

WSU DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY PROGRAM REVIEW RESPONSE
Response from Geography faculty to Program Review Committee Report
March 21, 2017

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 19, 2017 following a site visit to the WSU campus on February 22. 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. While the review was very positive and most areas received ratings of “good” or “strength,” the following responses focus on areas of concern and recommendations noted by the committee.

CURRICULUM/FACULTY (Standards B and E)

The committee found there was some concern expressed under the Curriculum section of the report which was reiterated under the section on Faculty. To quote, “The allocation of regular teaching faculty to other administrative positions on campus is hampering the allocation of sufficient teaching resources to classes and sufficient energy to program development. Furthermore, “the alignment of teaching faculty with course scheduling is made more difficult by the allocation of regular faculty to other campus duties.”

The committee recommended that the Department “hire a total of two teaching professionals on a three year contract, with yearly performance reviews, to cover the loss of faculty to administration in other units. This would cover the essential courses, and provide a more stable, longer term solution than hiring adjuncts on a course by course basis. This approach would foster the investment by the teaching professionals into their course development, program development and the learning community through mentoring and advising, involvement in student activities and outreach, and providing energy to departmental initiatives.”

While Geography faculty members support the recommendation of hiring “teaching professionals,” we are also aware of budget constraints and have been able to cover course loads using adjunct instructors. Our recent hire of a full time instructor, Jesse Morris has in fact mitigated some of the concern that reviewers expressed. Jesse will be assisting with a “geography bowl” next fall semester to help generate interest in the major.

ACADEMIC ADVISING AND PROGRAM SUPPORT (Standards D and F)

The committee noted their concerns related to the “over dependency on the Chair for student advising, given his/her many other responsibilities, and the shortage of regular faculty over the next three years to supplement the Chair’s role.” “The Department would benefit from a half time academic advisor to take over some of the duties of the Chair and the administrative assistant. Also, as the new building is finished, a half time lab-equipment technical support person is essential to help set up classroom demonstrations, provide assistance in labs, maintain and store equipment and supplies.”

Though it was acknowledged that all faculty assist in advising our majors, it should be noted that the department also receives significant advising assistance from the College advisors (Seth Wilhelmson and his assistant). If funding becomes available, the department would indeed benefit from a technical support person to assist with cartography/GIS lab maintenance. Currently, we have a technical support person for the College (Ryan Stephens) who has been very successful in helping the department with these needs. As redevelopment of the department's website is an ongoing process, it would be beneficial to have administrative support in keeping the website and social media up to date.

We appreciate the thorough review by the committee and will address their concerns by following recommendations as departmental needs may shift over the coming years. We are confident that our current courses are being covered more than adequately despite the half time positions for three of the faculty members. Moving into a remodeled building should help address concerns regarding lab space and GIS teaching facilities. We will be hiring a new Administrative Specialist who may also assist in providing greater program support. Needs for "teaching professionals," or additional instructors and greater administrative support will certainly be reassessed on an annual basis.