

Geography & the Environment Program Review

College of Arts

Dean's Summary

Submitted by:
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Accepted by:
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Academic Planning and Priorities Committee in May 2019

GATE Program Review Deans Summary, April 2019

The GATE program review site visit occurred in May 2018 and the department submitted their response in January 2019. At the time of the review, the department of Geography and the Environment (GATE) was housed in the College of Arts, within the Faculty of Social Sciences. The department had connections with and representation within the Faculty of Science, where it is now housed under a newly structured unit as a School for Agriculture, Geography and Environment (SAGE), although the name may change. Given that the review occurred when the department was in the College of Arts, the Dean of Arts has submitted this summary.

The following programs were included in the review:

- i) BA, major in Geography
- ii) BSc, major in Physical Geography
- iii) BA, major in Honours Geography
- iv) BSc, major in Honours Physical Geography
- v) BA, minor in Geography
- vii) BSc, minor in Physical Geography
- viii) Certificate in Geographic Information Systems (GIS)
- ix) Certificate in Indigenous Maps, Films, Rights, and Land Claims

At the time of the review, the department had ten full-time permanent (Type B) faculty, two half-time permanent (Type B) lab instructor faculty, one faculty emeritus, and six adjunct faculty. The department was also home to two post-doctoral/research associates and three sessional faculty members (two in Limited Term Appointment (LTA) positions). The department has one staff position, namely the department assistant. The department head was released half-time from teaching. The department had 82 sections (course equivalents) annually, used for lab and non-lab courses. As lab courses are weighted more heavily than non-lab courses (two sections for lab courses and 90 hours), the number of courses offered was significantly less than the number of sections. In 2017, the department offered 53 scheduled classes in Geography, some cross-listed with other departments.

Contribution to the University's Strategic Goals, Vision, Mission, Plans and Values

The Review Committee found that the GATE program is aligned with the University's core undergraduate mission and values.

Strengths noted by the Review Committee included use of active learning pedagogies and GATE's tradition of promoting experiential learning through fieldwork, study tours, lab work, and community projects. Individual faculty members were recognized for infusing their lectures with social, cultural, economic, and environmental considerations, as well as promoting the importance of globalization and Indigeneity within and across Geography. Individual faculty were recognized for supporting undergraduate student research and research mobilization through presentations.

Gaps

The Review Committee noted that timetabling was not responsive to student needs due, in part, to departmental legacy timetabling and accommodation of faculty who only want to offer courses at certain times/days. Students expressed a need for more evening, online and off-the-Abbotsford-campus course offerings.

Response: The GATE (now SAGE) curriculum committee will be working to ensure timetables reflect student needs. Timetabling is a complicated task given the diversity of programs that Geography courses support and the need to avoid conflicts. The curriculum committee, supporting the department head, has mapped these potential conflicts. In addition, timetables reflect program needs of students by offering GEOG 111 on the Chilliwack campus, expanding offerings of GEOG 105 online and ensuring a variety of required courses are offered in evenings.

The Review Committee observed that students did not feel 'job ready' and/or 'job prepared'.

Response: GATE has submitted program changes to UEC to discontinue lower level courses that are no longer (or rarely) offered and reduce the overall number of lower-level courses. GATE has discontinued concentrations in Global Studies and Environmental Science from the BA major. In addition, the new BES (and BES-NS) programs, approved in summer 2018 after the program review, will result in redefining the purpose and vision for the BA and BSc programs, with a retreat planned for May 2019. This revisioning will be completed over the 2019-20 academic year with the possibility of new courses supported by new hires. Curriculum mapping of skills will also be completed over this coming year.

The Review Committee identified a 'substantive academic credential divide' among faculty affecting collegiality. This division was also noted as occurring between Human and Physical Geography and resulting in some of the experiential learning projects appearing disjointed, not well supported and not well promoted.

Response: The Department has since determined that their mutual goal is student success and that they will work towards this shared goal in a positive and constructive way.

Alignment with Institutional Learning Outcomes

Reviewers noted that GATE incorporates Institutional Learning Outcomes across individual courses and that faculty members are highly qualified in their areas and evince a basic understanding of how outcomes are incorporated.

Gaps

The committee identified the need to better scaffold courses, particularly the GIS courses.

Response: The outcomes of the department retreat resulted in detailed curriculum and program planning. The department committed to revisiting the program learning outcomes for the BA and BSc degrees and curriculum mapping to ensure that skills are captured in those outcomes and that courses ladder into one another and that skills are built throughout the programs and courses. This will occur over the 2019-20 academic year in conjunction with a revisioning of the BA/BSc programs.

Ministry, Professional/Industry and Academic Standards

The Review Committee recognized GATE's successful history of providing a provincially distinct undergraduate program in Geography and Environment Studies. The Committee noted the reputation of faculty as educators who genuinely care about the success of their students and who offer students a variety of skills that enhance their experiences and post-graduate success.

