

ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW  
DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY  
EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

February 2012

## Introduction

The Geography Department appreciates the thoughtful and thorough recommendations provided by the Review Team. This document presents our response to the recommendations and our plans for implementing the initiatives that are related to each recommendation. The timing of the external review was fortuitous because it occurred immediately following the departmental revision of the Strategic Plan (Appendix A), which was conducted during a departmental retreat. The recommendations of the external review team parallel many of the elements of the Strategic Plan. The plan elements will be discussed in the context of specific recommendations. With the exception of the proposal for a Master's degree in sustainable community planning and increased outreach through community engagement, the plan's initiatives have been delayed by the current budgetary situation which has led to decreased departmental funding.

We must also point out that this review has taken place at the same time that the Program Prioritization Committee was undertaking the University Self-Study and recommendations were recently released. Among those recommendations is to examine the Geography BA degree for possible elimination. This is contrary to the view of the External Reviewers who state: *"At this time, it is too early to evaluate the success of the BS in GIS & Technology or the BS in Atmospheric Science. Among these degrees, however, it is clear that the BA in Geography suffers from low enrollment. **Despite the relatively low numbers, we believe that there is a significant place for the BA degree in Geography. This degree program most closely suits students with an international focus, which has become increasingly important in a globalized world. Many of the courses used to meet the requirements of this major are important, and well-enrolled and serve the broader university community.**"* (Italics in original; bold added).

Our plans for implementing the recommendations are detailed below. We have grouped them somewhat differently than is found in the Review Team's document because of the overlap among recommendations in different categories. Further, we address them in priority order, based on what we in the Department believe are most critical, recognizing that all are important and will be addressed.

## Student Numbers and SCH

The reviewers pointed out the problems the ECU Geography Department faces with respect to student understanding of what geography is and what it has to offer – a problem that many geography departments around the country also face. At ECU, this translates into low SCH per FTE, which has also been identified by the Program Prioritization Committee as a weakness of the department. To address this problem, the reviewers made several recommendations.

1. Consider a departmental name change that acknowledges, at the least, the Planning Program. This recommendation reflects something that has been talked about in the department for some time. If a change is made, the new name would likely reflect the environmental focus that many of the faculty have and brings in the atmospheric sciences more directly. The arguments in

support of a name change center on the fact that it would better reflect what the department offers and would be useful in letting students know what the Department encompasses. However, any all-encompassing name change would also have drawbacks, including that it would potentially be too long and confusing. Such a long name would be abbreviated, thus perhaps losing the desired effect.

In response to this, the Chair will contact Geography Departments that have changed their names to solicit information on the impact (both positive and negative) the change has had, if any, on student interest. Following this, the Chair will bring a recommendation to the faculty for discussion and, if appropriate, a vote. (Recommendations by the end of Spring 2012, with action following during the next year).

2. Offer additional introductory courses to draw more students to the department. While Geography faculty do not believe new courses will necessarily solve the problem, especially because of the resource allocation issues it raises and the fact that not all sections of our introductory courses are full every semester, we intend to undertake a discussion of curricular revisions. The emphasis would be on what might attract more students, while still building on the expertise of the faculty. However, some strategic changes seem appropriate. As a result, we plan to do the following:
  - a. Consider a course called Race, Ethnicity, and Place that would combine elements of both geography and planning and would be attractive to a diverse student population
  - b. Develop alternative ways to teach introductory classes including:
    - i. Offer a GIS-related section (incorporating race among other topics) of GEOG 1000 (to be implemented in Fall 2013)
    - ii. Offer smaller sections of introductory level courses with a more hands-on approach, at the same time larger sections are offered. While we recognize this will result in a few less SCH over the short term, we believe it will increase both the number of students taking additional geography classes and the number of majors, thus providing an increase in SCH over the longer-term (feasibility and planning to be considered in Spring and Fall, 2012).
  - c. Evaluate the mix of lower-level and upper-level courses offered each semester to determine the most effective allocation of resources.
  - d. Work with other programs to develop concurrent majors and minors. Discussion has begun with Recreation and Leisure Studies and other programs will be identified (specifics to be officially proposed by the end of Fall, 2012).
  - e. Revisit programs with which we have had co-requisites and look for other opportunities. Although not restricted to introductory courses, we intend to initiate conversations with Deans and Chairs in Colleges and departments in which we believe our foundations

courses and those in geospatial technologies offer important advantages for their students. A number of Geography courses were required for various majors or were recommended electives. Too many of these have fallen by the wayside as curricula have been changed, yet both the knowledge and geospatial skills offered in Geography remain important in many fields. (Summer, 2012)

- f. Develop one or more DE courses aimed at high school students to allow them to take a course for college credit (feasibility analysis to be completed by the end of Spring 2013).

