ABSTRACT
Members of the National Council for Geographic Education have been instrumental in the creation, launch, and early success of Advanced Placement Human Geography. Annual meetings of the Council have served as a forum for spreading the word about the course and its follow-up national examination and in helping teachers develop content confidence and delivery strategies. This article tracks, via the Council’s 1996–2005 annual meeting programs, agenda time devoted over that ten-year period to this Advanced Placement course, focusing on total minutes by year, minutes by category, and the people presenting.

Key Words: AP Human Geography, National Council for Geographic Education, college board, educational testing service

Writing in October 1998, David Lanegran, then the President of the National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE), reported on his visit to an Advanced Placement Human Geography (APHG) institute that summer at James Madison University. There he witnessed and participated in the preparation of high school teachers for the imminent launch of APHG. “It is hard to describe,” Lanegran told his NCGE constituents, “the feeling of satisfaction I got listening to teachers from across the country describe their plans to teach the new Advanced Placement course. This venture will be a huge success” (Lanegran 1998, 15).

And successful it has been for this recent addition to the approximately three dozen courses in the Advanced Placement (AP) roster, a roster of courses that enables teenagers in the United States, Canada, and overseas to take college-equivalent classes while they are still in high school, sit for an exam, and perhaps earn college credit in advance of college matriculation.1 Enrollment in APHG has steadily increased, along with the numbers of teachers engaged to teach it, schools offering it, and exam readers hired to score it. Numbers are available for the total exams taken for APHG, beginning with the initial sitting in 2001. That year 3,272 high school students took the AP exam. By 2002, the number had increased 62 percent to 5,286, followed by a 39 percent annual increase to 7,329 in 2003. Double-digit percentage increases (over the previous year) continued for 2004, as the number of exams completed topped ten thousand (10,471) and for 2005 when the number topped fourteen thousand (14,139). By comparison, other new AP courses begun around the same time as APHG also have done well. In its first year (1998), AP Environmental Science tested 5,163 students and was up to 38,104 in 2005. AP World History went from 20,955 in its first year (2002) to 64,207 in 2005. Overall, APHG gained 332 percent between the first year and fifth year of testing, while AP Environmental Science did slightly better at 372 percent for its first half decade (Hildebrant 2006a). AP World History needed slightly more than 90,500 exams in 2006 in order to match the 332 percent increase that APHG posted between year one and year five.2

The connection between NCGE and APHG has been and continues to be strong. NCGE stalwarts, like Lanegran, have been at the forefront of convincing the College Entrance Examination Board (College Board) to offer APHG, preparing the geographical community to accept it, staffing the training sessions for high school teachers who teach it, and finding qualified readers willing to give up more than a week each June to evaluate the free-response (essay) portion of the exams so that Educational Testing Service can score it. Items relevant to APHG have appeared in NCGE’s Perspective (newsletter), beginning in April 1994 (Marran 1994). Likewise, the Journal of Geography started providing coverage of the new course in the 1990s, first broaching the topic in a retrospective by an outgoing editor (Bednarz 1997, 279) and continuing now and again with informational and content-oriented articles (Murphy 1998; Murphy 2000; Sharma 2002; Gray, Hildebrant, and Strauss 2006). Recent additions to the Pathways in Geography series, from the Special Publications Editorial Board of NCGE, have enhanced the APHG literature (Elbow 2004; Bednarz 2004; Lockwood 2005).

It is with NCGE annual meetings, however, that this paper deals. In particular, I utilize the final printed programs from NCGE annual meetings in an attempt to learn how much programmatic time meeting organizers and participants devoted to APHG, what sorts of meeting activities dealt with APHG, and whose names we find connected to these activities. Final programs provide an extremely accurate gauge of what is going on with an organization in a given year. By focusing on what the meeting organizers listed and described in the
final programs, I was able to mine a similar source for each annual meeting. I started with programs from the early 1990s and worked my way through the 2005 (Birmingham) program. I also interviewed a number of key people in the APHG-NCGE union to gain insider perspectives on the process of taking APHG to the membership though the annual meeting venue. These interviews and subsequent conversations with APHG leaders revealed that occasional APHG activities at annual meetings have occurred that either did not make it to a final program or did not have an obvious APHG identifier. In order to maintain consistency among all study years, I did not include these items in the tallies that follow. Therefore, if anything, the influence of APHG on the annual meetings of NCGE is even greater than I demonstrate herein.

