DEMOGRAPHIC DESTINIES

A Project of the PAA History Committee:

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Interview with Stephanie Dudley
PAA Executive Director 1996-2014

Interviewed by Karen Hardee and committee members at the Boston Marriott Copley Place in Boston, during the 2014 PAA Annual Meeting
Stephanie Dudley announced this year that she is retiring as Executive Director of the PAA. She was hired to be the PAA Executive Director in 1996. Prior to that she worked at the National Bar Association from 1976-1984 and 1986-1996, as Assistant Director and then Director of Administration and Conferences.

HARDEE: Stephanie, thank you so much for agreeing to talk to the history committee of the PAA as you are stepping down as executive director after 18 years in the job. I'm Karen Hardee, and I will be asking questions, and my colleagues Dennis Hodgson and John Weeks will also join in.

DUDLEY: Okay.

HARDEE: So thank you again. In the spring issue of PAA Affairs, you were interviewed, and you listed a number of things that you do as executive director at PAA from sort of managing the organization's operations, the annual meeting, which we're here at the annual meetings now, working with the board on financial aspects of the association, and just the day-to-day operations. Could you describe your role over the years and how you've seen your role and the association change over the 18 years you've been at PAA.

[Here’s the link to the PAA Affairs article: http://www.populationassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/PAA-Spring.pdf ]

DUDLEY: Wow. Well, when I started there was one other staff person and we had a, I guess, early-stage database that we managed the membership on. And then I had meeting plan experience, so I jumped right into that. And as time went on, we added a part-time person. And I guess the biggest thing that's changed, of course, has been the technology. You know, we had no website, no network, none of that. Basic, early e-mail, and all that--it's just amazing to think about how far that's come in the last, even ten years.

As far as the meeting -- that's pretty standard. We have certainly increased the number of sessions and activities at the meeting, but that's pretty basic. And, you know, I guess it just seems that each year there's more and more for the director to do. There's more that -- you know, the board comes up with ideas, and here you go, get it done.

HARDEE: So what aspect of the job takes the most time?

DUDLEY: Well, I would say probably the meeting takes the most time and then administration. You know, just the general running of the office, overseeing membership and -- you know, that's probably a lot of it. The financial responsibilities have increased over the years.

HARDEE: And how about your interaction with the board, you get a new president each year; what is that like?

DUDLEY: Well, it can be a challenge, of course, everybody's different. The thing that keeps me going is that each year goes by so fast. So, you know, with somebody that you -- well, I haven't really had a problem where I didn't work well with people, but the time just goes, and then once it's time to start planning for the annual meeting, they are pretty tied up. So there's been some discussion over the years about changing the responsibilities and the timing of the responsibilities for some of the administrative things that the president has to do rather than focusing on their address. So they are looking at that now. There may be some more changes.
HARDEE: In addition to the technology changes at PAA, what other changes have you seen in the association over the years?

DUDLEY: I haven't really seen that many changes. The organization has been pretty steady as far as the way it's set up and the committees are very active in PAA. Were they not, I wouldn't be able to do my job. You know, well, I should say, one or two people wouldn't be able to do their job if the committees weren't so active. We have an excellent volunteer base and that hasn't changed. So it's good.

HARDEE: And you came to PAA from working at the National Bar Association?

DUDLEY: Yes. I would say that was much more demanding. They had more meetings than we do, six a year. One big one and then four or five others all over the country and in the Caribbean. So as soon as you got finished with one, you had to start preparing for another. Even though some were small, the same amount of work went into planning and execution. So I'd say PAA people are more even-tempered, a little more laid back than the attorneys.

HARDEE: What would you say has been the biggest surprise working at PAA?

DUDLEY: I can't really think of a surprise.

HARDEE: That's good.

DUDLEY: I mean, I'm usually not surprised. I'd say maybe one thing is the increase in the foundation funds, and I shouldn't say that's a surprise, but it can fund a number of international scholars, that's certainly gone up, maybe 10, 15, when I first started, and we're at 47 this year. And that takes a lot of work. But I mean, it's a good thing.

HARDEE: That's something that the association handles, not one of the committees?

DUDLEY: Well, the international outreach committee selects the recipients, and then we make all the arrangements.

HARDEE: What aspects have you enjoyed the most working on over the years?

DUDLEY: I enjoy the meeting, you know, seeing it come to fruition from start to finish. When it's a success, I think that's my favorite part.

HARDEE: Which meeting would you say over the 18 that you've organized has been from your perspective the most successful?

DUDLEY: Well, it's kind of hard to answer. As far as attendance, you know, DC of course is record-setting, although it looks like we might set a record this year. [editor’s note: no, the 2011 Washington, DC meeting still holds the record as of 2014.] So it's hard to say. And, you know, maybe, what, six years, maybe longer than that we have increased the number of sessions. It's hard for me to measure that kind of success. As long as everybody comes and I don't get too many e-mails when I get back, it's a success.

HARDEE: It sounds like you and your staff have a lot of interaction with the board and the committees. What about with the membership of PAA? Do you have a lot of interaction with members?

