

Our Association

The first meeting of the Canadian Association of Geographers was held at McGill University on May 30, 1951. At that meeting the sixty or so geographers present crafted the tenets that still guide our association. As stated in the minutes from that meeting, the objectives of the CAG were “...to *promote the use and development of geography in Canada by facilitating an exchange of ideas between geographers, by arranging meetings where geographers can discuss the several aspects of geography and its related fields and by publishing information and professional papers of interest to geographers in Canada. The Association will also assist in stimulating, guiding, influencing and encouraging geographical research, exploration and the teaching of geography in Canada and strive for the improvement of its status in Canadian education. It will provide direction for geography graduates to new fields of geographical employment.*”

In 1996, the Executive Committee of the CAG presented for approval to the membership the current mission statement of the association. As the full text of that statement is available on the association website for you to review, I will only remind you of the six goals that guide the activities of your association. The CAG is committed to promoting: the dissemination of geographic research; geographic education at all levels; the recognition of geographic excellence; increased cooperation with other National and International geographic organizations; increased participation in National interdisciplinary organizations; and, to improving service to the membership. Reflecting upon the accomplishments of the CAG since 1996, it is readily apparent that the association has seriously committed to these goals. While credit belongs to all members of the CAG who have volunteered their energy to these tasks, particular acknowledgement is due to the many individuals who have earnestly represented your interests as members of the divisional and national executive committees.

So what does the future hold for the CAG? As much will depend upon what the membership expects of the association, I thought it worthwhile for us to have an appreciation of who the CAG currently represents. The membership review that follows is based upon data provided by members during their annual renewal in 2008. It is current as of mid-October 2008.

Who are we?

The current membership of the CAG stands at 1135. Figure 1 illustrates where the members reside. The majority reside in the province of Ontario (50%), with declining numbers in British Columbia (18%), Quebec (11%), Alberta (7%), Saskatchewan (5%), Manitoba (3%), Newfoundland and Labrador (2%); New Brunswick (2%), Nova Scotia (2%) and Nunavut/Yukon (0.2%). Approximately 8.5% of the CAG membership lives outside of Canada, with the largest majority living in the USA (7.5%).

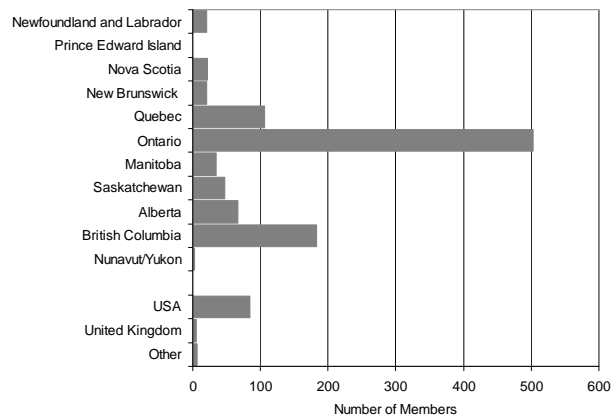


Figure 1. Location of Canadian Association of Geographers members (October, 2008).

The majority of our members are either “regular” (n=431; 39%) or “student” (n=382; 33%) members. The remainder of the members are either “retired” (n=63; 6%), or belong as “family”, “associate” or other members (n=259; 22%). Figure 2 illustrates the age and student:non-student composition of the CAG membership. The figure only includes members for whom both a birth year was recorded. The members of each group are organized into cohorts of individuals born within five-year intervals.

