

# SWAAG Newsletter



Summer 2008

Editor: Sarah Witham Bednarz

## SWAAG 2007, Held in Historic Bryan, Texas

Texas A&M University hosted SWAAG's annual meeting in Bryan, Texas, November 1-2, 2007. AAG President Tom Baerwald attended as did nearly 150 geographers from Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Texas.



The annual SWAAG Student Paper Competition was held on November 2, 2007.

Judges Sven Fuhrman, Doug Hurt, Fred Shelley, Marcus Gillespie,

Judith Hoffman, Michael Camille, Erik Prout, Robert Bednarz, and Jennifer Speights-Binet listened to an outstanding group of papers and reviewed a range of posters to reach consensus on winners (pictured above). First place was taken by Ingrid Haekel, University of Texas at Austin for her paper "*The hidden ceremonial harvest: Demand and harvesting patterns for epiphytic Tillandsia ssp. in Central Veracruz.*" Second place was awarded to Katherine Williams, also from UT, for "*Derailing in Key Weird: Liminality and the construction of place at Fantasy Fest.*" Third place winner went to Katia Aviles-Vasquez, UT-Austin, for "*Soil quality changes along an agricultural intensity gradient.*"

In the **Student Poster Competition**, Jennifer E. Miller, University of Texas at Austin, was chosen as winner

for "*Modeling impala distribution in Botswana using MaxEnt.*" Honorable mentions were made to two additional posters, "*The urban expansion of Bryan and College Station, Texas from 1967 to 2003*" produced by I. Srinath, W. Flately, C. Graff, F. Hopf, D. Kim, A. Krustchinsky, D Redo, and A. Young; and "*Highway subsidence detection in Pearl River Delta based on D-inSAR.*" by Zhaohui Chi, all of Texas A&M University.

## SWIG at SWAAG in 2007



Wendy Jepson (TAMU, shown left), Chair of the AAG Committee on the Status of Women in Geography, organized a panel discussion ("Women's Roundtable: Breaking Barriers to Success") and breakfast at SWAAG. This roundtable

drew upon some of the National Academy of Sciences' findings (*Beyond Bias and Barriers*, 2006) to discuss strategies that departments and the AAG can implement to improve women's professional development and success in the discipline at all levels. The breakfast, an annual event at SWAAG, was also a nice opportunity to network with fellow SWAAG colleagues and the AAG President.

## From the SWAAG Chair...

My first address as Chair of SWAAG comes during a fascinating time in world history, given the contradictions of Post-911 geopolitics and the important presidential and congressional elections in the U.S. It also comes at an exciting time for me personally. I am thrilled to be relocating during the summer months to Conway, Arkansas to begin my new position as Associate Professor of Geography at The University of Central Arkansas. I have learned throughout my years of participation in SWAAG meetings while teaching at Texas A&M International University in Laredo that there is something magical about geography programs. So many SWAAG faculty bring students with them to conferences. At the meetings I so often observe something that I recall all too well when I was a geography student myself: that geography students are inquisitive in distinctive ways, and possess talents that include unique insights into the ways our world is being shaped. Geography faculty have done a wonderful job at empowering geography students to view the world, the relations between places, and the landscapes we in-



teract with holistically. I have been the sole geographer in Laredo, and welcome the excitement of interacting with geography faculty and students on a daily basis in Conway, Arkansas. While nearly all of the students that took my geography courses in Laredo were ma-

teract with holistically. I have been the sole geographer in Laredo, and welcome the excitement of interacting with geography faculty and students on a daily basis in Conway, Arkansas. While nearly all of the students that took my geography courses in Laredo were ma-

jors in other disciplines, I suppose I can claim some modest success by virtue of the fact that a small number changed their minds and continued their education elsewhere to study geography. Now I will be in a much better position to be part of the mentoring process of geography students.

