

SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICAN GEOGRAPHERS

President: Professor Cecil Seethal, Department of Geography and Environmental Science,
University of Fort Hare, Alice, Eastern Cape, South Africa
Web site: <http://www.ssag.co.za/>



SNAPSHOT: GEOGRAPHY IN THE WORLD TODAY - SOUTH AFRICAN GEOGRAPHY

by

CECIL SEETHAL
(PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICAN GEOGRAPHERS)

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SPECIAL SESSION – SNAPSHOTS: GEOGRAPHY IN THE WORLD TODAY

Organizers

Kenneth E. Foote, University of Colorado
Douglas Richardson, Executive Director - Association of American Geographers

Chair

Kenneth E. Foote

Opening Remarks

Douglas Richardson, Executive Director - Association of American Geographers
Ronald Abler, President, International Geographical Union

Speakers (in alphabetic order)

Argentina	–	Ana Maria Liberali
Argentina	–	Susana Sassone
Australia	–	Lesley Head
Bolivia	–	Javier Nunez-Villalba
Canada	–	Anne Godlewska
China	–	Weidong Liu
Colombia	–	Jorge Ruiz
Costa Rica	–	Lilliam Quiros Arias
Czech Republic	–	Tadeusz Siwek
EIS-Africa	–	Sives Govender
Finland	–	Markku Tykkylainen
France	–	Yves Boquet
Ghana	–	James Eshun
Hong Kong	–	Donggen Wang
Ireland	–	Frances Fahy
Israel	–	Izhak Schnell
Italy	–	Margherita Azzari
Japan	–	Keiji Yano
Jamaica	–	Kevon Rhiney
Mexico	–	Alvaro Sanchez-Crispin
Mexico	–	Jose L. Silvan-Cardenas
The Netherlands	–	Henk Ottens
Nicaragua	–	Alfonso Jiron Garcia
Portugal	–	Dulce Pimentel
Romania	–	Ioan Ianos
Slovakia	–	Rene Matlovic
<i>South Africa</i>	–	<i>Cecil Seethal</i>
U.K. (RGS-IBG)	–	Madelein Hatfield
U.S. (GTU)	–	Randy Bertolas
U.S. (NCGE)	–	Richard B. Schultz
U.S. (AAG)	–	Douglas Richardson

SNAPSHOT: GEOGRAPHY IN THE WORLD TODAY - SOUTH AFRICAN GEOGRAPHY

On behalf of the community of South African geographers I extend warm greetings from sunny South Africa to the Association of American Geographers (AAG) on the occasion of your 108th Convention.

We thank you too for this opportunity to share our South African Geography 'snapshot' at this Conference.

The South African Geographical Society was established in 1916. Like the AAG in Philadelphia in 2004, South African geographers will celebrate in 2016, the centenary of the establishment of organized geography in the country.

Putting aside our historical differences, South African geographers launched in 1995, at the then University of Durban-Westville, the current Society of South African Geographers.

South Africa, with a population of 50-million persons, has 23 universities, with established Geography Departments at 18 of these institutions, and with the Geography Department at the University of South Africa constituting a distance learning centre. In South Africa, Geography Departments are often combined with other disciplines, for example, Geology and Environmental Science.

Geography Departments at the residential universities in South Africa have between 200 and 1 700 students each, from five to 24 academic members of staff, with a sixty-forty ratio of male to female lecturers.

The largest Geography Department has 80 Masters and PhD students. South African Geography Departments have an average of 20 Masters and 10 PhD students. Research focus varies and cuts across all major sub-fields in the Discipline.

The average number of undergraduate students per Geography Department is 600, for a total of about 10 000 Geography undergraduate students in the country. In general there are about

- (1) Sixteen undergraduate Geography students per 100 000 population;
- (2) 0.74 Honours students per 100 000 population;
- (3) 0.72 Masters students per 100 000 population; and
- (4) 0.34 PhD Geography students per 100 000 population, in South Africa.

In the postapartheid era, the Geography Departments have enrolled an increasing percentage of international students, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

The Society of South African Geographers (SSAG) has about 600 members, and in partnership with Routledge publishes its Journal, the South African Geographical Journal which is peer-reviewed, twice per year. About 350 local and international institutions subscribe to the Journal.

The SSAG hosts a Geography conference on a biennial basis, with the 2012 Conference scheduled for Cape Town in June, and the 2014 Conference at the University of Fort Hare. The Society plans to hold its centenary conference in 2016 at Stellenbosch, where the Society was founded.

South African Geography also prides itself in that annually, for the last 41 years, Geography students have held their own conferences, under the auspices of the SSAG. In alternate years, the students' conferences are held with the academic conference to foster greater student-staff interaction.

The SSAG makes various awards:

- (1) The Gold Medal Award for distinguished service to Geography;
- (2) Its Fellowship Award for outstanding academic scholarship;
- (3) Awards to Masters' students for outstanding dissertations; and
- (4) Four Awards for the best papers at the Students' Conference.

The Society and the Geography community have maintained and promoted international linkages across the world. In particular, the Society has membership on the IGU's National Committee of South Africa. Two South Africans have held office as Vice-Presidents of the IGU, with Professor Michael Meadows from the University of Cape Town serving as the current Secretary-General of the IGU. South African Geography is also represented on most IGU Commissions.

South Africa has also hosted the 2002 IGU Regional Conference, which was addressed by former President Nelson Mandela and current AAG President, Audrey Kobayashi.

Geography Departments in South Africa now also undergo academic review and auditing processes. Also, individual geographers can apply for academic rating. These measures are indicative of the general trend away from collegialism to managerialism at South African universities.

South African Geography is now focusing on several critical aspects:

- (1) Challenging the long standing dominance of metropolitan ideas and methods in the South;
- (2) Growing the number of graduating students with senior degrees;
- (3) Working towards enhancing ties with geographers in the region;
- (4) Building and extending reciprocal and mutually respectful relations with geographers in countries where our linkages and networks have been limited, including the South African Region; and
- (5) Beginning to work increasingly with persons involved in school Geography to advance Geography education.

Over the years many South African geographers have played critical roles in promoting the discipline. We are thankful to all of them for this.

Finally, on behalf of the Society of South African Geographers, I extend a warm invitation to all of you to join us in South Africa at our June 2012 Conference at the University of Cape Town.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C.E.P. Seethal', with a horizontal line underneath.

C.E.P. Seethal (Professor)