



AAG Panel on US and Latin American Collaboration in Geographic Research and Education

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Summary Description

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Dear Colleagues, we welcome you to this special panel session to discuss and promote collaboration in geographic education and research among geographers across the Americas. Today we will hear the valuable perspectives of a number of highly respected geographers from the region, providing us insight into opportunities and trends in geography, and giving us food for thought about collaboration and collaborative potential. Following these brief remarks by the participants on a notable research trends in geography within Latin America, this panel will feature an open discussion to explore existing and potential opportunities for international collaboration in research and education. This AAG-sponsored panel session encourages interdisciplinary perspectives, philosophical and methodological diversity, and professional and student perspectives on international geography research and education.

Chile: Research Trends in Geography and in Geography Education

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Chilean society has received a strong and consistent message about regional and global interactions as a response to a new exercise of democracy in the whole country. During the 1990's new development in communication technologies and higher education, among other structural changes, paved the way to a special new scientific evolution in Chile. New international funds have been offered to encourage scientific teams and the private sector to work together for an increasing "culture of innovation." Within a regional context, geographers evidence a more flexible view regarding regional planning and sustainable development by focusing on a strong regional learning process.

The most simple and straightforward exercise to verify these trends is to analyze the large spectrum of research projects presented in the most recent national and international conference in geography, held in the southern city of Concepcion in Chile (Chilean Society of Geographical Sciences, October 17-20, 2006). Region and Territoriality are the two key issues as complement of a common vision: the neo-liberal economic model. Thus, geographers tend to focus on several critical problems which are urgent to be resolved. Among them: territorial and regional instability, transnational corporations and social disruption, rural and urban ethnic segregation, labor migration patterns, life quality in middle size cities, and a weak sustainable development.

Two problems face Chilean geography: a very low recognition of the field by the scientific community and a weak participation as critical component of the formal educational system. Even when geography at both, academic and professional level, makes a great effort to be recognized, other fields concentrate more attention as better representatives of the neo-liberal economic model fully developed since the 1980's. The main geography themes in K-12 system tend to focus on life and nature as expression for environmental awareness. However, the sequence of topics related to physical, human and economic issues are not well developed as other social fields occupy extensive time from grades 9 to 12. During elementary and middle school, students receive an adequate knowledge about climate and human relations, natural resources and population development, as well as space and time relationships applied with cartographic resources. Here, geography of Chile is the core of life and nature, but then the field is reduced ostensibly to allow other social sciences such history and economy to expand their realms. In fact, only a regional approach about Latin America is exercised and the students are left with a weak preparation on the environment of global dimensions (Muniz, 2004).

The Chilean Society of Geographical Sciences is concerned about the actual situation and has developed a strategy to cope with this crisis in the field. Five conclusions were obtained from a former national meeting. First, geography teachers must be guided and supported by a strong academic networking. Second, workshops must be organized to allow teachers to study new methods and techniques in geography. Third, geography standards for school education should be revised to fit global values. Fourth, new development in teaching practice should to be undertaken in cooperation with international organizations. Finally,

research in geographic education should be encouraged and linked to the international geography community.

Chilean geographers have shared their concerns with colleagues from other Latin American countries, but being a common problem, solutions are not easy to find. As part of this preoccupation, the Association of American Geographers has sent several messages to create a new vision called: the Americas. One of the first efforts has been a formal relationship with the Panamerican Institute of Geography and History to interact in research and teaching (AAG, 2006). A more decisive and recent action in the field is the AAG's assistance to support the first international conference to study geography education. The *GeoAmericas* Conference to be held in La Serena, Chile in May 2007 is the initial step to work together toward a steady and positive change.

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<http://www.geographyintheamericas.com/>

Geographic Research and Education in Mexico City

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I have no doubt as to the strategic importance of geographical studies produced by Mexican scholars and institutions. Nevertheless, since long time ago, the high visibility of Mexican theoretical contributions have helped us take a sustantive steps forward.

My intention here is to make some comments on two influential perspectives on research and education in modern Mexico. In first place, the Pan American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH) specialized organization of American States (OAS) cover an agenda comprising themes related, and provided technical assistance in the fields of cartography, geography, history and geophysics through all countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

On the other hand, the Institute of Geography of the National Autonomous University of Mexico have a remarkable graduate studies in M.A and PhD with three major concentrations in a) Human Geography (Sociedad y territorio), b) Environmental Geography (Geografía ambiental) and c) Territorial Geography (Geografía territorial).