Gaps

The Committee identified an inability of GATE to conceptualize itself, which has contributed to a crisis of identity. They noted divergent ideas of the department as primarily a service department, as delivering skill development for employment, or as transitioning students to postgraduate degrees. The Committee noted the abundance of first year courses, many to help students meet their science requirement in the form of a variety of special topic options. The Review Committee suggested that the first year of the program should introduce students to the breadth of Human and Physical Geography and their long-term career opportunities. They suggested that terminal first year courses be moved to third year general interest, non-prerequisite, courses. They advised that first-year courses be taught by faculty who respect the differences and complementarity between the sub-disciplines and who collaborate to design these to include more experiential learning and flexibility (e.g. online components). In addition, the new BES (and BES-NS) programs, approved in summer 2018 after the program review, will result in a need to redefine the purpose and vision for the BA and BSc programs. This revisioning will be completed over the 2019-20 academic year with the possibility of new courses supported by our new hires. Curriculum mapping of skills will also be completed over this coming year.

Response: GATE identified priorities over a 10-15 year timescale as the basis for a vision. These included detail on experiential and field-based learning related to relevant skill development, appreciation of learning, higher order thinking and values including ethical practice and independence, information literacy, interdisciplinarity, well-roundedness, rigour and understanding the environment. The department identified a core set of geographic and life skills. The department identified capacities to build to ensure that graduating geography students have the education and skills to be successful citizens in whatever career they choose. The department has reduced its first year offerings, is introducing human geography into all courses and is planning to create a single non-scientific literacy course, possibly online. The department will remove the Environmental Science concentration due to the new BES degree, remove the Global Studies concentration due to the GDS major and minor and focus on urban and environment in Human Geography. These changes were submitted to the UEC approval process in April 2019.

The Committee noted that GATE students were not being taught to GIS-industry standards.

Response: Over the 2018-19, the curriculum and enrolment details of the GIS Certificate were evaluated. The GATE curriculum committee recommended to the department that the curriculum of the GIS certificate be revised to an associate certificate that focuses on applied GIS skills and meets the needs of students and employers in the Fraser Valley. This recommendation was approved by the department in March 2019. The geography program coordinator will be responsible for guiding the redevelopment of the certificate, in consultation with stakeholders, to meet deadlines for the Fall 2021 calendar.

GATE has many courses that transfer as unassigned credit and should ensure its course offerings maintain professional and academic standards, while supporting the mobility of students.

Response: Transfer credit will be brought up at the next Geography Articulation meeting in Spring 2019

The Review Committee recommended curriculum review to enable more co-op participation and the use the Teaching and Learning Centre by all faculty members.

Response: Proposed changes to the BA/BSc Honours and majors programs now includes a 'professional competency' that can be met through completion of internships/practicums, coop education terms, study

tours or relevant volunteer experience. The department invited a Faculty Development Consultant to a department meeting where he talked about what the Teaching and Learning Centre can offer faculty in SAGE.

Standards of Educational Practices

The Review Committee noted that GATE has what many would describe as a 'typical' geography and environmental program, at least in terms of the range of courses offered leading to BA or BSc degrees and that students receiving GATE degrees have an apparent balanced opportunity to receive instruction within the broad fields of human geography, physical geography and geomatics. They noted "numerous" examples of experiential learning opportunities offered both in laboratory and field settings and recognized the opportunity for senior undergraduate students to be involved in the research of faculty and post-doctoral fellows.

Gaps

The Committee noted that GATE should conduct regular assessments of its undergraduate course offerings, their content and times that they are offered and the time to completion that the curriculum allows.

Response: This will be reviewed over the 2019-20 academic year as part of a detailed curriculum review of the BA/BSc programs.

Utilization of Resources

The Review Committee noted that "[t]he large number of courses assigned to individual faculty means that when an individual goes on leave or is seconded to another unit, their absence impacts upon department program offerings. This issue is compounded by the breadth of the departmental program and the modest compliment of faculty...."

Response: Sabbatical timings have been reviewed but the same challenges exist and will be exacerbated by 2 new hires this year. Consultations with the Dean will take place during the summer of 2019 to deal with this issue.

GATE has since conducted two successful tenure track searches, one for an Assistant Professor in Urban Geography and one for an Assistant Professor in Human and Environmental Geography. The Urban Geography hire will be expected to teach human and urban geography courses and contribute to the delivery of core courses in spatial and quantitative methods. They will also contribute to teaching across traditional disciplinary boundaries. The hire in Human and Environmental Geography will be expected to teach courses in introductory human geography and environmental studies in addition to upper-level environmental management and assessment, and specialty courses in environmental policy/sustainable development/ political ecology/ indigenous environmental issues and field methods.

The Committee noted tensions between research and teaching in that the teaching workload of faculty members in the department is not conducive to tri-council research competitiveness and that teaching release is not a solution to this problem as it creates inequalities that make it difficult for faculty to attain their "potential"; and, it undermines "morale and collegiality". In addition they argued that the awarding of teaching releases leads to a 'research is more important than teaching' mentality.