The Department Chair and the Curriculum Committee will work on these items together. However, developing DE classes for high school students is a time-consuming task that requires a great deal of outreach with schools and with high school curriculum experts, in addition to course development. A fixed term position that is devoted half-time to this and marketing efforts aimed at the schools (see marketing section below) is required to carry this out successfully, including implementation and assessment.

3. Packaging of Courses was found in several recommendations, including those relating to better tracking of student progress through spreadsheets, developing advising sheets that explain curriculum expectations, and developing an environmental minor. Our response and action plan with respect to these recommendations are:
  - a. The courses required for the BS in Applied Geography and the BA in Geography will be divided into categories that will illustrate various tracks students can choose to follow, such as social justice, environmental geography, coastal issues, etc. This will facilitate students' choices of courses around their interests as well as provide them with a better view of curricular expectations. Spreadsheets allowing easier tracking of progress toward the major will follow from this. (Options presented to faculty in Fall 2012).
  - b. We will investigate the process for developing two new minors: Environmental Geography (or similar name) and GIS (Spring 2013). The Undergraduate Committee will develop proposals during the next academic year.
  - c. The reviewers noted the importance of the BA degree in Geography, something that has been targeted for possible elimination through the Program Prioritization process. We agree with the reviewers and want to retain the degree. It is our belief that the packaging of courses and activities relating to marketing and outreach (below) will serve to strengthen numbers in the BA program.
4. Marketing/Outreach activities are found in several places, such as the recommendation to develop an environmental minor and to develop greater interaction with high schools. We have recognized the problem of lack of image that the field of geography has among prospective college students. In the Fall of 2010, we initiated a "Fridays with a Professor" program in which ECU Geography faculty spend part of a day at a high school talking about geography with both teachers and students. Unfortunately, that initiative has not been pursued with regularity and

has not always been targeted to AP classes in high schools. In keeping with the recommendations of the Review Team, we intend to:

- a. Reinvigorate the Fridays with a Professor initiative, with specific focus on high school classes, and on AP classes. When available, this will also give us the opportunity to promote the DE class for high school students. The Fixed Term position requested in Section 2, Offer Additional Introductory Courses, would also have responsibility for organizing and overseeing this because of contact with schools that is central to development of the DE course for high school students. (Ongoing; system to be developed by the end of Spring, 2013)
- b. The reviewers recommended cameo lectures by faculty and external constituents to facilitate exposing students to applications of the discipline. This has been done sporadically in the past, but we will be more intentional about it. Faculty will be asked to prepare 1 or 2 presentations/lectures that they can present to other classes, when appropriate. This will also serve to better integrate Geography and Planning and to show the relationships between the fields to students. (Ongoing)
- c. The Department had an ad hoc marketing committee last year. A marketing committee will be formalized as a full-fledged committee within the Department to facilitate follow-through and accountability on initiatives determined by the faculty and chair. (Spring 2012)

### **Integration**

The Review Team pointed out several areas where integration is lacking – within the Geography majors and between the Geography and Planning Programs. To facilitate integration, the Team recommended integrating major requirements through a common core, using faculty (particularly GIS faculty) more efficiently, adding a field methods course or practicum, hosting workshops, and updating the website to more prominently feature the Planning Program. While we are currently implementing some of these recommendations, we feel that others may not work. All of the recommendations pertaining to integration of the Geography and Planning programs must also be considered in the context of the Planning Accreditation Board (PAB) accreditation requirements, which require some level of autonomy for the Program, and may present a limiting factor to some integration opportunities

Among the actions that have already been initiated, we would point to the use of Geography GIS faculty to teach courses in Planning. Our intent is to continue this practice. We are investigating if these courses must be taught as PLAN courses rather than GEOG courses as a result of the PAB requirements. In addition, we have begun to explore the possibility of cross-listing courses to improve the integration of Geography and Planning. Within the last year, one course (GEOG/PLAN 4270: Water Resources Management and Planning) has been developed that does this already. We think that there might be others that could be identified in this way, such as Urban Geography (GEOG 3004) or Transportation Geography (GEOG 4310). However, there is a limit on the number of courses we want to cross-list so

that the minors can be preserved. At the same time, it is recognized that Geography faculty are under-utilized in the Planning Program, something that is being rectified with the proposed Masters in Community Planning, where courses taught by Geography faculty figure prominently.