The times are also exciting, albeit somewhat nerve wracking, in light of the events of the 2008 political season and political-geographic problems the world over. As I write this, the nightmare of Myanmar is unfolding, as the ruling military junta confiscates food and relief supplies, and refuses to allow aid workers into the ravaged Irrawaddy Delta. Time will tell how horrible the disaster will be-

come in terms of starvation and illness, and to what extent the cyclone was related to climate change. The magnitude in lives lost and destruction from the earthquake of Central China is still unknown. I would like to use the balance of this address, however, to highlight some of the other issues of the day and suggest that geography as a discipline now more than ever is of extreme import. Food riots, crumbling infrastructure in the U.S., and the economic downturn in light of high petrol prices and the real estate debacle are issues that geographers are uniquely qualified to weigh in on.

This year will witness one of the most important U.S. presidential elections in decades, not only because the presumed Democratic nominee is African American and his Republican opponent would be the oldest man in history to serve in the White House, but because the pressing issues of the day are far too important to be ignored any longer. And yet they remain ignored. The two-party duopoly and the mainstream media dominated by too many narcissistic career-driven individuals, have once again turned the election into shallow attacks on opponents' character, spiritual advisors, sources of campaign funding, and the like.

I do not mean to diminish those things, but merely to point out that there are far more important issues that are not getting sufficient attention by the candidates and the

media. Whether the US pulls out of Iraq sooner or we pull out later, that country and the Mid-East region will be confronted with bitter divisions and violence for quite some time. It is my own view that we should pull out as early as is logistically possible, to force the incipient Iraqi civilian government to move beyond its dependency on us. This issue will no doubt monopolize much of the political dialog of the campaign season along with crises related to health care, job loss, gasoline prices, and the mortgage debacle. Those are all issues that are worthy of lengthy discussion; however, there are other issues, potentially more long-term in nature, that loom large and that political geographers are well positioned to weigh in on. The two that I will discuss here, food prices and the problems of infrastructure, relate to the present energy crisis. In my view, the issues are among many that require political geographers to step up to the plate and lead the way in fomenting understanding of the complexities of globalization.

The high fuel costs we all are reminded of every day are interrelated with high food prices around the globe and food riots in some thirty countries. Many fertilizers are petroleum based, and, of course, petroleum is required to transport food, thereby adding to its price tag. According to *The Economist*, as the price of corn increases in tandem with the demands of ethanol, alternative grains like wheat and rice experi-

ence price increases as well. Recent dry conditions in Australia have served to increase wheat prices and a longer than usual winter in the American Midwest has shortened the growing season, both of which underlie additional ripple effects in supplies and prices of grains. Among the most severe effects of higher food prices are those of rice-importing countries. The Philippines and Indonesia, for example, face new threats of civil unrest.

One question comes to mind, however. How do small-scale producers of grains fare? This is something that geographers could and should study. No doubt rural agricultural producers of the underdeveloped world are seeing mixed results. *The Economist* suggests that rice farmers in Vietnam in increasing numbers are enjoying the windfall of higher prices, in large part because liberalization (de-collectivization) of farmland by the Communist government has led to a simpler, more streamlined leasing arrangement that allows peasants to retain greater profits from their production. However, the same scenario is doubtful for rural laborers who lack access to their own land elsewhere in Asia, in Central and South America, and in Sub-Saharan Africa. Such laborers grow the crops, but often have to buy food with their low earnings. Advocates of "fair trade" lament that wages of rural farm workers have not kept up with price increases of rice, corn, and wheat.

Independent smallholders often are forced to rely on larger producers and middlemen to market their production, which tends to disenfranchise the independent producer. Finally, expanding production or switching to new, alternative crops is not always feasible, given that credit provision in rural areas of developing countries tends to be conservative (if it exists at all), thereby reinforcing the inelasticity of supply with respect to price increases. Obviously the urban poor of the developing countries are feeling the negative effects of high food prices even more severely.