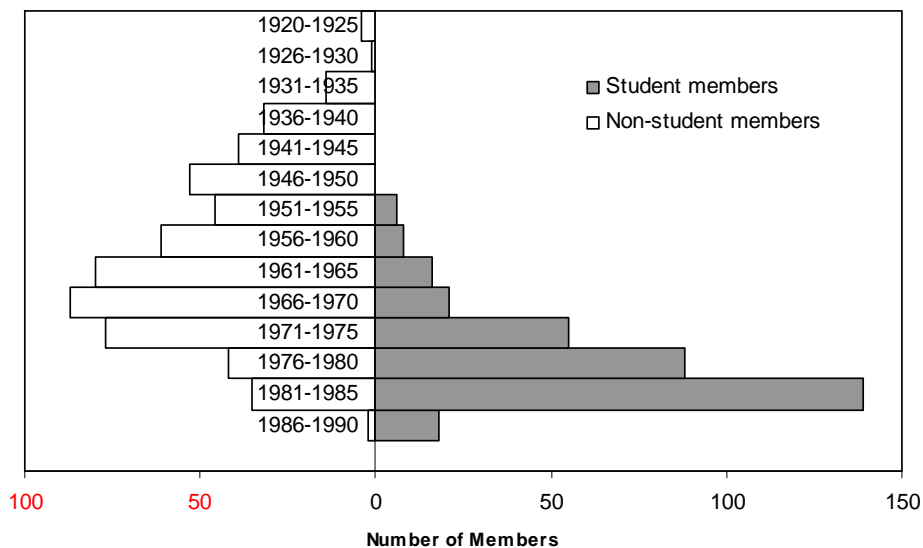


Figure 2. Population structure pyramid for 950 student and non-student members of the Canadian Association of Geographers, October 2008. Members are shown as five-year cohorts.

A striking aspect of the current CAG membership is the large number of student members (Figure 2). Speaking to the interest students retain in the activities of the CAG, this cohort also reflects proactive measures taken by some Canadian geography departments to purchase student memberships. Included in this group are geography departments who pay for some undergraduate or graduate student memberships (i.e. University of Toronto; University of Victoria), to other geography departments who purchase memberships for all of their incoming graduate students (i.e. University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University). Clearly serving this cohort of members should be a priority for the association.

Another notable component of Figure 2 is the decline in non-student members among mid- to late-career individuals. Although much discussion arises regarding the lack of CAG members at early stages in their professional careers (the 1971-1975 and 1976-1980 cohorts), the population structure of our membership also suggests that individuals may be disengaging themselves from the association once their careers are established. Continuing erosion of the number of individuals in these pre-retirement cohorts threatens to weaken the relevance and profile of the association.

At the time of their annual renewal, members are permitted to identify the field of geography that best describes their activities. While admittedly a coarse descriptor given the complexity of our discipline, a large number of members (n=1011) chose to identify their field as being either human geography (67%), physical geography (26%), both human and physical geography (7%), or other. Among the student membership cohort, a very similar pattern of self-identification emerges (human geography 65%, physical geography 25%, both human and physical geography 9%). Although a recurring concern for the association, clearly developing strategies to engage physical geographers at all career stages needs to remain a priority.

The majority of CAG members are men (56%), with women composing a slightly smaller percentage of the overall membership (44%). There are, however, clear differences in the percentage of women CAG members when the membership is examined by age cohort. Figure 3 illustrates the age and gender composition of the CAG membership. The figure only includes members for whom both gender and birth year are recorded (n=950; 82% of members). The members of each gender are organized into cohorts of individuals born within five-year intervals.

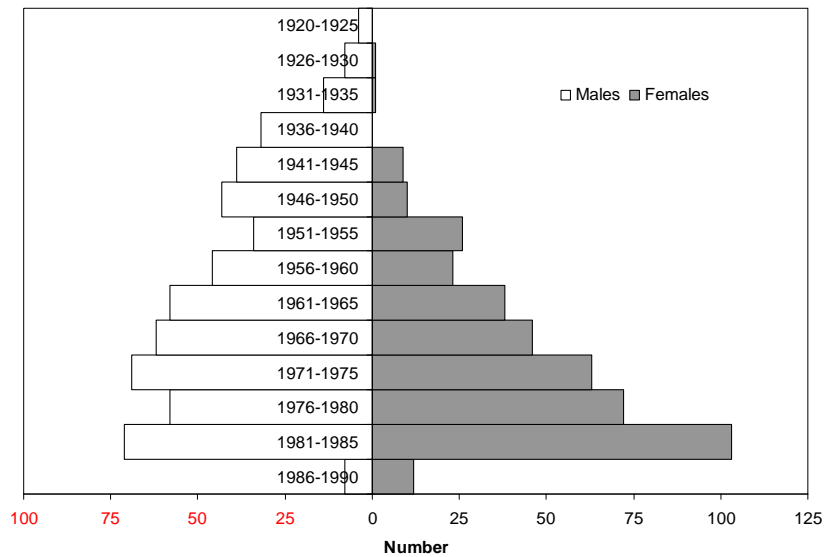


Figure 3. Population age structure pyramid for 950 members of the Canadian Association of Geographers in mid-October 2008. Members are shown as five-year cohorts.

