

**Chair's Response to the
External Reviewers' Report**

**Department of Geography
2015 Program Performance Review**

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Department Chair
17 April 2015**

Let me begin by thanking the external reviewers for meeting with the members of the Geography Department, including full-time faculty, staff, lecturers, graduate students, and undergraduate students. It was a pleasure to host the reviewers, and the “review day” was a positive experience for the entire Department. The Department welcomes the reviewers’ thoughtful report, which we have discussed. I will respond to each of their recommendations below. Other priorities identified by the Department can be found in the *Geography Self-Study Report* (see the New Long-Term Plan, pp. 41-44). Our overriding priority over the next seven years is to increase the number of Geography majors, by improving the visibility of the Department, making changes to the curriculum, and recruiting students.

1 The Geography Department plans to change its name to *Geography and Environmental Studies*. We agree that the Department should take this initial step before making substantive changes in the program (e.g. adding concentration or degree options). There are two major reasons to make this change. First, the new name will better reflect the Department’s mission and goals. The human-environment relation is a core theme in geography. Many courses in our current curriculum are focused on environmental geography, including several added since 2007. The name change will directly identify Geography as an environmental discipline. Second, the new name will increase the visibility of the Department to prospective majors. Because geography courses are a rare addition to high school curricula, incoming freshmen have little or no exposure to the discipline. However, all students have some awareness of environmental issues. Therefore, we believe that the name change will increase the visibility of the Department to prospective majors, making it more likely

that they will consider Geography as a major. To increase the number of majors, Geography needs to carve out its space as a department of choice for students interested in environmental issues. This is especially important given the growing significance of environmental sustainability, and pressing concerns regarding climate change and water resources in California.

- 2 The reviewers recommend creating a large Geographic Information Systems (GIS) cluster in the Department, and housing the University's GIS Certificate program in Geography, not Extended Education. They also recommend hiring two new faculty members to build the GIS program, including a GIS specialist able to teach courses in programming and advanced GIS.

GIS is a technical skill in high demand by employers in government, environmental organizations, and businesses. Many of our students receive GIS internships and jobs, and parlay their GIS training into productive careers. Currently, the Department offers three GIS courses (GEOG 281, GEOG 481, and GEOG 485), plus a field mapping course (GEOG 480). We agree that more courses should be added to the curriculum. This will be done in an incremental fashion, based on staffing resources. Dr. Carroll has created a new GIS course, which was submitted to the College in Fall 2014. We plan to add a G.E. GIS class, which could be an important introduction to the Department for potential majors.

We enthusiastically welcome the opportunity to build a stronger, forward-looking GIS focus in our program, and recognize that to do so fully will require resources, particularly in terms of one or more new faculty hires. The Department's priority for our next hire includes environmental geography (e.g. water resources), with expertise in GIS. Following this hire, we may be in a position to consider hiring a GIS specialist.

- 3 The reviewers recommend reorganizing the graduate program in terms of recruitment and the selection of thesis advisors. We recognize the need to improve the diversity and quality of recruits into the M.A. program. The graduate advisor, Dr. Taylor, has created a list of Geography Department undergraduate advisors in the Western United States. This semester, he sent announcements to regional geography associations (e.g. the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers) seeking applicants to the M.A. program. We will monitor the number, diversity, and quality of M.A. program recruits in the future.

Also, since each sub-field seminar (e.g. urban geography, political geography, economic geography) has the same course number and name (GEOG 530T), students from outside our program might not realize that we offer graduate courses in geography's subfields. We plan to re-number these courses to reflect the diversity of our graduate curriculum, and make the program more attractive to potential students.

In addition, the reviewers mentioned that students were “dissatisfied with the way advisors were assigned” (*External Reviewers’ Report*, p. 5). The Department has one graduate advisor (Dr. Taylor), plus thesis advisors. Thesis advisors are chosen by students, and not assigned by the Department. Since most of our M.A. students are former undergrads in the Department, they should be aware of faculty interests for the purposes of selecting a thesis advisor. However, to help students get focused on an area of research, we will require (1) a brief essay describing student interests on their applications, as suggested by the reviewers, and (2) that students opting for the thesis option select a thesis advisor before the end of the first year. We will also prepare a brief “road map” and a detailed “handbook” to the graduate program. A graduate orientation will be held as part of GEOG 500, or as a separate event. This will introduce students to faculty research interests and provide a forum for discussing requirements and procedures for the M.A. degree.

4 For a few years, we have been aware that our Department website was a poor portal for the Department. Fortunately, Dr. Salim has taken on the task of overhauling the website, which includes revising the design and updating the content. The Department wants to ensure that prospective majors and other students interested in Geography will use the website to identify courses and career possibilities, which we hope will benefit the Department in the form of more majors and higher enrollment.

5 The Department does not have an official mentoring system for new faculty. Informally, the Chair has taken on the responsibility of guiding new faculty through

the RTP process, and addressing any questions or concerns they have about teaching, research, and service. While continuing this practice as the current Chair, I will also assign a formal mentor to each of our junior faculty.

- 6 The reviewers' point about creating forward momentum is well taken. The Department recognizes that a number of times we have discussed a potential change to the curriculum or other program improvement in a faculty meeting, but not followed through with the required action. The Chair will take the responsibility of creating a Department Action Plan during the summer, to be implemented during the 2015-2016 academic year. (This will be followed by annual action plans). Action Plan items to be developed this summer will include Department priorities listed in the *Geography Self-Study*, as well as reviewers' recommendations. The Action Plan will identify specific tasks, procedures, timelines, and outcomes.

The Geography Department appreciates the recommendations made by the reviewers. These recommendations reinforce our priorities outlined in the Long-Term Plan. We look forward to working with the College and the University to implement these priorities and create a stronger Department of Geography.