The perspectives and research approaches unique to geography will foster a deeper understanding of the regional variability of the experiences of rising food prices than otherwise would be possible. The crisis will certainly embellish the drama of globalization through migration and the potential for strife to spill over international boundaries. Not all is hopeless, assuming the global community, informed by the analyses of geographers, plays its cards right. As political geographers have demonstrated, battles over water are generally tempered by international agreements, mostly brokered by the UN. In some quite surprising places, international agreements related to water have been lived up to, including the basins of such rivers as the Nile, Niger, Zambezi, and the Indus. The Jordan River, of course, remains at the heart of many if not most problems of that

region. But the success stories should give us cause to think that regional or global agreements might be possible to resolve the looming powder keg of food security.

In the American landscape, we see the other side of the coin of the petroleum crisis and what it has instigated. Dependency on the automobile in the U.S., voluntary or otherwise, is partly if not largely to blame for petroleum shortages and resulting high food prices in the developing countries. When the Minneapolis and St. Paul bridge disaster occurred, I was struck by the conditions under which it happened. Engineers studying the phenomenon after the fact created models of the conditions at the time, and the bridge was basically a rush-hour parking lot. Ultimately the weight of so many automobiles was not likely the real cause of the bridge collapse, but that traffic jam is emblematic of present and future problems the country faces. Our infrastructure is aging and in bad need of repair, renovation, and redesign. Despite rising petrol prices, people remain addicted to the automobile. Public transportation is need. Here in the Southwest Region, one of the worst traffic problems is the daily chaos of the Interstate I-35 Corridor between San Antonio and Dallas-Ft. Worth. A rail system is clearly needed. AMTRAK has identified the San Antonio-Dallas-Houston triangle as ripe for high-speed rail investment, though our political

system, corrupted by lobbyists favoring oil, automobiles, highway construction, and related industries, casts rail and urban public transportation to the sidelines. Despite increased use of AMTRAK in the Northeast in light of current petrol prices, politicians seem reluctant to channel new monies for expansion of the rail system. Geographers need to study this problem in greater detail, if for no other reason than the fact that continued high automobile use is complicit in such broad problems as sprawl, climate change, and even public health.

With the number of municipal governments numbering in the tens of thousands in the U.S., talented people will be needed to help design improved transport infrastructure. So great is the shortage of people qualified to work as planners that under the terms of the agreement, any citizen of any NAFTA-member country can obtain a "TN Visa" that allows him or her to work in any other member country as an urban planner. Geographers, in my view, have an edge over planners in that we are able to see interconnectedness of phenomena over time and space to a greater degree.

As the sole geographer at TAMIU, I recognized the impossibility of creating a BA in geography, so I oversaw the establishment of an interdisciplinary BA in Urban Studies, a program that includes a successful internship. I am delighted that the Department of Ge-

ography at the University of Central Arkansas, my new home, has an active and successful internship program that helps graduates get good jobs where they can make a difference by working with the kinds of problems I have discussed here. Thanks to the hard work of Jerry Reynolds, UCA geography interns work in such diverse settings as nature conservation agencies, state transportation departments, and urban planning entities. I wholeheartedly endorse the application of the principles we teach and research in our discipline to solving real-world problems related to transport infrastructure, food shortages, environmental deterioration, and changing regional fortunes locally and abroad.

Michael S. Yoder, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor  
Department of Geography  
University of Central Arkansas, Conway, AR  
72035-5003



## Call for Papers & Posters, SWAAG 2008

Abstracts of up to 300 words following the conventions of AAG abstract submissions should be submitted directly to John Tiefenbacher

([tief@txstate.edu](mailto:tief@txstate.edu)) by October 1, 2008. There may be earlier

deadlines and other requirements for Student Paper and Poster Competition submissions. For questions about competitions, please contact Darren Purcell, SWAAG Treasurer, at [dpurcell@ou.edu](mailto:dpurcell@ou.edu). Paper and poster sessions will be given greater attention and priority for scheduling over panel discussions. Organized research paper sessions are welcomed as well. Contact John Tiefenbacher with any questions at [tief@txstate.edu](mailto:tief@txstate.edu).