Mexico's population has grown at a tremendous rate. Today's population is about 105 millions. 20 years ago it was 67 millions. That is 64% increase in only 20 years. Mexico City with its population of 20 millions people attracts 2,000 migrants daily. 75% of Mexico's people live in the cities.

Mexico has defined itself, in the second article of its constitution, as a "pluricultural nation, in recognition of the diverse ethnic groups that constitute it. 12 millions of Amerindians (or "indigenous peoples", the preferred term in Spanish). Other international organizations prefer a percentage of 30% of *predominant* indigenous.

In Mexico there are 62 indigenous groups, that speak 62 different languages (officially recognized as "national languages" along with Spanish by the Mexican government. The productive tension between multiculturalism and *interculturalidad* needs to be further explored from interdisciplinary approach and geographers and other scholars could play an important role in this specific issue.

The Metropolitan Autonomous University offers a B.A. in Human Geography as a particular field of social sciences based on the social-territorial human activities. This is part of a project of the Humanities and Social Sciences Division since 2000 year with major concentration in Physical Geography.

Besides the Pan American Institute of Geography and History (PAIG), Inter American Indigenous Institute (OAS), National Commission to the Development of Indigenous Peoples (former National Indigenous Institute) etcetera, it's a real way to work in an interdisciplinary manner.

As a matter of fact, I would like to suggest that, quite the contrary; interdisciplinary by its very definition means taking different areas and understanding deeply, how each discipline's claims to truth are constructed differently. In this specific way, Anthropology and Geography has strong links and the point to work together is not to get rid or ignore disciplinary rules, but instead to understand the various way in which they help us organize evidence and evaluate analytical claims.

That's the aim of this Conference on Race, Ethnicity and Place.

Trends of Geographic Research in Argentina

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Geographic research in Argentina has been influenced by the context and the different macroeconomic policies implemented at the national level.

At the current time in our country, new occurrences of regional, economic, social and environmental import are present, a fact that has generated a lot of new research programs and projects, which in the majority of cases, are undertaken at centres of investigation in state institutions.

The Argentine territory has been affected in the last fifteen years by the deepening of the process of transnationalization of the economy, which has brought changes in the relations of production in our society. The insertion of Argentina in the new international division of labor, combined with a new internal division of labor, raises the following issues:

- Privatization of the principal means of production into the hands of big foreign companies;
- Brazil as the principal destination of exports;
- Primarization of the economy;
- Agrarian homogeneisation;
- Overexploitation of natural resources with the consistent deterioration of the environment;
- Increase in unemployment and social fragmentation;
- Migration.

After a long period in which Regional Geography had been absent in most research and educational programs, recently we have held a major conference, or summit, focused as much on regional national economies as on the geographical consequences of integration with other countries of the region, such as the case of MERCOSUR.

In addition, the privatization of major companies has had a strong impact on nature and on society. Because of this context, geographers have to a great extent increased their commitment to addressing two related questions concerning: 1) the destruction of the ecosystems due to the optimization of corporate earnings, and 2) the problem of increasing unemployment. For this reason, there have been an exponentially increasing number of environmental and social impact studies.

It is necessary to add and clarify that Environmental Geography also forms a part of a mode of research that exceeds beyond the borders of my country. Also, since there is not much Human Geography, it seems that studies in Social Geography have been the area experiencing major growth in recent times, at least in relative terms.

Changes in the rural land tenure system and in agricultural systems of soybean monoculture mean that some colleagues are treating diverse aspects of Agrarian Geography in their research. These processes have contributed both to the exodus of the scant population that remain in the Argentine countryside, as well as to a great urban fragmentation, with neighborhoods of mixed luxury and urban poverty previously unknown. There is also then a

demonstrated increase in urban studies both for big cities and for intermediate ones, where Argentina is being spoken about in terms of a “Latinoamericanization” of a formerly European space. Research in Urban Geography is related to these facts, and together with subsidies for programs in Local Development, many geographers have been stimulated to adapt urban problematics to this field.

