

**Program Performance Review
Geography Department
California State University, Fullerton**

March 2015

Reviewers

**Rebecca Dolhinow,
Associate Professor, Women and Gender Studies Program, CSUF**

**Edward Jackiewicz,
Professor, Geography Department, CSUN**

**Glen MacDonald,
Distinguished Professor and John Muir Memorial Chair,
Geography Department, UCLA**

I. Introduction

This document presents the report of the external review committee on the Department of Geography at CSU Fullerton. The reviewers visited campus on March 12, 2015. We met with Dean Sheryl Fontaine and Interim Associate Dean Lynn Sargent as well as Department Chair Mark Drayse. We also had the opportunities to meet with both untenured and tenured faculty as well as lecturers and the department administrative team. We met with undergraduate and graduate students and observed two classes. It is based on these meetings and the Department produced self-study that we make the following comments and recommendations. These comments are kept concise and focus upon the most important commendations, challenges and recommendations identified during the visit.

II. Commendations

- Geography students love their department. Both undergraduate and graduate students alike spoke of the enormous sense of community they feel in the Department. This sense of community is intellectual, emotional and geographic. Students feel stimulated and supported in their academic endeavors by colleagues and faculty and they describe their shared physical space in the Department as important to their success. Students repeatedly mentioned the supportive and approachable nature of the faculty. These relationships with faculty are key to retention and faster times to graduation.
- Faculty engagement with the Department and a sense of wanting to develop innovative and valued educational programs are high. Faculty are willing to consider new ideas and work together for these goals.

- Faculty relations are exceptionally collegial. The new faculty felt welcomed, valued and easily integrated, while tenured faculty exhibited a sense of teamwork and collective understanding of the department's future that could easily be a role model.
- The department supports a full and diverse curriculum. New faculty are encouraged to create courses in their research areas and this leads to a wonderful diversity of classes. The department has also developed a good set of GE courses that can serve as a strong base from which to recruit majors.
- Students receive a diverse geographical training. Many students commented on how they are well versed in both Human and Physical Geography.
- The two new hires in 2014, added depth and breadth to the Cultural/Human Geography side of the program. They will be important contributors and have already added energy to the department.
- Many students, undergraduate and graduate, regularly participate in professional conferences and often win awards.
- The department has several study abroad and study away programs that are great learning experiences capturing the spirit of Geography.
- The department is equipped with effective learning spaces, namely the Center for Remote Sensing and Environmental Analysis and the Geographic Learning Center. These spaces are clearly popular with the students and help build and support the tightly knit departmental culture.
- The creation of a Qualitative Research Lab by newly appointed Assistant Professor DeLyser that will benefit many students.

III. Challenges

- Undergraduate numbers remain low relative to potential size given the explosive growth of interest in the geographical information sciences (GIS) and environmental studies, which integrate the social sciences - and need for graduates in these areas in the State

- Graduate student recruits could reflect a broader geographic base and completion times could be improved.
- Access and range of geographical information sciences technologies and substantive courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels could be improved for current students and could also serve to recruit new students in this burgeoning area.
- Early career faculty require formal mentoring through tenure and promotion.

IV. Recommendations

All recommendations will help increase majors and improve recruitment at both undergraduate and graduate levels.

- Pursue the proposed name change. Before any other major changes are made to the degree offerings in the Department we believe that the proposed name change would be a good idea. The name Geography and Environment *Studies* makes the most sense to us as it allows a natural split from the environmental *sciences* as they may be practiced in other places on campus. All of the arguments we heard for the name change made sense and are in line with the direction many departments across the country have moved. The name change should also coincide with the development of a broader environmental studies curriculum moving toward a degree and/or concentration option.
- Create a large GIS cluster/focus in the curriculum. Students at all levels expressed interest in more GIS classes and the possibility of a certificate in GIS. Certificates in GIS are very valuable on the job market and the ability to provide one in house would be a big recruitment tool for the department. The existing GIS certificate on campus is housed in UEE. We strongly believe

it should be moved to Geography, the home of most GIS certificates on university campuses. In no case should a UEE certificate preclude Geography in developing one for its majors.

- Reorganize the graduate program in terms of recruitment and advisor/research coordination. The current recruitment and acceptance procedures date back to the last recession and focus on quantity not quality of students. We recommend striving for a greater focus on quality and recruiting more from outside the department (all of the grad students we met had been undergrads in the department). Students also expressed dissatisfaction with the manner in which advisors were assigned and the timing of the assignment. If the department required an essay for admission it would be possible to pair incoming students with faculty from the start thus increasing their ability to move forward quickly in establishing a research agenda.
- Improve department web site. The current web site is out of date and not at all inviting for possible graduate or undergraduate students. We feel that there should be a designated person who can update the website on a regular basis.
- Put into place a mentoring system for new faculty. While all of the tenured faculty are very approachable and friendly this does not replace a proper mentor.
- Work on forward momentum in the department. It can be the case that too much collegiality is actually a bad thing in that it can immobilize a department when action takes the backseat to diplomacy and consensus. It is time for this department to seize the initiative, move swiftly and make some big and positive changes and soon.

V. Resources Requested to meet Recommendations

Certain resources will be necessary to adopt our recommendations.

- To build the GIS curriculum, at least two new faculty should be hired. As it stands now, there is no one faculty managing the GIS lab. We feel one hire should be a GIS technician who can develop and teach advanced GIS and programming courses. The other hire should also have advanced GIS skills and a focus in Environmental Geography. This will allow the department to strengthen not only its GIS curriculum, but also offer applied GIS courses that will increase students' competitiveness in the increasing challenging job market. Funding for a technical support specialist would also be very helpful to improve the technological side of the department
- We also recommend an increased budget for department promotion and recruitment. Moving forward, recruitment of majors is an important goal for the department and should be supported. Promotional materials and resources to visit nearby community colleges and high schools and host open houses in the department to showcase all the wonderful resources they have to offer.