARD  
MEMBER**



**Necati Anaz, Greece, Summer 2009**

Dear PGSG student members,

My name is Necati Anaz and I am a PhD student at the University of Oklahoma. I am very pleased to be your 2009-2010 PGSG student representative.

I am writing this letter with great hope that you had a fabulous, productive and relaxing summer. I myself had a very joyful, educational and adventuresome summer, but of course it came at an immense expense. We all know that it is almost unimaginable for a grad student – particularly in geography – to not have financial problems. But this is especially the case if you are travelling to Europe where exchange rates conspire to make yourself poorer than you could imagine!

Let me share a bit of my travel with you. I personally experienced the geopolitics of citizenship – and what it means to be an “outsider” – as I crossed the borders of Europe’s so-called “shatterbelt” or “shatter zone” regions: Greece, Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Macedonia, Bulgaria and Turkey (I was rejected from Romania!). I was struck by how much citizenship, belonging and

identity can make such a difference when it comes to crossing international borders – especially in an age frequently caricatured as transnational as well as multinational. As I witnessed first hand, one’s mobility and ability to cross borders is highly contingent on who you are (profession, nationality and identity), where you are coming from (location of your entry), your skin color, assumed religion, and most importantly, what passport you hold (citizenship).

My short but no less rewarding summer trek through Central and Eastern Europe has convinced me of our collective need to “mine the gap” between the distant “geographing” of places and the more immediate “geo-experiencing” of landscapes and sites. Political geography students could more profitably reorient their academic investigation to accommodate different, grounded vantage points. Indeed my travels this summer have convinced me that young researchers would do well to include “other” sights/sites/cites in their academic investigations so as to better understand political terrains beyond the US and UK – places unfortunately too often labeled as different, dissident and unruly. My travels have also convinced me that the AAG could further extend its recent attempts to open the organization to those outside US and British academia. I am not saying that the AAG is lacking of these areas, but that we could do an even better job internationalizing our annual conferences, journals, decision-making processes and especially the language we use.

There is one other important item that I want to highlight. As you all know, this year’s AAG meeting will be in Washington

DC. (Check out the conference website at <http://www.aag.org/annualmeetings/2010/index.htm>) I strongly encourage our PGSG student members to take advantage of the conference site. For those who have not yet visited DC, you should give yourselves time either before or after the conference to explore, investigate and get a taste for the city. DC provides an almost unlimited array of free (or really cheap) sightseeing opportunities – political sites, history and science museums, war memorials, art houses, etc – as well as a number of inexpensive restaurants and good club/bar

opportunities. I highly encourage all conference attendees to take advantage of the city that has been formed and reformed to “capitalize” almost everything that PG students would appreciate! Best wishes for the start of the academic year. Please don’t forget to write us and share your thoughts and suggestions!

Peace!

Necati Anaz  
Norman, Oklahoma

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### **PGSG UNDERGRADUATE PAPER AWARD WINNER!**

**Amerita Ravuvu**, a Senior in Geography at the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa, is this year’s PGSG undergraduate paper award winner! Ms. Ravuvu’s paper is entitled “Fiji’s Weak and Divided State: The Rhetoric of Ethnic Polarization in the Political Process”. Ms. Ravuvu’s advisor is Professor Reece Jones – but luckily she doesn’t have to share the \$100 award with him, nor the fee waiver for this year’s annual meeting in Washington DC!

Stay tuned for details about our next PGSG Undergraduate Paper Competition.

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### **2010 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 for a 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 **Monday, March 15, 2010**.
7. The results of the DEA competition will be announced to the winner **Monday, March 29, 2010** prior to the annual AAG meeting in Washington, DC 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 Washington, DC, 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:

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)

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)

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 the deadline announced in the PGSG newsletter.
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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### PGSG PRE-CONFERENCE

Stay tuned for details on our upcoming PGSG pre-conference (and more) at Virginia Tech!

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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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