

ANNUAL REPORT, Atlantic Division of the Canadian Association of Geographers (ACAG/ACGA)

18th MAY 2020

The 29th ACAG Annual Meeting (ACAG 2019) was held at Memorial University, 4th-6th of November, 2019.

Three prizes were awarded: best student poster (Julie Reimer, MUN), best undergraduate / master's presentation (Ignace Schoot, MUN), best Ph.D. presentation (Alex Zahara, MUN).

ACAG executive elections were held, with Dr. Peter Bush ending his term as ACAG President. Dr. David Lieske (MTA) accepted the nomination to serve as ACAG President for the 2019-2022 period. Dr. Guy Vincent (UdeM) extended his term as Secretary-Treasurer (2019-2022). Dr. Carissa Brown (MUN) accepted a nomination to serve as a Member-at-Large. Kirsten Reid (MUN) accepted a nomination to serve as a student member.

ACAG finances remain in good shape. Total expenses for 2019 were \$2,316, consisting of student awards (\$500) as well as compensation for student travel expenses (\$1,789) and banking fees (\$27.00). Balance as of year-end was \$3,428.74

As follow-up on the survey that was distributed to regional departments to ascertain views on the efficacy and sustainability of annual regional meeting: two departments responded (MUN, MTA). To summarize, responses are grouped as follows:

- **Departmental Involvement**

Generally low, with only a few departmental faculty attending on a regular or semi-regular basis, as a function of: (1) proximity, more members will attend if the meeting occurs locally; (2) faculty research being largely external to Maritime Canada, little research or teaching occurring collaboratively between regional geography departments; (3) very small presence: only three standalone geography departments remain in Atlantic Canada: MUN, SMU, MTA, with geographers at UdeM housed in a joint Department of History and Geography; (4) perceived as primarily an undergraduate-focused meeting, which deters MUN graduate students and faculty supervisors.

- **Perceived Benefits of Attending ACAG**

Opportunity to build better linkages between Maritime universities, and encourage participation in CAG as a whole; facilitating professional networking; opportunity to showcase graduate studies program at MUN; venue to share research and enhance communication skills.

▪ **Perceived Barriers to Attending ACAG**

Unfortunately, perceived barriers appear to outweigh the perceived benefits:

- Lack of organization and enthusiasm as long-time members have retired.
- Transportation costs high, particularly travelling to and from MUN.
- Lack of enthusiasm from faculty.
- Meeting fatigue.
- Declines in faculty complement.
- Declines in student enrollment.
- Perception of limited benefits for faculty members and graduate students.
- Fragmentation within the department: geography, environmental studies, environmental science programs draw faculty and students to other venues (e.g., Science Atlantic).
- Timing of ACAG in the middle of the fall term is considered by a number of faculty members to be a barrier to student participation as they just haven't had time to progress far enough in their honour's thesis / independent project work.
- There are too few geographers left in the region; for all intents and purposes we have only three standalone geography departments MUN, SMU, and MTA. UdeM has a small number of geographers housed in a joint Department of History and Geography. Dalhousie has not been represented for at least a decade, nor is it playing a role in hosting these meetings. Other previously active faculty have taken on senior administrative roles in their home institutions.

Conclusions

The logistics of hosting a regional meeting with so few committed faculty, from such a small number of departments, has brought about 'meeting fatigue'. Coupled with low participation in some years, and forced cancellations of meetings (e.g., UdeM meeting in 2018), it is apparent that a biennial regional meeting would better reflect available resources and interest. Moving forward, the challenge for ACAG/ACGA is to make participation in regional meetings as valuable as possible for its small pool of Maritime faculty.

For updates on our division, our constitution, and our next annual meeting, check:
<http://community.smu.acag>.

Submitted by: Dr. David Lieske, President ACAG 2019-2022.