In the case of integration within the Geography programs, we would point out that there is a set of common courses that all students in all of the undergraduate degrees take: GEOG 2400 and GEOG 4999. In addition, all BS degree students are required to take GEOG 2410. Only the Planning degree currently requires a practicum, though a field methods course has been taught in Geography in the past.

Actions to improve program integration can be separated into Geography/Planning initiatives and Geography initiatives. All actions will occur within the context laid out above.

Specific to Geography/Planning, the reviewers specifically recommend the following:

1. Initiate a regional workshop that demonstrates the synergies between geography and planning. Although we are not certain how a workshop would demonstrate synergies, we do understand the need for the department and those outside to understand the synergies that exist and that are possible. To that end, we will incorporate planners, whether practicing or academic, to present colloquia in the department. We have already done this successfully, but we also intend to invite planners from the region to join us. The Colloquium Committee will follow through on this and, in addition to distributing the flier widely, keep an up-to-date e-mail list of external constituents who might be interested. (To be initiated in Fall, 2012).
2. Highlight better the Planning Program on the Department web page. It is difficult to see how the Planning Program can be more prominent on the webpage, other than redesigning it altogether. We will look into ways to achieve this, recognizing that Planning has its own website. In addition, we know that the departmental web page needs more regular attention than it is getting. A web working group and a protocol will be established to address this. (Protocol to be completed by the end of Spring 2012)
3. Integrate courses. As discussed above, this has already begun. We will continue to explore ways of doing this through cross-listing of courses, or by including courses from each program as co-requisites in the other program. The Curriculum Committee will follow up on this in Fall 2012, and conduct an overall evaluation of the programs to see how this kind of integration could be implemented so that necessary curriculum changes can be approved in time for implementation in the Fall of 2011).

With regard to integration within the Geography Program, the reviewers identified the following issues or proposed the following solutions:

1. Packaging of courses in both the BA and BS degrees. This issue has discussed above in terms of the issues related to the image of Geography. Needless to say, any improvements we make in regard to improving the way concentration options and requirements are presented to the students will also improve the perceptions of integration.

2. Investigate options for a field methods course, taking into consideration faculty teaching loads, student needs and financial limitations, and how it would fit in the curriculum (required vs. elective; all degrees in the department vs. targeted ones, etc.). (Options known by end of Fall, 2012, in order to meet proposal deadline for new courses for 2013; to be undertaken by interested faculty).

### **Graduate Program**

The Review Team focused on the quality of our graduate students, recognizing our access to sufficient numbers of high quality graduate students is limited by two factors: the lack of a PhD Program and the limited graduate support available to Masters' students. At the Masters level, we do, in fact, receive applications from high quality students from both inside and outside ECU. Too often, however, we lose a significant number of these students (including our own) to universities that have better resources to support them, including the ability to provide tuition remissions or waivers to *all* funded Masters' students, whether in-state or out-of-state. Our ability to work with PhD students is limited because we do not have a PhD program. While some of our faculty have been involved with PhD students through the CRM program, this option is problematic for other geographers whose work is high quality but not centered on the coast. The reviewers recommended evaluation be undertaken to see how geography might be better integrated into the CRM program, perhaps through more policy courses and through greater inclusion of physical geographers.

The efforts listed in the sections above centering on the undergraduate programs also address the recommendation relating to the quantity and quality of undergraduate students as a pool for the graduate program. We believe the graduate students who come from our own undergraduate program are already high quality, but improvement in their preparation can only be beneficial.

The Review Team recommended that the Department provide a computer lab that is reserved for use by the graduate students. From our perspective, there are several problems associated with this recommendation including: a. upper level undergraduate students have similar hardware and software needs to graduate students; b. we lack the funds to provide dedicated hardware and software; and c. space is not available in Brewster to accommodate this. Instead we recommend

1. An electronic keypad lock on the door to the GIScience Center, which would give graduate students 24 hour access.

### **Faculty**

We very much appreciate the Review Team's recognition of the needs of faculty and of the resources needed to help them reach their full potential. However, the resource issues are mostly beyond the control of the department. Budget cuts and resource allocation over the past several years have hamstrung us (as they have other units on campus), and we await the final results of the Program Prioritization process.

