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**OFFICERS 2011**

**PRESIDENT**
Randy Bertolas  
Wayne State College  
1111 Main St.  
Wayne, NE 68787  
e-mail: raberto1@wsc.edu

**FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT**
Thomas Wikle  
Department of Geography  
337 Murray Hall  
Oklahoma State University  
Stillwater, OK 74078-4073  
e-mail: t.wikle@okstate.edu

**SECOND VICE-PRESIDENT**
Burrell Montz  
Geography Department  
A-228 Brewster  
East Carolina University  
Greenville, NC 27858  
e-mail: montzb@ecu.edu

**IMMEDIATE PAST-PRESIDENT**
Don Zeigler  
Virginia Beach Higher Education Center  
1881 University Dr.  
Old Dominion University  
Virginia Beach, VA 23453  
e-mail: dzeigler@odu.edu

**OMEGA OMEGA (ALUMNI) CHAIR**
Richard Earl  
Department of Geography  
Texas State University  
San Marcos, TX 78666  
e-mail: re02@txstate.edu

**EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**
James D. Lowry, Jr.  
Department of Geography  
2000 Lakeshore Dr.  
University of New Orleans  
New Orleans, LA 70148  
e-mail: jlowry@uno.edu

**RECORDING SECRETARY**
Jeff Lash  
Geography Program  
University of Houston-Clear Lake  
2700 Bay Area Blvd  
Box 246  
Houston, TX 77058  
e-mail: lash@uhcl.edu

**COMPTROLLER**
Michal LeVasseur  
10933 New Liberty Rd.  
Piedmont, AL 36272  
e-mail: mllevasseur@gmail.com

**HISTORIAN**
Howard Johnson  
10933 New Liberty Rd.  
Piedmont, AL 36272  
e-mail: hjohnson@jsucc.jsu.edu

**SENIOR STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE**
Jed Riley  
Geography Department  
Seaton Hall 118  
Kansas State University,  
Manhattan, KS 66506  
e-mail: s267143@k-state.edu

**JUNIOR STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE**
Rupak Shrestha  
Geography Department  
720 Fourth Ave. South  
Saint Cloud State University  
Saint Cloud, MN 56301  
e-mail: shru0701@stcloudstate.edu

**EDITOR, THE GEOGRAPHICAL BULLETIN**
Steven M. Schnell (ex-officio)  
Department of Geography  
Kutztown University of Pennsylvania  
Kutztown, PA 19530  
e-mail: schnell@kutztown.edu
A Note from the Editor, 
and Some Unconventional Grammar

First of all, an apology is due to the authors of an article in the November 2010 issue. For Richard Shaker and Taly Drezner’s article “A New Technique for Predicting the Sky-View Factor for Urban Heat Island Assessment,” we inadvertently reversed the order of the two authors; Richard Shaker should be listed as first author. We’ve posted a corrected version on EBSCO and ProQuest.

Secondly, our online archives of old issues of The Geographical Bulletin back to Volume 1 in 1970 are now complete – check them out at http://www.gammathetaupsilon.org/geographical-bulletin-index.html. Special thanks are due to Catherine Lockwood, Jim Snaden, and Thomas Vaughn who tracked down the missing issues.

And now for something completely different. As I’m sure you’ve noticed, the English language, as flexible and fluid as it is, has a glaring flaw – namely, the lack of a third-person singular pronoun that is gender-neutral. If a writer needs to refer to an unknown individual, she must either use a gender-specific word (thus sowing potential confusion and/or sexism), or he/she is stuck with a clunky construction that has all the grace of tax form instructions.

Imagine my delight, then, upon discovering Patricia T. O’Conner and Stewart Kellerman’s “On Language” column in the New York Times Magazine from July 26, 2009, entitled “All-Purpose Pronoun: The Search for an Anybody Who’s Everybody.” Turns out, the English language came up with a solution a long time ago – simply use “they” as a generic third-person pronoun. It was common practice until the grammar police intervened in the 18th century. O’Conner and Kellerman point out that Chaucer, Byron, Austen, Thackeray, Eliot, and Dickens, among others generally thought to know their way around the English language, used it commonly. It’s become such standard practice in spoken English that Merriam-Webster’s newest Collegiate Dictionary accepts it even in formal usage. What’s more, you, gentle reader, use it all the time in daily conversation. Admit it! And it works!

So, henceforth, any author (be they a he or a she) who wishes to use “they” as a generic third-person pronoun in The Geographical Bulletin is more than welcome to do so. If it’s good enough for Charles Dickens and Merriam-Webster, it’s good enough for me. If you’d prefer ye olde “he/she” construction, by all means, stick with it. Perhaps our journal will warrant a footnote in the language histories of future generations.

Now, anyone up for an assault on the pseudo-Roman use of “data” as a plural noun? Maybe next time.

Steven Schnell
Editor, The Geographical Bulletin

1. Available at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/26/magazine/26FOB-onlanguage-t.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=all%20purpose%20pronoun&st=cse]