A revealing feature of the CAG's population structure is the prominent reversal in the gender imbalance among members born before and after ca. 1970. As Figure 3 shows, men outnumber women among those born prior to 1970. Cohorts born after 1971-1975 have more women members, and the number increases with each successive five-year cohort to the present.

One aspect of the changed gender ratio within the association membership deserving of recognition is the contribution played by student members. Of the 382 student members recorded in 2008, 91% chose to self-identify their gender. Figure 4 illustrates the gender and age cohort of student members of the CAG membership. The figure only includes members for whom both a birth year was recorded. The members of each group are organized into cohorts of individuals born within five-year intervals.

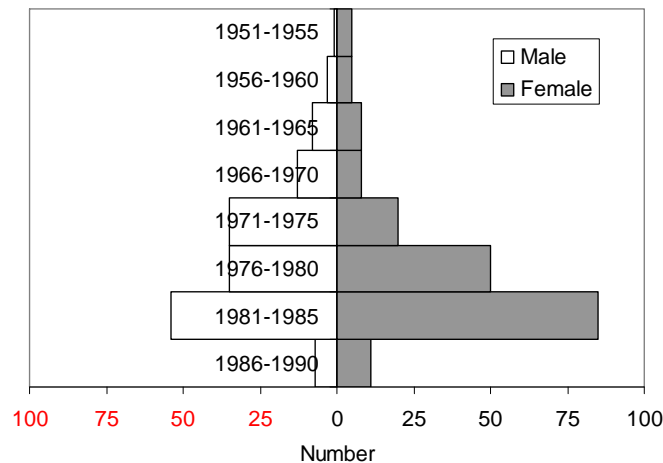


Figure 4. Population age structure pyramid for 348 student members of the Canadian Association of Geographers in mid-October 2008. Members are shown as five-year cohorts.

Figure 4 shows that more women than men currently hold CAG student memberships. A gender imbalance reversal occurs among those born after 1976, after which the student cohorts have many more female members. This gender imbalance appears to be increasing with each successive 5-year cohort. This change presumably reflects a colloquial impression of the changing population structure of many undergraduate and graduate geography programs in Canada. In concert with societal changes, more women than men are choosing to enrol in geography programs. An assessment of the field of study by student members by gender shows a female-to-male ratio of 1.6:1 in human geography, 1:1.4 in physical geography, and a 1:1 ratio in members identify both human and physical geography.

Summary

The CAG population structure is a legacy of past disciplinary tendencies and a large influx of student members. The current population structure anticipates future changes worthy of discussion.

- First, given the overwhelming imprint of younger students on the structure of the CAG, the activities of the Association may well need to focus additional attention on the needs of this cohort. Members of this group will define the future of the CAG.
- Second, with the growth in women members, the complexion of the CAG has changed. Women are certain to play a larger role in the Association than ever before and it is critical that we foster equitable opportunities for leadership.
- Third, the continuing and deepening disenchantment of physical geographers with the Association could be disastrous for the CAG. With physical geographers no

longer drawn to the CAG, the publications and meetings of the CAG are increasingly polarized in their relevance. The Association is at a crossroads and must soon make a decision as to where best to devote its attention.

For most of the CAG's history, the value of the Association to its' members has been the commitment "*to promote the use and development of geography in Canada*". With accelerating political, economic and societal changes having profound impacts on the relevance of our Association, perhaps it is time we reflected evermore upon the needs of our members.

Dan Smith
President, Canadian Association of Geographers