## SWAAG 2008



SWAAG 2008 will be held Thursday to Saturday, October 23-25, at Texas State University under the direction of John Tiefenbacher ([tief@txstate.edu](mailto:tief@txstate.edu)). Texas State will host an informal reception beginning about 6 p.m. on Thursday. Also the Society of Women In Geography (SWIG) will hold a pre-reception reception of their own in the hours preceding this (time and place to be determined).

Highlights of SWAAG 2008 will include:

- paper and poster presentations Friday (and maybe, depending upon demand, on Saturday as well) in the Department of Geography, Texas State University;
- a Friday lunchtime AAG presidential address;



- the SWAAG business meeting on Friday afternoon; and
- a banquet with live music at The Cheatham Street Warehouse in San Marcos Friday evening.

Shuttle service (to reduce drinking and driving) will be available between hotels and the reception and banquet venues on Thursday and Friday.

Saturday will feature at least three field trips in the San Marcos area focused on themes such as the Hill Country, Enchanted Rock & Luckenbach, I-35 corridor development, ranching, and perhaps others depending upon interest/demand).

A web site linked to <http://www.geo.txstate.edu/> will be developed in the next several months. Hotel information and registration costs will be posted there as soon as they are available.

## Minutes, SWAAG Business Meeting 2007



*Brazos Room, LaSalle Hotel, Bryan, TX (Minutes taken by Michael Yoder, SWAAG Secretary, Texas A&M International University)*

I. The Meeting was called to order at 5:00 P.M. by John Tiefenbacher-Texas State University

### II. Acknowledgments and Announcements

- a. Recognition of Texas A&M University Hosts. Peter Hugill was recognized for hosting an excellent meeting
- b. Welcome of the AAG President, Tom Baerwald, who was not present at the Business Meeting
- c. Approval of Minutes from 2006 Meeting. Minutes as appeared in Summer 2007 Newsletter. Peter

Hugill (Texas A&M) made the motion to approve the minutes, Doug Sherman (Texas A&M) seconded. Passed unanimously.

### III. Remarks from the AAG

a. Craig Colten (SWAAG Regional Councilor). Dr. Colten said that AAG has now surpassed 10,000 members. Students represent an important and growing part of the paid membership. The AAG is expanding its physical headquarters facilities in Washington, DC, particularly to accommodate its merger with NCGE. Routledge Press has entered into a relationship with the AAG for printing of the Annals. Physical geographers are encouraged to submit more articles to the Annals. The AAG is making a concerted effort to make the journal available on line, and is seeking copies of volumes 1-44 for scanning. The San Francisco Meeting earlier this year attracted more than 6,400 registrants and 4,100 papers. In Boston in April 2008, Noam Chomsky will be one of the featured speakers. The Healthy Departments Initiative is seeking a venue for its 2008 meeting. Candidates for AAG officers include John Agnew for President, and Carol Harden and Jennifer Wolch for Vice President.

### IV. Officers' Reports

a. Secretary's Report-Michael Yoder (Texas A&M International) said that his

"Message from the Chair" and the Minutes of this meeting will be prepared by mid-Summer in time for the next Newsletter, which Sarah Bednarz will create.

b. Treasurer's Report- Due to Sarah Bednarz's absence from the meeting, attendees were directed to the Summer 2007 Newsletter for the most up to date report

c. Report from the local organizer, Peter Hugill, Texas A&M. Peter thanked us all for coming to the meeting.



d. Report from the Southwestern Geographer, Jennifer Speights-Binet (University of Houston-Clear Lake). Jennifer said she and Jeff Lash express their gratitude to those who serve as on the Editorial Board of the journal. The proofs of Volume 10 (2006) have been sent to the publisher two weeks ago. A check is needed to cover the costs of printing it. Fred Shelley will provide Jennifer and Jeff a list of the paid attendees of the 2006 meeting so that Volume 10 can be sent to them. Next year, two issues will appear, and the journal will be caught up (Volumes 11 and 12). The acceptance rate of articles is 40 percent. The tradition of including articles on the history of departments in the region will be continued.