BACKDROP

If APHG has a birth parent, it would have to be James Marran, the former chair of the Social Studies Department at New Trier High School in Chicago’s North Shore suburb of Winnetka (and past-president of NCGE). Alexander Murphy (1998, 132) has called Marran one of the “pioneers” in making APHG happen.

While on the faculty at New Trier, Marran saw firsthand how AP status lent credibility to subjects in his department and elsewhere in this top-notch secondary school. Marran began the long struggle for geography’s AP status, after some experience working on materials for AP U.S. History, by writing in 1985 to historian Harlan “Harpo” Hansen, the Director of AP programs at the College Board, a man that Marran did not then know. As Marran recalled from that first long-distance encounter, Hansen offered him little encouragement, with the comment “Good luck, pal,” or something to that effect. Geography, in Hansen’s opinion, could not sort out whether it was a social or a physical science. Hansen suggested that when the discipline got it straight, somebody might then contact the College Board. Marran persisted, however, writing every year or so and eventually going to visit Hansen at the College Board’s New York City office. Hansen did not say to forget it, but the lack of finality encouraged Marran. A couple of years later, Marran called on Hansen again, this time with Salvatore (Sam) J. Natoli, then Director of Publications for the National Council for the Social Studies, and the trio had a good conversation, according to Marran. Hansen opined that geography still did not offer the kind of market that the College Board would be seeking when considering new AP courses. Then Hansen retired (Marran 2006a).

Geography as an AP aspirant languished, but Marran, Natoli, and others kept the fire burning behind the scenes in the geographic education community. Encouraging news came with the success of the Geographic Alliance movement, designation of geography as a core subject by the nation’s governors, inclusion in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) testing, and preparation and publication of the national geography standards, Geography for Life (Geography Education Standards Project 1994). It did not hurt, of course, that the National Geographic Society (NGS) was throwing its name and many millions of dollars behind geographic education, starting in the mid-1980s. Marran found, however, that officials at NGS had little understanding of the AP process or the potential benefits to an AP-anointed discipline. So Marran and a couple of NGS leaders, Robert Dulli and William Strong, met with Hansen’s College Board successor, Robert Orrill, to see if the College Board might now be more amenable to an AP Geography venture. Out of that meeting (a meeting in which Dulli, then chief assistant to NGS President Gilbert Grosvenor, mentioned that NGS had by the early 1990s already spent some sixty million dollars to promote geographic education) came a visit by Marran and his assistant, Elizabeth Downey, to NGS headquarters. Marran was there for the meeting at NGS, and NGS brought in, from central Illinois, Fred Walk, a leading force among the Teacher Consultants of the various Geographic Alliances in the NGS network. After a full day at NGS, Orrill and Downey finally acceded and subsequently got in touch with Educational Testing Service (ETS), which actually puts the AP process into action. Geography had the nod from the College Board to seek counsel of the national organizations, NCGE and the Association of American Geographers (AAG), as to the best way to proceed (Marran 2006a).

A survey, a West Coast meeting, and committee work followed. The top two hundred high schools, in terms of schools giving the most AP exams in the early 1990s, and an equal number of colleges got a chance to respond to a survey asking about interest in such a course (Marran 1994). At the AAG conference in San Francisco in 1994, an open session allowed proponents to present the AP idea to collegiate geographers from around the country. Reactions at San Francisco were not quite what Marran had expected. In his conversation with me, he said the session “went poorly.” Professional geographers “performed badly.” He sensed “territoriality” issues as collegiate geographers imagined how (as Marran put it) AP credit might steal students from introductory college courses. To him there was little innate understanding among college professors of the great benefits to the discipline of having an AP course. But Marran and the AP crew kept up the pressure. The College Board assembled a committee of twenty-one members, including sixteen college and high school instructors, plus five ETS and College Board representatives, which met in New York City on March 4, 1995 (Sharma 2006a). From this committee came the decision to focus not on all of the discipline but on the human side, where, in Marran’s words (2006a) there were more high school teachers available and there would likely be less competition with the upcoming AP Environmental Science course. Murphy (1998) attributed this tactical decision also to the notion that those collegiate geographers promoting an AP geography course apparently had more confidence that their social science colleagues, at the secondary
level, could deliver a quality course than they did in those teaching on the science side of high schools. Then the College Board appointed a task force, headed by Murphy, a professor at the University of Oregon, and consisting of eight (later six) members, all from the initial committee of twenty-one (Sharma 2006a). Out of the task force, which convened in May 1995, came guidance, in terms of the AP course’s purpose, scope, and content. The College Board approved APHG in the spring of 1996. Soon after approval, a test development committee began the task of getting the questions ready for what was to have been a 1999 launch but, due to delays at the College Board,3 became a 2000 start, with the first exam taking place the following May. Knowledge of and ongoing acceptance of APHG among collegiate geographers continued to concern College Board and APHG’s professorial proponents, such as Adrian Bailey. A member of the original test development committee and chief reader for the first four scoring years of APHG, Bailey (2003; 2006) has praised the potential of APHG for student recruitment to college geography programs and described the rigor of APHG assessment. When Bailey began service on the test development committee, he was a professor at Dartmouth College. Later he moved to a position at the University of Leeds, in the United Kingdom.

