

WSU DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY PROGRAM REVIEW RESPONSE
Response from Geography faculty to Program Review Committee Report
April 10, 2012

INTRODUCTION

This document provides an itemized response by Geography Dept. faculty members to the report from the Program Review Committee (hereinafter referred to as “the committee”) for the Department of Geography. The committee’s report was submitted on March 29, 2012 following a site visit to the WSU campus on March 6. During their visit, the committee toured the facilities and met with faculty, staff, and students in the Department of Geography and with Dean Frank Harrold.

I. ADMINISTRATIVE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

A. Leadership

The committee recommended that the dept. chair “should take his allocated course release time,” and “the job as the primary advisor to prospective and current geography students should be transferred from the chair to one of the other faculty, who should be compensated with one course release time for this important work.”

Response: The department chair began taking course release time during spring semester 2012 and plans to continue teaching only two to three courses each semester. While the chair does much of the advising, the task is shared with other geography faculty and staff.

As recommended by the committee, during the 2012-13 academic year, the chair and faculty will continue to...

- (1) “Undertake a strategic planning process for the future direction of the department,” including “a long-term strategy to guide the hiring of new faculty or replacing regular faculty and adjuncts.” Two new adjunct instructors were hired in spring, 2012 and another is being hired for fall, 2012.
- (2) “Work with institutional offices on the formulation of a comprehensive assessment plan, develop methods and collect data for purposes of assessment of student outcomes and program effectiveness.” We will continue to assess our three main general education classes along with all courses currently being taught. As part of the program assessment, exit surveys will be administered to graduating seniors at the end of the senior research seminar class. An assessment timeline will be developed and coordinated with administrative support from Gail Niklason.
- (3) “Foster external outreach, in part through social media initiatives, to parents, students, alumni and members of the community.” We hope to organize an alumni association and annual meeting involving alumni, current students and employers.
- (4) “Maintain and publicize a yearly teaching schedule for the students as far in advance as possible.” The chair will draft an advising document showing suggested course sequences with notations of semesters when courses are typically offered.
- (5) We will continue to “develop and maintain awareness of what the geography department offers, both to the students, and to other programs, such as the Community Involvement Center, Office of Undergraduate Research and other interdisciplinary initiatives across campus.”

B. Administrative and Instructional Resources

Though the following concerns are largely dependent upon budgetary issues beyond our control, we hope to attain...

(1) "faculty salaries on par with similar institutions throughout the country and to replace outgoing faculty. As a retirement in the department is forthcoming, the sixth geography faculty line must be maintained." We will work with the Dean and other administrators to maintain a sixth position.

(2) "Geography faculty have done a good job of securing on-campus resources, such as Hemingway Foundation grants. An incentive system should be developed that provides both financial compensation and, even more important, release time to encourage and reward faculty research and acquisition of external funding." We will continue to seek funding as recommended above.

(3) Funding for community-based projects may include recommended "release time, as well as stronger, centralized staff support." Unfortunately, release time is often denied as part of internal funding opportunities.

(4) Current clerical staff support (part-time departmental secretary) is sufficient, but may be extended if necessary. The secretary will be asked to work on the departmental website.

"The students expressed a strong desire for a lab assistant for GIS courses and tutors for instructional support." We will seek tutorial support for GIS courses, and consider charging a student fee to help cover the costs of a GIS lab assistant.

(5) Long term plans include "increased information-technology-staff support, current software, and increasingly powerful computers" to support GIS and land use planning program initiatives.

C. Space and Facilities

(1) Building renovation plans should include adequate space for an updated cartography/GIS lab. The lab should be equipped with at least a dozen computers (PCs). One large lecture room for teaching physical geography courses should be equipped with 2 gas jets, 2 sinks, and wet and dry lab areas. We will request "adequate, secure storage [that] must be a part of the design for remodeled geography space." Additional new field equipment should include a dozen or more light-weight lap top computers (ipad IIs). The Geography dept. lacks a conference room; hence renovation should include a conference room equipped with a large conference table and seating for 20 people.

(2) "The geography students need to have one or more rooms to consult with adjunct faculty and to use as project rooms. These rooms would need desks, computers, and locked closets for equipment and supplies necessary for good classroom instruction. Also, students need to have a comfortable and inviting place to gather so they can consult with tutors and other like-minded students, learn about research and fieldwork opportunities, display their research, and most important, have a sense of place where they can interact as majors in the discipline. This is vital because many of them are nontraditional and commuter students." We have started by obtaining furniture for SS345 for senior seminars and hope to have a coded lock so that students can gain access to the lab. Currently, there is communal office space for adjunct faculty who wish to meet with students.

II. INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM AND CURRICULUM

A. Interdisciplinary Community Involvement

The Department of Geography will continue to work with the Community Involvement Center, the Bachelor of Integrated Studies program and the Office of Undergraduate Research.

B. Instructional Support

The committee determined that the fine teaching being done in the department could be enhanced by several actions.

- (1) As noted above, we will pursue “teaching lab assistants to work with cartography/GIS students.”
- (2) We continue to closely monitor enrollments and scheduling of both lower division (higher SCH) classes and upper division classes. This is done in consultation with Dean Harrold.
- (3) The committee suggested that introductory level courses “provide a consistency of structure, content and standards across all sections of the particular course.” As part of the course assessment process, we are developing such standards.
- (4) The department chair currently reviews all adjunct course evaluations and conducts periodic interviews. Adjunct faculty receive some financial incentives (conference travel expenses) and are eligible for some monetary awards. Adjunct faculty are engaged in departmental activities and have access to the equipment in the main office.

C. Outcomes Assessment

“The committee recommends that the university and college develop a standardized model for outcomes assessment for the College of Social Sciences that can be adapted to the geography program by the geography faculty. Furthermore, tabulation and interpretation of student performance results, student surveys, other measures of program performance, exit interviews and follow-up with alumni, all require significant time and effort to be done properly. Departments, especially small departments like geography, need expertise, staff and financial support to perform these evaluations in a complete and useful manner.”

While some institutional support along these lines exists, there is still the issue of creating the time to conduct assessment when teaching loads and research activities remain a high priority.

III. STUDENT EXPERIENCE

The review team made the following observations and recommendations.

- (1) “The upcoming renovation of the Social Sciences Building provides the department an opportunity to organize its space in the future to include a majors’ room.” We support this recommendation, and will encourage students to use the communal space in SS380.
- (2) The department will continue to have one or more faculty members to serve as advisors for the Geography Club – and the Geography Honorary (Gamma Theta Upsilon) “with the purpose of facilitating (not planning or conducting) activities and providing year-to-year continuity” as recommended by the committee.
- (3) The department chair, with assistance from other faculty, periodically meets with entities responsible for advising, and participates in “Major Fest” to share information on the department’s various degree programs and career opportunities.
- (4) “The lack of networking with recent department graduates was raised and it was suggested that a re-vitalized Geography Club could sponsor a Geography Career Day, in which recent graduates were invited to return to campus to share information about their career paths.” As previously noted, the chair will work to form a geography alumni association that can host such events as a “career day.” Currently, several alumni either teach or guest lecture for the department.
- (5) At least five or six geography students have received funding through the Office of Undergraduate Research (OUR), but our goal is to expand research activities that involve our students.