

## **Program Performance Review: Culmination Meeting Memo Geography, B.A. and M.A. Programs**

The 2014-2015 Program Performance Review (PPR) process for the B.A. and M.A. Programs in Geography concluded with a culmination meeting on March 25, 2016.

The following people attended the meeting: Peter Nwosu (AVPAP), Sheryl Fontaine (Dean, HSS), Mark Drayse (Chair), Su Swarat (Director of Assessment and Educational Effectiveness).

During the meeting, the department was commended for its significant accomplishments, which include:

1. Faculty relations are exceptionally collegial. A strong sense of professional and scholarly community supports both student and faculty success.
2. Both undergraduate and graduate students alike spoke of the enormous sense of community they feel in the Department and repeatedly mentioned the supportive and approachable nature of the faculty.
3. Students receive a diverse geographical training and many undergraduate and graduate students regularly participate in professional conferences, often winning awards.
4. Department supports a full and diverse curriculum and has also developed a good set of GE courses that can serve as a strong base from which to recruit majors.
5. Department offers students great learning experiences such as study abroad programs and effective learning spaces, namely the Center for Remote Sensing and Environmental Analysis, the Geographic Learning Center and the newly created Qualitative Research Lab.
6. Department is highly supportive of student, student-faculty, and faculty research. Its annual "All Points of the Compass" conference provides an important venue for students.
7. Department has revised and updated its Assessment plan, including its Student Learning Outcomes, in accordance with CSUF best practices and the six-step assessment process.

The major recommendations and concerns raised through the PPR process were discussed. Suggestions on how to address them were provided:

1. Proposed department name change to Geography and Environmental Studies:
  - The Chair explained the rationale for the proposed name change. First, there is a national trend of dissolving the Geography department or merging it with another department, resulting in the loss of the unique contributions and characteristics of Geography. Second, the B.A. program almost has no incoming majors – most of the majors come from transfer students or students who enjoyed the GE courses offered by the Geography department. The faculty would like to grow the number of majors, and the proposed name change could help "rebrand" the department to make it more recognizable to the students. Third, most of what the faculty do revolves around environmental topics, and the proposed name change would appropriately reflect that. Fourth, similar initiatives are taking place at other CSU campuses (e.g. San Francisco State) and nationwide.
  - The department faculty has approved the proposed name change, and the proposal has been submitted to the Dean's office in November 2015.

## **Program Performance Review: Culmination Meeting Memo Geography, B.A. and M.A. Programs**

- The Dean's office is facilitating conversations within the college on this proposal. One of the issues is how the proposed name change impacts the current interdisciplinary Environment Studies program.
  - The Chair commented that the current M.S. Environment Studies program is unique, and student work in the program historically tends to have a stronger emphasis on the biology/NSM side. The Geography department currently does not have the interest or capacity to offer a program of this nature. The department name change will not result in degree program name changes, which means that the B.A./M.A. Geography degrees will be distinctive from the M.S. Environmental Studies degree. The Chair also indicated that the faculty would be resistant to a B.S. Environmental Studies degree, as it would undermine the B.S. Geography degree program.
2. Undergraduate student recruitment and outreach:
- The Chair commented that the faculty would like to see an increase in the number of undergraduate majors, aiming to reach 100 majors in a few years. Efforts have been made to increase majors, and the department is starting to see positive changes in the number of majors and minors.
  - The Dean recommended the department to create pipelines from high schools. The department has already been engaged with its alumni and local community colleges, and is now working with high schools (e.g. AP teachers) and local geography associations to promote the department at the K-12 level.
  - The department has recently re-designed its website, and met with the HSS Marketing Specialist to generate promotional materials.
  - The department has a strong alumni base, and the Chair is working on generating an annual report as a way to engage them further.
3. Graduate student recruitment:
- The department typically has 25-30 graduate students, and cannot accommodate more. The faculty are concerned with the fact that many graduate students take a long time to graduate or not graduate at all.
  - The Chair indicated that some efforts to streamline the curriculum have been implemented to help graduate students complete in 2 years. For example, Geography 500 has been restructured to help students develop a thesis proposal by the end of the course, which hopefully can serve as a springboard for student completion. The department has reorganized some of the special courses into regular courses to attract good candidates from outside the department, which would help increase the diversity among students.
4. Faculty hiring and mentoring:
- The external reviewers recommended a formal mentoring system for newly hired faculty. The Chair has implemented this system since last year.
  - The department would like to hire two additional faculty members in the areas of physical and environmental geography and GIS. The need comes from the recent retirement and leaving of two faculty members. One hiring request for AY16-17 has been put forward by the Dean's office to the Provost.
5. GIS courses and certificates:
- The Chair indicated that GIS is the No.1 marketable skill for a geography student. There are 3 GIS courses currently, which are offered each semester. The department would like to expand

**Program Performance Review: Culmination Meeting Memo  
Geography, B.A. and M.A. Programs**

the number of GIS courses, and has explored the possibility of offering specialized GIS courses for targeted populations (e.g. real estate, anthropology, health science).

- The Chair proposed to offer a GIS certificate, and is recommended to work with UEE to explore the existing UEE GIS certificate program and the possibility of offering self-support specialized GIS certificate programs (e.g. GIS for engineers). Such programs could be used to generate additional revenue for the department.

6. Department momentum:

- The external reviewers commended the department for its collegiality among faculty, but raised the concern that “too much collegiality can immobilize a department when action takes backseat to diplomacy and consensus.”
- The Chair acknowledged the concern that comfort may promote status quo. He indicated that the newly hired faculty has brought fresh energy to the department, and he is eager to “lead” (not just “manage”) the department to move forward.

The Chair expressed appreciation for the strong, long-term support from the college, and for the PPR process which allowed the department to identify “where we are” and “where we want to go”. The Dean commended the department for its accomplishments, and expressed commitment to help the department attract more students. The department is “poised to take off”, and desires to be one of the leading Geography departments in the CSU.