

# International Symposium on Learning and Teaching Geography in Higher Education

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## 1. Overview

The First International Symposium in Learning and Teaching Geography in Higher Education was held on 23 April 1999 in Honolulu, Hawaii, in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Association of American Geographers. Twenty eight geographers attended the day-long symposium, including representatives from the United States (14), Britain (10), Australia (2), and New Zealand (2). In advance of the meetings participants worked in teams to write short discussion papers that were posted in the Worldwide Web in February and March ([Table 1](#)). The papers identified key opportunities for international cooperation, as well as some of the constraints and challenges facing such efforts. The papers were the basis for considerable online discussion among participants before they met in Hawaii. The papers and discussions helped to clarify a number of contextual and conceptual issues before the symposium began so that more time could be spent in Honolulu concentrating on the overall goals of the project and on specific plans for its development.

A broad consensus emerged in the preparatory discussions as well as at the symposium that establishing of an international network for the learning and teaching geography in higher education would be of major benefit to the discipline. The symposium participants agreed that plans should move forward to establish this network under the name INLT (International Network for Learning and Teaching Geography in Higher Education). The success of INLT will however hinge on setting clear goals, enlisting support from many sources, and selecting projects that demonstrate the benefits of international collaboration in both the short and long term. For this reason, the symposium discussions focused on three questions: What should be the overall purposes and goals of the network? What projects offer the greatest potential for realizing these goals?; and How can these projects be implemented? Participants divided into small groups to address each of these questions in a series of breakout sessions held throughout the day. After each breakout session, participants reconvened as a full group to discuss their findings and to refine the ideas presented. The following sections summarize the points raised in these small and large-group discussions.

## 2. The Goal and Purposes of the Network

A wide range of goals was suggested in the first round of small-group discussions, although a good deal of overlap and convergence was apparent among the goals proposed. After

considering the list in some detail, it was suggested that each small group spend a few minutes synthesizing a short INLT mission statement from the full set of suggestions. The five drafts again highlighted many of the same points and can, perhaps, be summarized as follows:

**Goal:** To improve the quality of learning and teaching of geography in higher education internationally

**Purposes:** (1) To promote innovative, creative, and collaborative research as well as critical reflection on learning and teaching of geography  
(2) To facilitate the exchange of materials, ideas, and experiences about learning and teaching of geography and to stimulate international dialog  
(3) To create an inclusive international community aimed at raising the profile and status of learning and teaching of geography

Two important points were raised in discussion. First, the international network should focus on higher education, but from a broad perspective that addresses the concerns of all stakeholder groups including as appropriate precollegiate, collegiate, teacher training, and adult education audiences. Much can be gained from building upon existing projects in these areas and establishing linkages among them. Second, the network should focus on learning and teaching "of" geography rather than solely on learning and teaching "in" geography programs. The teaching of geography takes place in many venues outside of the traditional university campus, in adult education, distance education, and the private sector. The network should address the concerns of learning and teaching of geography in higher education wherever it takes place.

### **3. Making a Network Work: Projects and Plans**

Participants again divided into small groups to discuss the projects that should be started first. Two points emerged in debate over the many ideas presented by the small groups. First, the network should balance its choices between projects that can be realized quickly with little funding and some that will require more time, money, and international participation. INLT should begin with one or two projects that it can be completed and demonstrated in the next twelve to eighteen months, but with one or two others with longer time horizons. Second, it was suggested that at least one project be aimed directly at learners and one be targeted on professional development.

Six projects were selected for development and were the subject of the final small-group meeting of the day. The groups worked independently to draft brief development plans for the projects. These are listed below along with the participants who volunteered to continue work on the projects over the next year. Chairs were appointed by the symposium organizers in early April.

#### **3.1. Publication of the Discussion Papers in the *JGHE***

Following the original plan for the symposium, participants agreed to revise and submit their discussion papers for publication in the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*. It was felt that this would be an important means of conveying the results of the symposium to a larger audience and for generating support for INLT.

This project is being coordinated by [Mick Healey](#). Deadline for the submission of the revised discussion papers is 30 June 1999.

### **3.2. Establish a Communication Network**

There were two parts to this project: 1) the creation of a listserv or threaded discussion board for announcements and continued discussion; and 2) planning for a second international symposium. Iain Hay volunteered to set up a listserv for the network and a threaded discussion board will be established by Shannon Crum and Ken Foote. It was agreed that a second symposium of this type would be planned to coincide with the RGS-IBG conference in Plymouth in January 2001. Efforts would be made to continue the symposia at two to three year intervals in conjunction with the meetings of other national geographical organizations.

*Committee:* [Brian Chalkley](#) (Chair), [Iain Hay](#), [Mick Healey](#), [Phil Gravestock](#), [Derek Reeve](#), [David Rich](#), and [John Stainfield](#).

### **3.3. Develop a Database and Clearinghouse**

There are two distinct but interrelated parts to this project. The first is to create an easily accessible database containing basic information about geography in higher education around the world. Relatively little basic information has been compiled about the role of geography in the systems of higher education in different countries. Gathering such information can be viewed as the first step in a research program to analyze the status of geography in higher education topics internationally. The second of the project is to use existing networking technologies to create a clearinghouse for educational materials in the Worldwide Web. Some projects of this type are already underway and the current effort would seek to unify some of these offerings and, as necessary, fill in the gaps. The two projects are interlinked because they would both be accessible through a common Web site that will be established for the international network.