DUDLEY: Yes, we do. We get a lot of questions from members and, of course, we generate all the e-
mails for renewals. Especially the membership services coordinator, Lois Brown, has a lot of interaction with the members.

**HARDEE:** What are most of the questions that members ask?

**DUDLEY:** Usually something to do with their membership records or getting things updated, or they are not getting information or they need information.

**HARDEE:** What would you say are the most important issues facing PAA today?

**DUDLEY:** Well, I can only answer that from an administrative standpoint. I think there's just more and more for the executive office to do, and I'm not sure how much longer one person can manage all that.

**HARDEE:** And as you're retiring and PAA has to unfortunately hire your replacement, what kinds of things are you suggesting to the committee that's doing the hiring that they look for or that they think about in terms of changing the position or hiring two or more people for it?

**DUDLEY:** Well, actually, we had a leadership task force committee to look at that, and I basically let them know they really need to hire somebody who has meeting planning experience and somebody who can learn fast. You know, I've learned more about computers than I ever thought I would because we are a small office. I've been fortunate that we have identified a number of partners that are an extension of the staff, and we have an IT consultant that we can go to. Here we have an audiovisual company that helps us. I have an event management company that helps us out too.

**HARDEE:** What will you miss the most about working at PAA?

**DUDLEY:** I guess the excitement and planning the meeting and seeing everybody at the meeting. That's probably what I will miss most. I'm not going to miss going to work every day.

**HARDEE:** And what is the advice that you would give the next executive director?

**DUDLEY:** I would say that when they get in and find their way around, anything they need they should go to the board. The board is very supportive.

**HARDEE:** When you started, did you have any idea that you would be there for 18 years?

**DUDLEY:** I kind of thought I would retire from PAA.

**HARDEE:** Really? You thought that early on?

**DUDLEY:** Yes. Because I'm not a job hopper. I had been at the bar association for almost 20 years. I figured if things worked out, I'd stay. So it worked out.

**HARDEE:** That's great. Other questions?

**WEEKS:** Karen touched on the main questions, including what kinds of advice you would give the board about the person to replace you, and you already suggested that down the road it might need to be more than one person, which obviously suggests a bigger budget and maybe membership dues increases, that kind of thing. We haven't really talked about the finances of the organization. How do you see the financial situation for the organization? I know it's sort of the board's issue, but you are the one who has
to actually pay the bills.

DUDLEY: Right.

WEEKS: So do you have any perspective that we ought to be sharing with the membership?

DUDLEY: Well, you know, the PAA campaign fund that we recently held generated a lot of money for special projects. This has become so popular that the board is now considering ways to continue this support and sustain it, and it would have to be outside of the operating budget. So I guess there's a potential for dues increase or, you know, seek additional foundation funds.

HARDEE: Anything else that you'd like to leave with PAA?

DUDLEY: Just that it's really been a wonderful experience for me. It really has. I've enjoyed it every year. So that's pretty much it. And I think they probably will find somebody who can come in and do everything, or at least the things they can't do, they will be able to suggest ways to get them done.

HARDEE: I'm living in Washington myself, also. I think it's a very political place, and one of the roles of the association is advocacy, making sure funding levels stay where they need to be. How much have you gotten involved in that kind of activity as part of the association?

DUDLEY: Not at all.

HARDEE: That's probably the board --

DUDLEY: Public affairs office, right.

HARDEE: But living in Washington, you must have a lot of advice for them?

DUDLEY: No, not really.

HARDEE: Try and stay away from that if you can?

DUDLEY: Exactly. I have enough to do.

WEEKS: Do you spend time talking with or about other organizations like the American Sociological Association--with which we used to be affiliated before you were hired—the American Political Science Association, those kinds of groups? Is there something to be learned from them or do they learn something from you?

DUDLEY: There probably is. You know, early on I would contact them to get answers to questions because they had the experience or they had an executive director that had been there for a number of years. I've been in touch with ASA, and I'm trying to think, American Statistical Association, and then I'm a member of the American Society of Association Executives, and they have a wealth of information -- seminars, blogs -- that, you know, I keep in touch with, magazines, articles, to keep up with what's going on in the administration of associations as well as the meetings.

HARDEE: And your plans for retirement?

DUDLEY: My plans for retirement first is take a deep breath, but I have two grandchildren in the area so I plan to spend more time with them, take a class, finally get to the gym. That's for starters. Probably after
a year of that I will be looking for something to do.

HARDEE: I'm sure PAA will need some consulting by then.

DUDLEY: I'll stay in touch.

HARDEE: Well, congratulations on another successful 18th meeting. This one really is excellent.

DUDLEY: Thank you. And a side note, Karen [Mason] was the first president I worked with. She was wonderful.

HARDEE: And every single meeting that I've been to, the presidents say that there's not a chance that we could have done our jobs in the year that we had without Stephanie.

DUDLEY: Thank you.

HARDEE: So you have big shoes to follow.

DUDLEY: Thank you.

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