APHG AND THE ANNUAL MEETINGS OF NCGE

NCGE holds its annual meetings during the second half of the calendar year, usually in the fall but sometimes in the late summer. Organizers issue a call for papers, workshops, and other meeting presentations around the beginning of the calendar year and set a deadline several months in advance of the meeting. A preliminary version of the program becomes available before the meeting, and registrants pick up their copy of the final version when they appear at the meeting site. Requests for slots on the program (which means times and places for presentations) come from individuals and from groups, such as a committee or company. The meeting’s organizers also can use slots for presentations they deem appropriate and pertinent, such as plenary sessions.

Total Meeting Minutes

APHG claimed program space at each of the NCGE annual meetings from the 1996 meeting in Santa Barbara, California, to the 2005 meeting in Birmingham, Alabama (Fig. 1). Time afforded APHG, in minutes, has varied from 90 that first year to 900 in 2003 at Salt Lake City. The entire 90 minutes in 1996 went for a panel discussion entitled “Advanced Placement Geography: A College Equivalent Course in Secondary School,” which Sheila M. Ager, representing ETS, presented, along with Professor Alexander Murphy from the University of Oregon and Martha Sharma from the National Cathedral School in Washington, D.C. (Ager, Murphy, and Sharma 1996). As the announced launch date of 1999 approached for APHG, program minutes devoted to APHG grew steadily, through meetings at Orlando (1997), Indianapolis (1998), and Boston (1999). Boston’s 270 minutes included the inauguration of the first of the lengthy workshops for teachers that the APHG test development committee would organize. A slight decrease in program minutes

![Minutes Devoted to AP Human Geography at Annual Meetings of NCGE, by Year](chart)

*Figure 1.* Scheduled minutes devoted to AP Human Geography at annual meetings of the National Council for Geographic Education, by year, 1996–2005. Ten-year total equals 3,895 minutes. (Source: NCGE Annual Meeting Programs.)
between Boston and Chicago (2000) may have been the result of the postponement of the course for a year, to the fall of 2000. Once launch occurred, however, program minutes bounced back substantially for Vancouver (2001). Daylong rather than half-day training sessions for teachers became the norm, starting in Philadelphia (2002), with “Advanced Placement Human Geography Teacher’s Workshop,” organized by Barbara S. Hildebrant of ETS (Hildebrant 2002). These early-morning-to-late-afternoon workshops continued through Salt Lake City and Kansas City (2004), but Hildebrant and Sharma (who served as NCGE President in 2005) decided to go back to two half-day teacher workshops and a related plenary session at the Birmingham (2005) meeting. After peaking in 2003, APHG meeting minutes have fallen from that year’s 900 but may have plateaued near 600. Not visible in Figure 1 are the many off-program connections between the annual meetings and APHG, such as the presence of an ETS booth in the exhibit area from which ETS can tout the course and recruit teachers and exam readers (Hildebrant 2005).

Meeting Minutes by Category

The nearly four thousand minutes of program time that APHG occupied during annual meetings in the period 1996–2005 fall into several categories (Fig. 2). A pair of categories, Teaching Strategies and Content for Teachers, required the bulk of the minutes, often piling up in separate or joint workshops running half or whole meeting days. The least time-consuming four of the six categories (together) occupied only 998 minutes or just a quarter of the sixty-five hours over the first ten years of AP program presence at the NCGE annual meetings.

Smallest among the four minor categories of minutes allocated were the 120, all at Salt Lake City, that went for the Special AP Students Session, a workshop primarily for the students from Ann Linsley-Kennedy’s classes. The students and Linsley-Kennedy were on their way back to their Bellaire, Texas, high school from a study trip to Yellowstone National Park. Six geographers, from various colleges and the U.S. Geological Survey, put on the workshop, to which they also invited students from the local area (Strong et al. 2003).