*Committee:* [Sarah Bednarz](#) and [Geoff Robinson](#) (Co-chairs), [Shannon Crum](#), [Ken Foote](#), [Phil Gravestock](#), [Jim Hathaway](#), [Derek Reeve](#), and [Ifan Shepherd](#).

### **3.4. Explore and Establish Links with Other Organizations and Projects**

The role of this project is to identify and establish alliances or collaborations with organizations working on related projects. These might include both national and international organizations both inside and outside of geography. Of particular interest is coordinating the network with existing projects within the geography education community, but this may need to expand to interest in projects being pursued in related disciplines.

*Committee:* [David Rich](#) (Chair), [Bob Bednarz](#), [Sarah Bednarz](#), [Susan Hardwick](#), and [Richard Le Heron](#).

### **3.5. Link Student Projects Internationally**

The goal of this project is to have students from perhaps four institutions in different nations collaborate in the creation of virtual fieldtrips or guides of their local area. Such a project would both permit study of the potential of international student collaborations and help build materials in the Worldwide Web that would be of value to other students and instructors.

*Committee:* [Teresa Ploszajska](#) (Chair), [Shannon Crum](#), [Les Doak](#), [Peter Fisher](#), [Eric Fournier](#), [Susan Hardwick](#), [Iain Hay](#), [Dave Hill](#), Susan Hume, [Pat McGreevy](#), [Karen Nairn](#),

[Ifan Shepherd](#), [John Stainfield](#), [Melanie Milicich](#), and [Susan Woodward](#).

### **3.6. Establish Pilot Project to Explore Learning and Teaching Strategies**

The goal of this project would be to formulate a small-scale pilot project to explore the process of collaboration over teaching and learning strategies and how these might be improved. It would raise the question of whether international collaboration can improve professional expertise. The project might involve identifying three or four individual or departments with overlapping interests in one field of geography. Participants could discuss and coordinate their efforts using a combination of electronic media and face-to-face meetings, or perhaps convene some sort of international seminar. Funding would be required for this project.

*Committee:* [Karen Nairn](#) (Chair), [Luke Desforges](#), [Eric Fournier](#), [Jan Monk](#), [Eleanor Rawling](#), [David Rich](#), and [Michael Solem](#)

At the close of the symposium volunteers were also sought to serve on a steering committee for the international network until the next meeting in Plymouth in 2001.

The members of the steering committee are: [Ken Foote](#), [Iain Hay](#), and [Mick Healey](#) (Co-chairs), [Sarah Bednarz](#), [Brian Chalkley](#), [Shannon Crum](#), [Luke Desforges](#), [David Hill](#), [Karen Nairn](#), [Teresa Ploszajska](#), [Eleanor Rawling](#), [David Rich](#), [Geoff Robinson](#), [Ifan Shepherd](#) and [Michael Solem](#).

#### **Table 1. Discussion Papers Prepared for The First International Symposium on Learning and Teaching of Geography in Higher Education**

1. [Going Global: Developing an International Network for Learning and Teaching Geography in Higher Education](#)  
by Iain Hay (Flinders University, Australia), Ken Foote (University of Texas at Austin, USA) and Mick Healey (Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education, UK)
2. [Internationalising Geography in Higher Education: Towards a Conceptual Framework](#)  
by Ifan Shepherd (Middlesex University, UK), Jan Monk (University of Arizona, USA) and Joos Droogleever Fortuijn (University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands)
3. [Delivering Courses Internationally](#)  
by Susan Hardwick (Southwest Texas State University, USA), Karen Kemp (University of California, Berkeley, USA), Teresa Ploszajska (Liverpool Hope University College, UK) and Derek Reeve (Huddersfield University, UK)
4. [Geography Teaching in Higher Education: Quality, Assessment and Accountability](#)  
by Brian Chalkley (University of Plymouth, UK), Eric Fournier (Samford University, USA), David Hill (University of Colorado, USA) and Bettina Aten (Bridgewater State University, Massachusetts, USA)
5. [International Perspectives on Fieldcourses](#)  
by Karen Nairn (Otago University, New Zealand), David Higgitt (University of Durham, UK) and Dominique Vanneste (Institute for Social and Economic Geography, Belgium)
6. [International Perspectives on Virtual Fieldcourses](#)

by John Stainfield (University of Plymouth, UK), Peter Fisher (University of Leicester, UK), Bob Ford (Westminster College of Salt Lake City, USA) and Michael Solem (University of Colorado, USA)

7. [International Perspectives on Teaching Geography through Information Technology](#)  
by Bob Bednarz (Texas A&M University, USA), Dave Rich (Macquarie University, Australia) and Geoff Robinson (University of Leicester, UK)
8. [Reflections on Experience in Schools Education](#)  
by Sue Burkill (College of St. Mark and St. John, UK), Eleanor Rawling (University of Oxford, UK), Sarah Bednarz (Texas A&M University, USA) and John Lidstone (Queensland University of Technology, Australia)

**Figure 1 An overview of the goals of the International Network for Learning and Teaching of Geography (INLT)**