Another phenomenon that we have been experiencing in Argentina in recent years is the deepening complexity of migratory processes and patterns. We have on the one hand an exodus of inhabitants particularly from professional and middle classes, to the USA and Europe. We have a strong process of urbanization and a net immigratory positive balance, not only from traditional sources of bordering countries but also from new origins like Eastern Europe and Asia. This has generated new investigations in the area of Social Geography.

In addition, Economic Geography has been one of the means to understand new commercial relations and how changes in the productive system have modified the processes of property accession in the whole country. After devaluation, tourism has increased rapidly, and this speciality is set to become an important subject for upcoming research trends.

All of these territorial changes produced in a short space of time have political manifestations, given that they have been fulfilled through those who forcefully influence the annihilation of geographical space. For this reason, the works of Political Geography has begun to prosper lately, leaving aside the more traditional kind of Geopolitics, in order to study macroeconomic politicians and the new insertion of Argentina in the international context.

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Research Trends in Geography in Panama

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Geography in Panama has developed positively in the last years. Diversity of interest identifies geographic research in our country. Guided by the department of geography at the University of Panama (1935) which produces professionals in five different areas: Cartography technicians, Meteorology technicians, Ecology tourism, Professional geographers (research oriented) and the school of geography for education (high school teachers). Development of geographic research in Panama follows four distinctive areas:

Sustainable development: Encourages research in rural areas that have serious spatial limitations such as transportation, production and market accessibility. Geographers have proposed to political authorities many ways to increase the quality of life of the population in these low income areas using the natural resources available but considering sustainability.

Medical Geography: The spatial distribution of disease and death. Geographic view of the AIDS virus, claims a special attention at a national and regional level. Infant Mortality in minority groups such as the natives and blacks. Links between climate, population and disease, particularly in studies of TB, and other contagious disease.

Economic Development: Explains the principles of economic and social development and culture diffusion as they affect people lifestyle.

Research activity in this area looks at the role of natural resources and climate characteristics affecting community development.

Geography and tourism: Research in this area seeks to suggest the best use of our Natural Resources for the development of recreational activities. Great effort is given to find new sites that may offer an economic alternative to rural communities.

Needs and weaknesses:

- Very little research is done in physical geography. Many are the possible explanations for this fact, however, recently a master's program was installed to produce specialist in Physical Geography.
- Lack of modern technology and applied software.
- G.I.S training and applications in research.
- Training in Research methods and applied Geography.

Thank you.

Geographic Research and Education in Mexico

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Let me first thank Dr. Patricia Solis and Dr. Douglas Richardson of the AAG for their kind invitation and generous support to come to this splendid meeting.

Although Mexican professional geography was established in Mexico City since 1833, like elsewhere in the world, this discipline has gone through ups and downs. However, during the last two decades both education and research have raised academic pertinence and social visibility of geography. This has been so for several reasons.

First, the number of undergraduate programs has grown: during several decades the only programs offered were those of the Autonomous National University of Mexico (Mexico City), University of Guadalajara (Guadalajara), and Autonomous University of Mexico State (Toluca). During the last years three new undergraduate programs were opened: those offered by the Metropolitan Autonomous University (Mexico City), Universidad of Veracruz (Xalapa), and the Autonomous University of San Luis Potosí (SLP). Apparently, the University of Guerrero is about to start its undergraduate program very soon. These programs were complemented by a special one devoted to form geography teachers – offered by the National College of Teachers. Further, although the UNAM graduate program in geography (master and Ph. D.) was for decades the only one available in Mexico, in 2004 the Quintana Roo University opened a Ph. D. program in geography. Moreover, in the same year the Colegio de Michoacán opened a Master Program in Human Geography. The UASLP is planning to open a master and Ph. D. program in geography in 2007 and 2008. The consequence of this is clear: at last, the sheer number of professional geographers in Mexico is growing. This is critical because most of the geography professional positions – especially at the secondary and high school level- are controlled by non-geographers.

