

Geography Program Review

Faculty of Social Sciences, College of Arts

Dean's Summary

Submitted by:

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Program and Unit Review: Geography

Dean's Summary Report

Dr. Jacqueline Nolte

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In May 2013, the Program Review Committee conducted a site visit as part of a Program Review of the Geography Department. The external review team included members from other Canadian Universities and one internal member from another department.

Geography faculty teach a wide range of courses in Human Geography and in Physical Geography. Geography also offers courses in regional geography, GIS, remote sensing and quantitative methods and residential field work courses. The Department offers Major, Minors and Honours programs in two different degree streams (BAs or BScs). The BA stream allows students to choose from five concentrations, and there are three certificate programs, namely Extended Studies in Arts (Geography) and Sciences (Physical Geography) and GIS. Geography also participates in three Interdisciplinary programs (Global Development Studies Degree, Indian-Canada Studies Certificate and Indigenous Maps, Films, Rights, and Land Claims Certificate). Demand for the courses and programs is strong. FTEs were around 25% higher in 2011-12 compared to 2007-8. The 2011-12 total included 94 BA majors and 54 BA minors, 17 physical geography BSc students and four minors, and five honours students.

Overview

The Geography Department provided an outstanding self-study and impressed the external panel with its expertise and dedicated faculty members. The overall assessment of the Program Review Committee is that the department provides superior education and training for all students.

Department strengths include its distinctive dedication to teaching, experiential and problem-based learning, its provision of multiple opportunities for local and international placements and internships and its promotion of outstanding teaching-research synergies. Geography's faculty members are described as a high energy, qualified and experienced group. The reviewers were impressed by the substantial grants brought in for support of teaching and research activities, the department's impressive array of connections with other universities and organizations, its dedication to service and its engagement with community issues. The department is noted for its distinctive holistic view of the discipline and for being at the forefront within UFV, and probably across Canada, in researching and developing learning outcome templates modified to specific courses. Reviewers note that Geography has pioneered the adoption of teaching dossiers at UFV and is interested in conducting frequent student course evaluations. The department is described as fulfilling all aspects of the Strategic Plan and as being an exemplary university citizen.

Challenges faced by the department were seen by the reviewers to result from a combination of the dedication and expectations of department members and UFV's evolution as an institution.

The department has followed up this external review with a concise and practical summary of actions, many of which have been implemented already. The tables present the summary of the department's response to the external review, modified by additional comments from the Dean.

Summary of Reviewers' Recommendations

| # | Recommendation | Action | Time Frame |
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| 1 | <p>Fill faculty and staff vacancies and requests as funding allows. Additional Faculty Member: Physical Geography; Additional Faculty Member: Human Geography; Additional expertise in GIS in next 1-2 hires</p> <p>Additional shared staff position to oversee lab equipment</p> | <p>The department will develop a 5-year plus personnel plan and continue to request a new Physical Geography position. This position will benefit the proposed Agriculture degree and proposed Centre of Excellence in Agriculture. The request for a Physical Geographer will be presented by Geography at budget 2013 in light of the UFV Centre of Excellence in Agriculture. The Dean will keep a record of this request but will not be advocating for this position for 2014-15 due to a projected cut of circa 2.7% to the budget in Arts.</p> | Ongoing |
| 2 | <p>If Research Chair created, serious consideration to a noted faculty member</p> | <p>The faculty member's research achievements are indeed noteworthy. However, Program Reviews are not the route for such advocacy as the identification of a Research Chair arises under the direction of the AVP Research, Engagement and Graduate Studies.</p> | |
| 3 | <p>Department to retain focus on experiential, integrated learning and to consider program and course structure rationalization (e.g. reduction in classroom-based courses, IS/DS offerings, concentration options)</p> | <p>The department will maintain focus on experiential learning. The department has identified two to three courses for removal and has combined two concentrations into one. The three concentrations that will remain in the program by 2015 will be: Urban Studies, Environmental Science, and Global Issues. Changes have streamlined Geography programming. Changes to Honours program have been made to redirect some DS into this.</p> | <p>Curriculum changes sent to CWC in fall, with implementation, 12-24 mos.</p> <p>Workload changes TBD</p> |
| 6 | <p>a. Create new 1st year Physical Geography course to replace GEOG 101 and 102</p> <p>b. Evaluate 105 and 116</p> <p>c. Potential for lab instructors on 2nd year courses</p> | <p>The department has developed a model for a single course that could potentially be used at Chandigarh campus as well. Over the next 2-3 years GEOG 103 will replace 101 and 102; the department has decided to maintain GEOG 105 and 116. Discussion on lab instruction is postponed until discussions on scheduling of double sections of 1st year physical geography occur.</p> | <p>Curriculum changes sent to CWC in fall, with implementation over 12-24 mos.</p> |

