



College of Humanities and Social Sciences
Office of the Dean
P.O. Box 6850
Fullerton, CA 92834-6850
T (657) 278-3528 / F (657) 657-278-5898

To: Su Swarat, Associate Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness

From: Dr. Sheryl Fontaine, Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences and Associate Dean of Student Relations, Dr. Jessica Stern

Date: March 17, 2023

Subject: Dean's Summary and Evaluation of the BA and MA in Geography and the Environment

The Department of Geography and the Environment is a dynamic department with nine tenure/tenure-track faculty and four full-time lecturers. They offer two BA degree programs (Geography and Geogrpahy with a concentration in Enviornmental Analysis, two certificant programs (Geospatial Technologies and Geographic Informationa Systems), a minor, and an MA program. They are in the process of developing an interdisciplinary Urban Studies minor. As of the Fall 2022 census they have 62 majors, 12 minors, 29 students pursuing certificates, and 13 graduate students. The department plays a key role in providing CSUF undergraduate students with general education courses in the physical, natural, and social sciences. They are a college leader in engaging students in High Impact Practices through labs, field trips, an annual conference, and career planning activities. Their excellent department leadership and high faculty morale is a point of commendation and admiration.

Dean Sheryl Fontaine, Associate Dean Jessica Stern, current chair Mark Drayse, and in-coming chair Trevis Matheus met on March 9 to discuss the Self Study, External Review Team (ERT) report, and Department's response to that report. In the remainder of this memo we record and build on that discussion about the department's short and long term priorities priorities.

1 Analyze and Strategize Student Recruitment and Retention

With the leadership of Dr. Zia Salim, the department was a poster child for how a department could leverage community college relationships, direct outreach to potential students in GE courses, and a department conference (All Points f the Compass) to grow the major. The department went from having 90 undergraduate students in their major/minor/certificate in F18 to 147 in S20. Since the pandemic they have lost ground, and in the Fall 22 census their number across their undergrad programs has dipped to 103. In their self study they commit to creating an Action Plan which will include resuming their promising practices of "active recruiting, teaching



engaging in-person classes, and strategic curricular and program planning.” We add to this that we believe that the GIS certificate and related coursework could be leveraged to attract more majors, including FTF, undeclared continuing students, and transfer students. Moreover, GIS is a valuable skill for many disciplines—from criminology, political science, Ethnic Studies, history--but not all chairs and advisors in those departments know about the GIS certificate. We recommend that the department better promote this program by sharing the information directly and regularly with other departments. We’ve discussed starting with a presentation at the HSS Council of Chairs.

Their graduate program (like almost all in the College) has also shrunk dramatically, with 26 students in F18 and 13 in F22. With the help of the Provost’s Graduate Student grant, which the college is directing to the three grad programs, including Geography and the Environment, that are having the hardest time enrolling enough students to keep their grad classes filled to the minimum numbers, the department hopes to attract more grad students into the F23 cohort. As we discussed at the March 9 meeting, another area of opportunity is to develop a TA program for graduate students to teach GEOG 110L lab classes. A TA program could provide financial support for students and a chance for them to develop their teaching skills and increase both their marketability at community colleges and their preparation for PhD programs. Associate Dean Stern will set up meetings with Geography and units across campus who run TA programs to discuss models.

The ERT also noted that not all tenure track faculty in the department are as present on campus as they had been prior to the pandemic and that this may be impacting the ability of the department to connect with potential second majors or minors. The ERT commended the open-door practice that continues to be normal among the adjuncts in the department. We applaud the department for starting to nudge all faculty back to campus by requiring each faculty member to teach at least one class in person each semester. The faculty should continue having conversations about the value that faculty presence on campus can have for student enrollment and department community. As we discussed at the March 9 meeting, the deans office encourages GEOG to offer the right number of in-person classes to allow more faculty to connect with students and to build the undergraduate programs.

2 Resources: Identify Space for Growth and Provide a New Line for Hire in Physical Geography

Lab spaces provide an opportunity for students to engage in the high impact practices of working with faculty members in small groups and conduct original research. Labs like the Cal-Dendro lab provide an opportunity to make the valuable work and research of Geography more visible to campus and potential students. We encourage the department to publicize their Cal-Dendro lab as much as possible.



The ERT's description of the ventilation in the lab space does give us pause, and we would like the department to arrange for an assessment by Environmental Health and Safety (safety@fullerton.edu, 657-278-7233) as soon as possible. We clearly heard that the Cal-Dendro lab would benefit from being in a larger space, and Dean Fontaine will add this request to the list of college space priorities.