Second, geographical research has also grown in Mexico, both in physical and human geography. Although for the last three decades most of the geography research projects were carried out in the UNAM Institute of Geography, geographers out of Mexico City have grown both in numbers and in activity. In this growing research profile has been critical the formation of professional researchers in geography. For example, the UASLP, the University of Carleton and the University of Kansas have created a partnership with American Geographical Society to carry out the *Indigenous Mexico* project, which taps public access information sources and participatory mapping to draw community maps of several regions of Mexico and create a world model for the I. Bowman expeditions. Although a professional census is still lacking, we can estimate that about 150 Mexican geographers hold a Ph. D. in Mexico. Although this number is still very modest, the figure of Mexican graduate students getting a Ph. D. both in Mexico and overseas is also growing. Even has grown the number of young scholars in postdoctoral programs. The net result of this process is an increased social visibility of geography, both in the public sector, and the college level -undergraduate and graduate programs –not only in geography, of course. Another encouraging indicator in the number of geographers in the National Research System, which certifies and recognizes professional geographers –geographers are also involved in project evaluation committees sponsored by the National Council of Science and Technology (CONACYT).

Third, although the number of geographical meetings and conferences is still quite small, we have been able, at least, to keep with the pace –after several years of absence! For instance, we have a two-year national congress of geography. Geography specialty meetings are frequently organized in Mexico. And here is a commercial: Next Nov. 2007 will be hosting the Fourth International Congress on Territorial Management –supported by several Mexican universities, the National Institute of Geography, Statistics and Informatics, the National Institute of Ecology, the American Geographical Society, U of Kansas, and the Canadian University of Carleton.

Fourth, as a result of the previous reasons, the social profile –even its “professional appealing”- of geography has also grown. Although geospatial technologies (GIS, GPS, and so on) have played a significant role in this process, it is true that what geographers are doing is being socially recognized every day. To give you an idea of this let me mention that about 60% of the students enrolling the UNAM graduate program in geography suddenly “discovered” the relevance, the holistic scholarship and usefulness of geography. Another example would be the increasing recognition by non-geographers of this field contribution to the diagnosis and eventual solution of environmental problems. Further, both the number and the prominence of geography projects are growing. Indeed, we are harvesting what was sown by several generations of geographers, both from Mexico and from elsewhere –in the USA, Latin America, and Europe.

In conclusion, although we are far from having a robust geography in Mexico, its recent development timidly shows that we are walking towards a promising direction. This recognition, however, does not mean to overlook the multiple problems that we still have. What it means, instead, is that we have to be optimistic but double or triple the work what we are doing as geographers. International collaboration, though still modest is already in progress in Mexico, is a promising way to build a professional alliance to make the Geography of the Americas even more relevant, robust, useful and appealing.

Thank you very much.

Advancing Academe: A Multidimensional Investigation of Geography in the Americas (AAMIGA)

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I would like to briefly describe an effort aimed at facilitating collaboration along important research trends in the Americas. This project is funded by the National Science Foundation's International Research Fellowship Program and is supporting a twelve-month research effort by myself to work with Dr. Rodrigo Tarté at the City of Knowledge in Panama and with Dr. Douglas Richardson at the Association of American Geographers in Washington, D.C.

The premise of AAMIGA is this: As producers of knowledge in a globalized society, scientists and scholars must reckon with an increasingly interconnected world, prompting research-oriented organizations including the NSF to promote international research collaboration as a means to build intellectual capacity and increase competitiveness. Despite widespread recognition of the increasing importance of international research collaboration, there have been surprisingly few systematic studies that measure its extent, assess its spatial patterns, account for place-specific context, or articulate connections among local-national-regional dimensions of collaboration. The literature also overlooks the influence that disciplinary professional societies exert toward facilitating productive international research collaboration.

Thus the overall goal of the project is to systematically and holistically investigate the dynamics of international research collaboration through a multi-dimensional study of geography in the Americas. Results will be broadly disseminated and used by the AAG to advance the intellectual and developmental impact of academic geography in our increasingly interconnected world. Specific objectives and related questions are as follows:

1. To discover, articulate and communicate collaboration and collaborative opportunities among geographers and closely related scholars in the US, Canada, Central America and the Caribbean, and South America. What is the state of geographic research in the Americas? Where are the major sites and axes of collaboration with respect to participation in global or regional scale projects/networks, intergovernmental agreements, exchanges of personnel exchanges of information (curriculum, data, etc.), and/or joint conferences, meetings? Who are participating in international research collaboration (gender, ethnicity/race, location, subfield, age, etc.)?