Next, at 198 minutes, comes a series of research presentations about the AP course, mostly in 20–25 minute increments, beginning in Boston with ‘Key Concepts for AP Geography as Identified by Teachers and Professors” by Robert S. Bednarz (1999) and “A Survey of Available Textbooks for the AP Human Geography” by Susan E. Hume (1999). All but two of the annual meetings since Boston, in the study period, had at least one research paper about APHG on the program. Among other topics in this irregular series of research reports were papers that dealt with a comparison of the APHG curriculum with that of comparable collegiate courses (Middlebrook and Rutherford 2001), connecting APHG to gifted programs (Croft and Croft 2001), and ways of explaining scale in AP classes (Anderson 2002, 2003).

The Teacher Morale Support sessions used 320 of the 3,895 minutes in the ten years under scrutiny here. The special interest network of NCGE encompasses nine different member focus groups, including, since 1998, one
called SI-NET: Advanced Placement. APHG teachers take (typically) forty-five minutes during the annual meeting to informally share their experiences with the course and the exam that follows each spring. Lane gran handled the SI-NET for APHG early on and told me he considers the format “perfect” (2006). He turned it over to Judy Ware, a former high school teacher and later a college instructor, for the Philadelphia conference and those subsequent to Philadelphia. Members of the test development committee and other APHG leaders sometimes sit in on these SI-NET sessions in order to get a feel for how things are going with teachers in the AP trenches.

Last of the four minor minute generators is the one that includes the very first APHG session, in Santa Barbara (Ager, Murphy, and Sharma 1996). I refer to this category in Figure 2 as Explanation of APHG, which catches a diverse set of generally short presentations in which persons in the know discuss new developments in APHG and share with the meeting registrants what is happening. Here I found reports on what had transpired with respect to the course and exam as well as what was to come. ETS has encouraged the APHG leadership to get out and spread the word to calm worries at the College Board about such matters as the course launch and the acceptance rate by colleges (Hildebrant 2005).

Next rises the first of the two dominants, Content for Teachers (Fig. 2). By the 1999 (Boston) meeting, the test development committee had taken on principal responsibility for promoting APHG and preparing teachers for the job of getting the course rolling. Answering the call to teach it were high school teachers with considerable background in geography and others drawn to the task from various social sciences, such as history. Content familiarity for all teachers was critical, so the test development committee organized a half-day workshop in Boston, entitled “Teaching Advanced Placement Geography,” which focused on providing content related to five of APHG’s substantive course topics: political organization of space, population, agricultural and rural land use, cities and urban land use, and industrialization and economic development (Ford et al. 1999). Only one topic, cultural patterns and processes, was not among the content deliveries that exceed content minutes might surprise some. Both are critical; but APHG content sessions have almost always preceded equivalent time on task for strategy. On the other hand, teachers sometimes had access to strategy sessions that stood alone, without an announced (in the meeting programs) content connection.

Teaching Strategies defines the second of the twin dominants and the last of the six session categories in Figure 2. Without an effective method of conveying the content to students, the APHG teacher will struggle. So the test development committee has encouraged experienced teachers to share their strategies with those new to APHG teaching. In fact, following the content segment of the Boston (1999) half-day workshop, two high school teachers, John Trites from Nova Scotia and Debra Lange of Texas, provided strategy ideas to help teachers think of ways to deliver new-found content to their students (Ford et al. 1999). The strategy segment of that first half-day APHG session was not, however, the first effort at sharing with teachers best practices for delivery. At Orlando, Lane gran and Marran (1997) received 105 minutes from the program organizers so that they could spotlight teachers who had participated in the first institute for APHG that summer in St. Paul, Minnesota; they discussed “curriculum, texts, supporting materials and assessment packages appropriate for teaching the new advanced placement geography course.”

That teaching-strategy minutes related to APHG exceeded content minutes might surprise some. Both are critical; but APHG content sessions have almost always preceded equivalent time on task for strategy. On the other hand, teachers sometimes had access to strategy sessions that stood alone, without an announced (in the meeting programs) content connection.

Program Participants
APHG has a loyal cadre of proponents. Over the decade under discussion here, the names of more than forty individuals have appeared in APHG sessions at the annual NCGE meetings. About half of the names came up only once, but two were listed ten times.