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| 7 | Add flexibility to Honours degree | The department has reduced credits from 132 to 120 and removed requirement for Upper Level breadth. | Changes made Fall 2013 |
| 8 | Investigate alternative modes of delivery (block, on-line, hybrid), and do so slowly | The department has a proposal for a block scheduling model, in which three courses will be delivered one at a time in a 4-week condensed schedule. This model will allow for the integration of field study into the course model, with potential benefits for considering how to integrate unscheduled teaching into workloads. The department has developed an On-line/ hybrid plan. | Pending consultation with advisors, scheduling, etc. this could begin in Spring 2015 |
| 9 | a. Develop shared lab tech/ equipment support among Sciences b. Support for new Science Building | The department is working to develop a cost-sharing proposal for Arts and Sciences, regarding, for example, shared lab stores and equipment management. | 2013-14. The Dean of Science is working on a proposal for a new Science building. |
| 10 | a. New Faculty of Environment a low priority b. Department should remain positioned to attract 'green wave' of incoming students | There will be no action on item (a). Geography will continue to offer a concentration in environmental studies, and play an active role in the proposed EVST program. The Dean of Arts will work with the new Program Development Coordinator to assess the viability of the proposed degree in Environmental Studies and will encourage a closer working relationship between this group and the Agricultural Degree working group to ensure, at the very least, a flexibility of pathways for students in these proposed programs. | 2013-14 |
| 11 | Add additional workload weight to Human Geography courses with extensive field work | There will be no change to the weight of the Human Geography courses. The Dean is aware of the inequity of workload between Human and Physical Geographers but the issues need to be addressed in the context of the LOA on class size and flexible workload. | 2013-14 |

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| 12 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Recognize unscheduled teaching in teaching load b. Increased tolerance for low enrolments to reduce shift to IS c. Identify short-and long-term service needs for field study, placements, etc. | <p>Discussions around how to 'count' unscheduled teaching as part of workload will continue over the next academic year. The department recognizes the issues created by a structural reliance on IS/DS courses within its program (particularly in the 4th year) and has begun discussions regarding how these and unscheduled teaching commitments can be integrated into workload; this will take time and, unfortunately, resources are not currently available. The department can propose shifts in class size within the current collective agreement limits so as to arrive at a sustainable model for course delivery. Note that course enrolment is not a major contributor to IS numbers. Service-needs planning will commence in 2014 and will best be tied to recommended changes in BA breadth requirements.</p> | 2013-15 |
| 13 | No change in upper-level Human Geography credit counts | No change is proposed at this time. | N/A |
| 14 | "Continue" departmental "leadership role" in conducting frequent course evaluations | Ultimately, this is a bargaining issue; any additional evaluation is voluntary. | |
| 15 | Greater tolerance for low enrolments in upper-level physical geography | No specific change is proposed. The department has flexibility with regard to how it meets its FTE and tuition targets. The department can increase its course enrolments in lectures and labs at the lower level so as to accommodate low tolerance at the upper levels. | N/A |
| 16 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Continue liaising with Co-operative Education coordinator(s) b. Investigate possibility of integrating current placements into Co-op program | <p>The department will promote Co-op to students, in classes and in public spaces/ on-line. The potential for integrating current placements will need further analysis/ discussion. The department is developing a common portal for practica, internships and co-op and suggests this serve as a model for Arts.</p> | Ongoing |

| 17 | Review of department head compensation | This will not change without an assessment of department head compensation across all faculties. Currently, budget does not permit an increase in compensation. | |
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| Self-Study Recommendations | | | |
| # | Recommendation | Action | Time Frame |
| I | Develop level-specific learning outcomes | This was seen by reviewers as adding too much additional burden on department; however, some of this work is already done and the rest will continue as part of institutional curriculum mapping initiative. | 2013-2014 |
| II | Establish better alumni contacts and post-graduation achievement tracking | This was seen by reviewers as adding too much additional burden on department; however, some work on this is already underway and this could benefit the department's recruitment and retention efforts (e.g. list serve for alumni, better social media usage). | 2013-14 |
| III | Better student outreach at 1 st and 2 nd year | This was seen by reviewers as adding too much additional burden on the department; however, the department has identified this as necessary in order to encourage earlier enrolment in Geography courses and to ensure more timely movement through the program, and it will be reaching out to high schools. | Ongoing |
| IV | Create indigenization strategies | This was seen by reviewers as adding too much additional burden on department and the department has identified a need for additional support from the institution. The Associate Dean of Faculty will be asked to work with the department to develop strategies for indigenization that coincide with both UFV's strategic regional focus as well as with the UFV Education Plan. | 2013-14 |
| V | Tread slowly into on-line delivery | The department has developed an on-line/ hybrid plan, which shows limited expansion of current all on-line offerings. It will identify those courses that will benefit from the use of Blackboard ('Blackboard Assisted' courses). | Fall 2013 |

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| VI | Continue conversations around geographic integration (human, physical, techniques) | Reviewers identified the existing level of integration as a departmental strength. | N/A |
| VII | Complete short and long-term space planning | This is a priority for the department. A short-term space plan has already been drafted; a long-term space plan will be developed. The short term space plan will be submitted along with the department budget requests. | October 2013; Long term 2013-15. |
| VIII | Devise plans for shared wet lab, expanded student work space, and new GIS lab | This is contingent on funding for more building in Abbotsford, in the long term, a Science building and any possible funds forthcoming from a proposed Centre of Agricultural Excellence. | Ongoing |
| X | Close monitoring of impact of new programs on Geography enrolment | Ongoing | Ongoing |
| XI | Look for additional ways to improve support student engagement and GUS | Seen by reviewers as adding too much additional burden on department. However, discussions will continue. A student hub is required that could be shared with Biology students. | Ongoing |
| XII | Reduce upper-level Human Geography courses to 3 credits | This was not supported by reviewers due to the added complexity and workload in managing such a transition. | N/A |
| XV | Greater support from institution for Research Office, in order to better support student research needs | No action proposed. The Dean will work with the research office toward this end. | |
| XVI | Develop exit surveys for graduating students | This is already in progress. | 2013-14 |
| XVII | Develop a mentorship model for students | This was seen by reviewers as adding too much additional burden on department. The department will revisit this at later date, when most faculty are off sabbatical. | 2014-15 or 2015-16 |