2. To explore how geographic contexts within the Americas impact upon actual IRC activities and how such considerations should be addressed by means of a national level case study. What are some of the common regional peculiarities within the Americas that must be considered when building collaborative efforts? What are the needs of geography professionals everywhere in terms of capacity building for international collaboration? How do differing reward systems and inequalities in resources devoted to research impact IRC? What roles do ICT and the digital divide play in realizing or inhibiting connections?

3. To develop an appropriate assessment of the role of professional societies for IRC using the AAG as a model. What is the most appropriate role of a professional society in facilitating connections and strengthening the discipline through IRC? How should the various audiences be engaged (students, undergrads, grads, teachers, professors, private sector geographers, public sector geographers, related professionals)? What specific activities would be most productive for strengthening and internationalizing geography / geographic science in the US and the other regions of the Americas?

As a rigorous, original study of international research collaboration in geography, the project itself is designed as a collaborative international research endeavour. This investigation of international research collaboration through a multi-dimensional perspective of one discipline in one region can provide a model for understanding other fields and for NSF international programs. The project incorporates elements and methods that will ultimately facilitate international research collaboration, including active engagement of participants from the region to promote capacity building, outcomes and deliverables to collaterally benefit US Spanish-speaking geography scholars, and involvement of the AAG to implement findings.

At this moment, about halfway into the project, a few of the initial steps that AAG has already taken with respect to preliminary findings include the following actions taken:

- 1) Organize panels/ forums/ venues for explicitly discussing and facilitating international research collaboration; especially this has occurred at the AAG Annual Meeting in Chicago with the first ever Spanish language session, is in planning for the AAG Annual Meeting in San Francisco, following on this very successful and well-received session, and in participating in developing special panels and sessions at the AAG co-sponsored conference "Geography in the Americas" to take place in La Serena, Chile next May 2007.
- 2) Expand the AAG Guide to programs in North America to become the AAG Guide to programs in the Americas, now with 25 complete listings outside of the US and Canada from 13 Latin American Countries and a number of others referenced; a new online system to submit information was launched in English, Spanish and Portuguese
- 3) Assist with the dissemination of journals to department libraries in need; especially through the online Journals exchange program that has had the result of taking extensive sets of retired geographers' collections of the Annals, PG, and the Journal of Geography (dating about back to the 60s) to geography departments in universities in Merida, Mexico; Panama City, Panama and Central America.
- 4) Consider the creation of a new developing regions membership category that would provide the same benefits of AAG membership to departments and individuals in lesser-income countries of the Americas at much reduced prices
- 5) Improve relationships and linkages with broad (multidisciplinary) scientific unions that work in the region, including the Third World Academy of Sciences, UNESCO, and the International Council of Scientific Unions
- 6) Improve relationships and linkages with regional geographic organizations such as the Canadian Association of Geography (including joint programs at our respective annual meetings in 2007); the International Geographical Union (with which the AAG has for a long time had excellent close ties), the Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers (again, an organization with longstanding good relations not only with the AAG's Latin Americanist Specialty Group, but also the AAG Meridian Place

- itself), the Pan-American Institute for Geography and History (including signing a memorandum of understanding with the intention to collaborate)
- 7) Build AAG Staff capacity to undertake activities with respect to our growing international research collaborations, including now having several staff that speak Spanish and Portuguese
 - 8) Design and develop external funding for regional projects, such as those under the My Community, Our Earth Partnership; the ongoing work with USAID and USGS in Panama, Honduras and Jamaica around geographic technologies for locally defined sustainable development projects; an upcoming USAID-USGS-ESRI-and NASA collaboration supporting biodiversity projects in 10 central American countries; USDA supported work in Puerto Rico and Peru, work with the US State department toward capacity building on hazards in the region, the Online Center for Geographic Education's work in Chile and elsewhere, and others.

In the second half of the project, there will be further data collection and analysis as well as a full set of more formalized recommendations for action after the end of the project term in May of 2007. There will also surely be further activities to report, as the AAG demonstrates its commitment to serving geographers across the Americas, and indeed around the world.