Jennifer Speights-Binet stated that some 25 libraries subscribe to the journal and that the current library subscription rate of \$15 should be raised to \$25 to more adequately cover postage costs. She made a

motion to raise the rate. John Tiefenbacher seconded the motion. The motion carried.

e. SWAAG Treasurer Election. The floor was opened for nominations, given that to date no nominations have been made. Don Lyons nominated Darren Purcell (University of Oklahoma) for Treasurer and motioned to close nominations. Craig Colten seconded. Darren Purcell was voted unanimously as the new Treasurer for a two-year term.

### V. Old Business

a. Update of Future Site Meetings

- 2008 San Marcos, TX (Texas State University), most likely October 23-25.
- 2009 Little Rock, AR (University of Central Arkansas) Jeff Allender indicated that polling showed a strong preference for Little Rock over Hot Springs, and that the meeting would likely be in early November.
- 2010 Tahlequah, OK (Northeastern Oklahoma University)
- 2011 Austin, TX (University of Texas)
- 2012. Juana Ibañez mentioned that New Orleans would be a good site for the meeting, and that University of New Orleans and Louisiana State University could co-host.
- 2013 (not on the original agenda) John Tiefenbacher suggested that the 2013 meeting be held in San Antonio, with Texas State University and University of Texas San Antonio co-hosting. Judith Hoffman

(Texas Lutheran University) offered Texas Lutheran as co-host.

b. Other Old Business. Juana Ibañez brought up the issue of SWAAG purchasing a brick for the AAG Walkway in D.C. Each brick costs \$1,500.00, and the AAG uses the funds for scholarships. At present, Juana has collected \$818.17, leaving a deficit of \$681.83. The idea was put forth to announce at the banquet the need to collect additional monies for the brick. [NOTE: Collection of funds at the banquet following the meeting achieved the \$1,500.00 limit needed to “buy” a brick.]

**VI. New Business**

a. Announcements of Upcoming Conferences. AAG is considering hosting its 2010 conference in Vancouver, BC.

b. Open Floor. (No items)

c. Additional Items. Michael Yoder (Texas A&M International University) thanked John Tiefenbacher for the outstanding service he has provided SWAAG as Treasurer, Secretary, and Chairman.

**VII. Adjournment.**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:41 P.M.

**SWAAG Treasurer’s Report**

The SWAAG account is handled by the office of the Association of American Geographers. The table below shows receipts and disbursements from August 31, 2007 through April 10, 2008. The capitation payment from AAG is made annually in August.

Additionally, through the tireless efforts of Juana Ibanez, University of New Orleans (pictured on the left on the front page, bottom right of this newsletter) SWAAG members donated \$1,500 for the purchase of a Commemorative Brick. The check was sent to AAG in May, 2008.

*Submitted by Darren Purcell, SWAAG Treasurer*

Dates	Items	Receipts	Disbursements	Balance
8/31/07				\$5,214.60
11/07/07	SWAAG Poster Award (Miller)		(\$100.00)	\$5214.60
	SWAAG Paper Award (Aviles-Vasquez)		(\$50.00)	\$5164.60
	SWAAG Paper Award (Williams)		(\$75.00)	\$5089.60
	SWAAG Paper Award (Haekel)		(\$100.00)	\$4989.60
4/10/08	MI Services Corp. Southwestern Geographer		(\$1650.00)	\$3339.60
4/30/08	Balance (month not yet closed)			\$3339.60

*Source: Teri Martin. AAG Accounting Manager*