Response: UFV has no plan to move to distinct teaching and research streams. Faculty who generate external grant funding can reduce their load to 5 courses. Faculty also have the opportunity to apply for special funds or releases if engaged in innovative teaching projects. Research is not regarded as of more importance than teaching at UFV; they are seen to be complementary activities and faculty who are behaving contrary to this are not acting in accordance with UFV's mandate or strategic directions.

The Review Committee was critical of many faculty assuming over-load instructional duties, or in some cases additional jobs, resulting in exhaustion and inability to improve, modify or experiment with assigned courses.

Response: The Dean may choose to approve or deny overloads depending on department needs and faculty performance. The interim Director will attend to these concerns.

The Review Committee advised not reducing the department assistant from 100% to 80%.

Response: Currently, the department assistant is a 100% position.

The Committee noted that "space provided for the Department is, at present, barely adequate. More and higher-quality dedicated space is required for: (a) the office and research needs of present and anticipated faculty; (b) the Department Administrative Assistant; (c) teaching purposes; and, (d) undergraduate students" as well as the need for privacy for the head's office.

Response: There is an opportunity for the new School of Agriculture, Geography and the Environment to submit space requests to Campus Planning.

Conclusion: Overview and Recommendations

Recommendation #1: That the members of the Department of Geography and the Environment, led by the Dean of the College of Arts and an External Facilitator, engage in a strategic planning exercise that uses the current Self Study as a solid starting point to address current trends and changing patterns across the Faculty and the University. GATE faculty should use the exercise to examine strengths and challenges within the Department, with the primary objective of invigorating the undergraduate program.

Recommendation #2: That the Dean of the College of Arts immediately initiate a search for an external candidate to assume leadership of the Department of Geography and Environment.

Response: members of GATE met with the Dean of College of Arts and the Acting Dean, Faculty of Science on May 31, 2018 to discuss ideas around vision and direction for the department. The outcome of this meeting was to explore the idea around developing a school in conjunction with Agriculture that would provide a place for curriculum and research in the fields of geography, environment, food, and agriculture. It was agreed that this school could exist in the Faculty of Science where the Bachelor of Agricultural Science degree is housed. Meetings with Agriculture and GATE were followed by a vote in October 2018 for all permanent members of both GATE and Agriculture. Members of GATE voted unanimously in favour of building a School of Agriculture, Geography and the Environment (temporary name) in the Faculty of Science. Following further consultation among administration, it was decided to move forward and the School was approved by the Board of Governors in November 2018. It was launched on April 1, 2019 under the direction of an interim director and sits in the Faculty of Science.

GATE voted to join in a school with Agriculture and GATE is keen to build a strong and vibrant school in collaboration with Agriculture colleagues who are in the process of considering options. The school will serve as the administrative home for all geography degree programs, the newly approved Bachelor of Environmental Studies and Bachelor of Environmental Studies - Natural Sciences and the Bachelor of Agricultural Science.

Additional recommendations from the GATE Self Study but not highlighted by the Review Committee

Recommendations related to Indigenization

- Develop an advisory group to help indigenize the curriculum and department.

In progress through the development of SAGE under the interim Director.

- Offer a course in Aboriginal Geographies or Sto:lo Geography in a special format taught by an Indigenous scholar or local community leader.

Pending

- GATE faculty to engage in a variety of PD activities around Indigenization.
- GATE faculty have been made aware of opportunities around Indigenization.
- More engagement in geography courses to respect and acknowledge research and teaching spaces in Indigenous communities and embrace traditional knowledge in courses.
- Individual faculty have been alerted to the opportunities.
- All courses to include acknowledgement of territory and department to explore better ways to welcome, engage and retain Aboriginal students.

Discussions with all faculty.

Recommendations related to Internationalization.

- To continue to increase our cultural awareness and expectations of international students.

The department met with the International Liaison Coordinator in Arts to talk about cultural expectations and experiences of international students. This was a productive session and many faculty commented that this would help them better support students.

- Develop a mentorship program between past international students completing introductory courses and current students to encourage and support student success.

This has been established.

- Continue to support students to complete Study Abroad semesters and provide transfer credit for those courses.

Addressed by department head on an as needed basis.

Recommendations related to enrolment.

- Build linkages to the Bachelors of Agriculture and pursue cross-listing arrangements with Agriculture courses.

Pending establishment of school with Agriculture as fully participating members.

- Do not remove the Planning concentration until an alternative is in place.

This has been kept.

- Advertise programs as a well-rounded degree and emphasize the transferable skills.

Pending

- Build relationships with High Schools and promote employment connections including planning and environment related programs.

Pending direction from new Director

- Consider integrating the GIS certificate with planning.

Will take place through GIS Certificate redesign.

- Work with UFV marketing to improve our promotional materials.

Will occur with formal launch of the school.

