

Institute of Australian Geographers' Annual Conference 2015

Susan Caldis, GTA NSW President

During the first week of July I had the pleasure of attending and presenting at my first academic Geography conference. The conference was held at the Australian National University, Canberra with the theme being 'Exploring Geographic Connections'. Keynotes, panel discussions and research presentations focused on the diversity of domains to which geographers are connected. Conference delegates were warmly welcomed with a puffer jacket to help combat the sub-zero temperatures and an invitation to join the conversation on Twitter via #iag2015Canberra.

The program was jam-packed and the geographical research being presented was varied <https://kaigi.eventsair.com/QuickEventWebsitePortal/iag2015/iag2015/Agenda> I would like to take the opportunity to profile a couple of the sessions that resonated with me most as a Geography teacher:

Professor Patrick Dodson provided the opening keynote live from Broome, via Skype. His message was about the importance of cultural connections and links to Indigenous communities, using many specific examples to reference the disruptive effects mining, town planning and community closures are having on the social and cultural practices of Indigenous peoples. As I considered the *new K-10 Geography syllabus* and the units focused on water, liveability, interconnections and environmental management, together with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority, I saw many entry points where key components of his research and message could be introduced to students.

David Crew, a PhD candidate from Macquarie University, is building on the work of Janice Monk to determine the reasons for and extent of change about social life, access to housing, income and education levels, and dependence on the government amongst the Aboriginal population in rural towns across NSW. His work, as Monk's did, concentrates on Coffs Harbour, Griffith and Deniliquin – towns that in 1965 had similar demographics. Preliminary research findings indicate the following: since 1965 the reasons for and extent of change for the prior mentioned factors in Aboriginal communities has been positive in the Coffs Harbour region; has remained much the same in the Griffith region; and has declined or been negative in the Deniliquin region. Examples such as the following were cited: in 1965 the Aboriginal

population in Deniliquin was economically viable but in 2011 research and statistics indicate the Aboriginal population is comparatively poorer, less educated and less employable. The next component of this research project is to ask how the Aboriginal population can become 'better off' through an exploration of community and stakeholder narratives. The units and cross-curriculum priority mentioned in the previous paragraph for our new Geography syllabus provide an opportunity to explore this research as an interesting and contemporary example.

Rhonda Itaoui, a PhD candidate from the University of Western Sydney, presented her research about Islamophobia and the mobility of young Muslims in Sydney. Her work investigates the influence of media in creating areas of inclusion and exclusion around Sydney for young Muslim people – a constructed and perceived space of ethnicity which leads to young Muslim people creating internalised mental maps of safe and unsafe spaces. I found this a fascinating study in its own right but also an interesting way to help students interpret the term 'mental maps' and further their understanding about the geographical concept of space in the *new K-10 Geography syllabus*.

Dr Rebecca Cross, an IES PhD graduate from the University of Sydney, presented her research about the relationship between mining and agriculture and its effect on the Great Barrier Reef – enter some fabulous material to explore vulnerability and resilience, nature and rate of change, and contemporary management strategies for Ecosystems At Risk.

Throughout my time as President of GTA NSW I have often reflected on the ways in which our Association and members could increase connections with academic geography. At the conference I discovered the flip side – the academic geographers were

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wondering about opportunities to build relationships with Geography teachers. As a result, I look forward to continued dialogue and increased levels of participation at 'each other's' events from hereon.

In closing I would like to encourage an aspiration to add depth to understanding Geography as a discipline and invite you to consider joining the Institute of Australian Geographers, particularly if engaged in postgraduate study <https://www.iag.org.au/home/>. The access to professional readings centred on various aspects of geography (such cultural, political, environmental etc.) provide rich, alternative perspectives and case studies that with some thought can be cleverly integrated in to teaching and learning programs, particularly for the senior years. For those engaged with Twitter, the following accounts might be of interest to begin investigating the realm of academic Geography: @AUSCCER (Australian Centre for Cultural Environmental Research, Geography and Environment at the University

of Wollongong); and @SCGRG_RGS (Committee of the Social and Cultural Geography Research Group at the Royal Geographical Society).

Obviously I would also like to encourage schools and individuals to continue their membership with GTA NSW – an association set up by teachers, for teachers; and an Association that endeavours to provide a variety of professional learning opportunities and access to networks to support the teaching of Geography for those about to commence their career in teaching through to our most experienced and expert practitioners.

As teacher-accreditation requirements and implementation of the *new K–10 Geography syllabus* become a reality, it will be important to ensure a range of opportunities to maximise learning are accessed not only for the benefit of our students but also for our own professional learning and growth.

Susan Caldis



Below: IAG Annual Conference Dinner, held at the National Museum of Australia on Thursday 2 July 2015