The Review Team is right on target with the observation that our tenured faculty are ripe for “cherry-picking,” given their scholarly productivity and their national and, in some cases, international recognition. However, we find their recommendation of contingency plans for making competitive counter-offers to be a somewhat reactive response. By the time a faculty member is being courted by other institutions, it is too late. Although we are not saying anything that is probably not already known, we believe it is important enough to repeat. The university needs to find ways to keep its best faculty from looking in the first place, by offering competitive salaries (and raises) and by providing other resources that support their work. The Chair will continue to work with faculty to ascertain and set in motion what is needed to retain someone.

As the Review Team points out, professional development is key to the success of faculty, tenured, untenured, and fixed-term. Financial assistance to pursue such opportunities is one example of resources that support the work of faculty, and may be part of a proactive contingency plan. The Geography Department has experienced significant cuts to its operating budget and has little flexibility to provide much in the way of professional development support. There are two sets of funds from which such resources might be drawn but they are limited, and what goes to professional development cannot go to other critical expenses such as equipment purchase, maintenance, or other travel. The accounts are the Department’s portion of Facilities and Administration (F&A) funds that come from grants and the off-load account that comes from buy-outs. Both are limited, and unspent off-load money will be swept at the end of this fiscal year, limiting its longer term potential to help with this. Recognizing these limitations:

1. We will discuss the possible use of a portion of these funds at a faculty meeting, with consideration of what else these funds are used for. From this, a recommendation from the faculty will be made to proceed and how, or not to proceed, with this avenue of supporting professional development. (Ongoing)
2. We would request that the university administration consider a mechanism for faculty to obtain professional development support, in an effort to enhance the quality of their work as well as to provide incentives to stay at ECU. This might include allowing us to keep our off-load from year to year for professional development.

The Review Team correctly pointed out the importance of mentoring, for which the Department does not currently have a formal mechanism. The Planning Program Director’s contractual expectations include mentoring and several faculty have taken it upon themselves to serve as informal mentors for untenured faculty. We recognize the importance of this and will:

1. Look for models of mentoring programs in other departments and at other institutions
2. Determine how to evaluate the effectiveness of a formal mentoring program. The Personnel Committee will have responsibility for this, along with the Chair. We plan to have a program implemented by Spring, 2013.
3. In the meantime, the faculty will discuss implementing an informal program in Spring, 2012.



The recommendation to provide course releases for fixed term faculty can be problematic, given that funding for these positions has been approved for teaching. In the past, the Department utilized two fixed term faculty to oversee the GIScience Center. This ended when the Center lost its funding in 2009 and the faculty now teach full loads. Thus, the fixed term faculty, particularly those involved with GIS, need an opportunity to stay abreast of the changing technologies. However, the current ECU model makes this impossible.

### **Facilities and Funding**

The Review Team is cognizant of the significant reduction the Department's operating budget has seen over the past few years. The Team made several recommendations. One is the return to the department a portion of the fees raised from DE courses. At the current time, this is not allowable in the UNC system. The team also recommended a more aggressive fund-raising approach. This has been discussed among some faculty, and the Chair is well aware of the need to increase donations. Because this is a very time-consuming and on-going activity, the Chair will take responsibility for it and call on other faculty to assist as needed. To this end:

1. The Chair will work more closely with the Department Advancement Council to develop fund-raising strategies
2. The Departmental Newsletter, *Vectors*, will include a section in every issue that talks about donating to the department and how the money is used.
3. The Department is approaching its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and that will be used as a focal point for soliciting donations.

The Review Team also recognized the role that the Department plays with respect to the GIScience Center, particularly since funding to the Center has been cut. The Center is important to the Department and the University. There have been attempts to make the Center a money-making entity, but this is difficult given the distribution of GIS technology both on and off campus. However, it serves an important role in providing a service in terms of both GIS software and assistance to people and organizations both on and off campus. And it has been central to a number of grant proposals. The Departmental IT technician has had responsibility for managing the hardware and software in the Center, but he has resigned since receiving the Review Team's report. This put the department in a very difficult situation, given the lack of funding for the Center. The return of this position to the Department recently is very much appreciated.

The university has an opportunity to make the GIScience Center a central facility for geospatial technology on the Main Campus. The Department is considering integrating its laser scanning technology and software in the Center as well in order to produce additional opportunities to generate external funding from opportunities regionally and nationally (which it already does in its current

capacity as the Terrain Analysis Lab). However, to accomplish this, the Department is in need of support to keep the GIScience functioning, as the Review Team recognized. We see the need for a temporary buyout of a GIS faculty member to concentrate on moving the center to be self-sustaining. This would also require returning the budget for the Center.