As the Chair's response notes, before the department can submit a request to hire an additional tenure-track faculty member their tenure-track ratio will need to be less than 65% (they are currently at 68%). While we agree that the department's GE enrollment makes a case for an additional Physical Geographer, the department should use this time before they can hire to review their curricular vision and determine how to shape the next faculty position. As we discussed in the March 9 meeting, the ERT reported and the Chair noted that the next search will provide an excellent opportunity to increase the representative diversity of the faculty.

3 Curriculum

The department is well positioned to resume and expand their high impact practices by offering more field trips, field classes, study abroad trips, community engagement activities, and other hands-on opportunities for students. These opportunities help build community and engage students who may learn best when applying academic work to what they see out of classroom. We are glad that Dr. Matheus will be offering his *Mountain Field Ccass* and Zia Salim will be leading Cal State DC, both in summer 2023. Though incorporating high impact practices programs like these during the academic year in a way that is accessible to students who work and have family obligations can be a challenge, Associate Dean Stern is happy talk with the department about how to design accessible programs and assess a program's accessibility. Utilizing funding through internal grants, like IRA and College CCF, and fundraising may be key in making these opportunities affordable, so please continue working with Associate Dean Stern and Director of Development Melissa Martinez.

As we discussed during the March 9 meeting, we recommend that the department explore the "College and Major Snapshot" on the Tableau Dashboard system available here: <http://www.fullerton.edu/data/institutionalresearch/>. We note that the percentage of underrepresented minorities and first-generation students is lower in the major than it is in the university as a whole. It would be worth more study to determine the reasons why this may be the case. Although the ERT confirmed that the CSUF curriculum is consistent with curriculum in other departments, one wonders if there opportunities for innovation, There may be ways to make more transparent which of your courses engage the discipline of geography from diverse perspectives through course name and description changes or to develop new coursework in areas like critical physical geography. We recommend that you make it priority over the next two years to review



your curriculum as a department, which will also put you in compliance with UPS 100.007: *Diversity, Inclusion, Equity, and Social Justice at CSUF*, which reads, “All CSUF units shall look critically at their curriculum and programming through the lens of equity and inclusion.” This could be a job started by the department curriculum committee, which the Self Study suggests needs to be organized under a set of specific responsibilities (31).

We commend the department for incorporating career activities in their coursework (GEOG 400A) and conferences. As we grow the college *Passage to the Future* program we hope to be able to build synergy with your efforts. For example, the department could use the “Workforce Outcomes” dashboard on the Tableau Dashboard system mentioned above. Using a data request, the department could find out where, in general, their alumni are landing professionally.

Regarding the graduate program, the ERT wondered if the poor retention and graduation rates for graduate students may be related to the thesis requirement. We agree that the department should prioritize determining the barriers to graduate student degree completion and use what you learn to make appropriate adjustments. This suggestion is in alignment with the department plan to conduct “a survey of recent graduate students to inform our efforts to improve advising, retention, and completion” (31). These adjustments may also create a program that draws more student applicants.

In summary, we have added our main recommendations to the table presented by the department in their Chair’s Response.

Long-Term Plan	Reviewers’ Recommendations	Dean’s Additional Recommendations
1 - Increase the Number of Undergraduate Majors, Minors, and Certificate Candidates	1 - Analyze and Strategize Student Recruitment and Retention	<i>Publicize GIS certificates and, once developed, the Urban Studies minor</i> <i>Increase tenure-track on-campus presence</i>
2 - Increase the Number of Majors in the Graduate Program	1 - Analyze and Strategize Student Recruitment and Retention	<i>Explore creating a TA program for GEOG 110L</i>
3 - Improve Student Retention and Completion in the Graduate Program	1 - Analyze and Strategize Student Recruitment and Retention	<i>Conduct a study of grad student retention and graduation and revise program</i>



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		<i>accordingly</i>
4 - Create Department By-Laws and Strengthen Department Organization		
5 - Implement the Department's Strategic Plan through New Hires, Curriculum, and Potential Programs	3 - <i>Provide a New Line for a Hire in Physical Geography</i>	<i>Reconsider your curriculum through a lens of equity and inclusion.</i>
6 - Support Students through High-Impact Practices and Scholarships	4 - <i>Curriculum (Field Trips/ Joint Graduate Courses/ Career Preparation)</i>	<i>Ensure that field trips and other high impact practices are accessible for working students and students with household responsibilities.</i>
7 - Support Faculty Retention, Tenure, and Promotion		
8 - Build a Thriving Alumni Relations Program with a Regular Communications Strategy		<i>Explore the Alumni Outcomes dashboard through IR and request alumni contact information</i>
9 - Improve, Update, and Expand the Department's Classroom and Lab Facilities and Equipment	2 - <i>Identify Space for Growth</i>	<i>Request an assessment of Cal-Dendro Lab by Environmental Health and Safety</i> <i>Continue exploring a lab space for 110L</i>