Leading the way, with ten sessions, were one proponent from the high school ranks, Martha Sharma, and one
from the collegiate crowd, David Lanegran. From the outset, these two pacesetters filled roles in developing the exams and spreading the word. Sharma was part of the first APHG session at Santa Barbara (Ager, Murphy, and Sharma 1996). Lanegran’s first APHG program venture at NCGE came a year later at Orlando when he co-led an informational session dealing with course curriculum (Lanegran and Marran 1997). Sharma or Lanegran (or both) had APHG roles to play in every 1996-2005 NCGE meeting program. Following Lanegran and Sharma was Judy Ware with eight sessions, about equally mixed between morale building and strategy delivery. Barbara Hildebrant, with seven sessions to her credit, took over as ETS representative on the test development committee about the time of APHG’s startup and organized all of the half-day and full-day content and delivery sessions. She also gave presentations as a means of sharing test results with meeting attendees (Hildebrant 2001; Hildebrant, Lanegran, and Sharma 2003). Two content specialists, West Coast professors Alexander Murphy (University of Oregon) and Larry Ford (San Diego State University), gave five sessions each—frequently the same session. AP teachers Paul Gray, Gary Gress, and Sheri Reugsegger constitute the four-session group, usually, but not always, devoting their programmatic time to helping other teachers figure out how to deliver the goods. At three sessions each, John Trites and Kathleen Anderson used their NCGE podium time on different aspects of APHG. An APHG teacher, early member of the test development committee, and table leader at the first exam reading, Trites collaborated in NCGE meeting sessions that often involved sharing best practices with fellow teachers (Ford et al. 1999; Lanegran, Sharma, and Trites 2001; Sharma and Trites 2001). Anderson, as she finished her doctorate in education at the University of Pittsburgh, reported on results of her research in 2002 and 2003, while her 2004 contribution, at Kansas City, came as part of a delivery results of her research in 2002 and 2003, while her 2004 contribution, at Kansas City, came as part of a delivery committee, and table leader at the first exam reading, Trites collaborated in NCGE meeting sessions that often involved sharing best practices with fellow teachers (Ford et al. 1999; Lanegran, Sharma, and Trites 2001; Sharma and Trites 2001). Anderson, as she finished her doctorate in education at the University of Pittsburgh, reported on results of her research in 2002 and 2003, while her 2004 contribution, at Kansas City, came as part of a delivery session that Ware organized (Anderson 2002, 2003; Ware, Gress, Reugsegger et al. 2004). Somewhat ironic is the fact that James Marran’s name does not appear on this list until we get down to the group of seven persons involved in a total of two APHG sessions over the study decade (Lanegran and Marran 1997; Marran 2005). His retirement from teaching in the 1990s, which served to keep him from being a part of the test development committee or among the test leader or reader personnel, in part explains why over this time period he stayed in the background of the APHG saga as it relates to NCGE. And behind the scenes is where pioneer Marran seems to do some of his best work for the discipline.

**SUMMARY**

APHG and NCGE have a happy marriage. NCGE members were instrumental in creating APHG and successfully launching it. Annual meetings of NCGE have provided an important venue for publicizing the new course, assisting AP teachers, recruiting readers for the free-response questions on the test, and apprising the membership about APHG. It may even be true that some teachers attend NCGE meetings mainly because of the APHG sessions. Meeting organizers and NCGE leaders have allowed APHG advocates considerable flexibility in setting up AP sessions—a flexibility from which both APHG and NCGE benefit. Every NCGE annual meeting, from 1996 through 2005, has had program minutes devoted to one or more aspects of APHG. Content and teaching strategies consumed the bulk of the total of nearly four thousand APHG minutes on these ten programs. Information sharing, morale building, research replaying, and student educating have claimed far fewer, but still important minutes. Names like Lanegran, Sharma, and Ware have joined Marran and Murphy as part of long line of NCGE members keeping the faith with APHG. May the collaboration continue.

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**NOTES**

1. Some students sit for the exam without having taken the course, while others take the course but choose not to take the exam. A high percentage do both.

2. Subject to minor revisions, for 2006, APHG came in at 21,003 exams, World History at 84,143, and Environmental Science at 44,698 (Hildebrant 2006b).

3. Insiders believe the delay of one year for the launch of APHG, from 1999 to 2000, was the result of financial concerns at the College Board plus a change in administration that unexpectedly brought other priorities to the table. Persistence on the part of APHG advocates and financial help from NGS paid off as an initial decision to postpone APHG indefinitely turned into a delay of only one calendar year (Marran 2006b; Sharma 2006b).

**REFERENCES**


