

May 1, 2012

### **Dean's Response to the Program Review of the Geography Department**

I appreciate the thought and effort that went into the Program Review Team's report, and into the Geography faculty's self-study and response to the report.

The Review Team found the Department to be a very strong academic unit, with excellent teaching, high credit-hour production, satisfied students, and good leadership. The Team's report identified as well several areas of challenges for the department, centering around planning and assessment, scarce resources for faculty and students, and community and alumni engagement. They made a number of recommendations related to these challenges:

- Undertake a strategic planning process to guide future decisions about curriculum, program development, and hiring. The Department's response did not directly address this suggestion, though I suggest that it merits their consideration.
- Work on a comprehensive assessment plan. The Department response indicates that this work is ongoing. I am pleased to see that they are working with the Director of Institutional Effectiveness on this issue.
- Foster external outreach. The Department response mentions intentions to form an alumni association and organize an annual meeting for alumni, students, and employees. These are good ideas and I look forward to their realization. The Department response notes that a good deal of such activity is already underway (one could cite this year's Lindquist Award to a faculty member in the Department).
- Foster "internal outreach" to raise awareness of the Department on campus generally, and specifically in venues such as the advising center, OUR, and CIC. Such activity does occur. But I suspect that campus awareness of the Department could be usefully enhanced (e.g., of such widely applicable fields as Geographic Information Systems). Perhaps a "Geography Day," with consciousness-raising demonstrations, geography quizzes, and the like, could be combined with the annual gathering for students, alumni, and employers that was mentioned above.
- The report suggests several "student-friendly" actions, such as publicizing teaching schedules in advance, funding support for student research, providing space for student organizations and for students to gather or "hang out," and doing more to encourage vibrant student organizations. The Department's reaction to these suggestions is positive, and I believe their implementation would serve students well. Planning for the suggested student spaces can be incorporated into the upcoming renovation of the SS Building.
- The report recommends raising faculty salaries (we were, at least, able to distribute modest raises for next year), and increasing incentives for faculty research, external grantseeking, and community projects. Hemingway grants go some way toward

addressing the latter issues, and I note that the College instituted a grantwriting workshop this summer pays faculty members a stipend upon submission of an external grant proposal. I am pleased that a Geography faculty member will be a participant. The report also suggests a full-time secretary for the Department, but the faculty response indicates that clerical support is currently sufficient.

- The report stresses the need for a GIS/cartography lab and other facilities, and the Department response concurs, while requesting a conference room. I will put a new lab on the list of College priorities for the Development Office's Capital Campaign, and planning for the upcoming renovation can incorporate this feature.

I believe that the Review Team report correctly identified and stressed the considerable strengths of the Geography Department, and made a number of useful suggestions. I support the positive responses of the Department to these suggestions.

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