### **Summary**

The Geography Department appreciates the work of the Review Team and the recommendations they have made. We believe that most of the recommendations will make the Department more successful and will strengthen it as we move forward. There is a lot to be done, some of which will be relatively straightforward, and some more difficult. The difficulties lie in two areas: where we need to consider a range of options and come to agreement and where we have little control. In addition, the faculty have many other things to accomplish, in addition to responding to the recommendations, particularly as the Program Prioritization process moves ahead and as we prepare for SACS re-accreditation. Thus, we have set target dates by which we expect to implement the recommendations, and we have outlined who or what committee will be responsible for overseeing implementation (Table 1). At the same time, we are constantly called on to respond to new needs/initiatives and these may at times take precedence over consideration of the recommendations. In any case, however, we expect to have completed the process within three years.

To achieve what we have set out, we request the following:

1. A Fixed Term position that would have responsibility for:
  - a. high school oriented DE courses,
  - b. overseeing Fridays with a Professor,
  - c. teaching classes
  - d. assisting with curriculum revision of lower level courses
2. A temporary buyout for a faculty member to move the GIScience Center to a position where it can become the central GIS facility on campus that it was originally proposed.

Table 1  
Recommendations/Actions/Responsibility/schedule

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Anticipated Timeframe</b>
Department name change	Research Options Recommend to Department	Chair	Recommendation by end of Spring 2012
Add Introductory courses	Revise existing courses Develop concurrent majors and minors Look for co-req opportunities Promote courses to colleges and departments Develop DE course for high school students	Curriculum Committee and Chair	Fall 2012 Spring 2013  Summer 2012  Summer 2012  Spring 2013
Packaging of courses	Develop possible major tracks Develop possible new minors Market BA degree	Undergraduate Committee " All	Fall 2012 Spring 2013 Ongoing
Marketing/Outreach	Reinvigorate Fridays with a Professor Utilize cameo lectures Establish Marketing Committee	Chair with Marketing Committee Chair and faculty Chair to establish	Spring 2013  Ongoing Spring 2012
Integration	Investigate Field Methods course Integrate courses Include planners in colloquia Revise Web	Interested faculty  Curriculum Committee Colloquium Committee Web working group	Fall 2012 to implement in 2013 Start Fall, 2012 Fall 2012 Spring 2012
Improve graduate program	Work to attract high quality students Develop competitive support options Evaluate CRM Electronic access to GIScience Center	Graduate Committee Grad School/University University University	Ongoing   Fall 2012
Improve faculty development	Proactively develop support to counter outside offers Develop faculty mentoring program Develop ways to support professional development	University and Chair Personnel Committee  Chair/Faculty/University	Ongoing Spring 2013  Spring 2012/ On-going
Funding and facilities	Increase fund-raising	Chair and faculty	Ongoing; start in Spring 2012
GIScience Center	Increase use by others	University	On-going

## Geography Department Strategic Plan

<b>Initiative/ Strategy</b>	<b>Time line</b>	<b>Resource needs</b>	<b>Evaluation/ Assessment</b>	<b>Outcome/ Product</b>	<b>ECU SAP Alignment</b>	<b>HCAS SAP Alignment</b>
Develop Master's Degree in Sustainable Community Planning	Permission to plan in 2011 with startup in Fall 2013	2.0 additional FTE; \$20,000 in operating; 1 GA	Short term: approval to plan; longer term: graduation of 25 by 2018	New professional degree addressing issues facing Eastern NC	1.4.8,2.3, 4.2.1, 4.1.3, 4.3.5	3.1, 10.1, 13.2
Integrate unit expertise in geography, planning and atmospheric science to address challenges of sustainability, livability and regional prosperity through a focus on environment, development and health.	Fall 2010 through Fall 2011	Costs to be met by department	Curricular revisions; submitted course proposals	New/revised courses; increased student & faculty research at intersection of topics; enhanced links with ECU Centers: natural hazards, sustainable tourism, health disparities, and diversity and inequality.	1.2, 2.3.1, 3.1, 4.1.3, 4.3.3, 4.3.4, 5.3.3	3.1, 10.1, 11, 14, 15
Share expertise with local and regional partners, including GIS, through outreach, continuing education, and data sharing	2011	Some costs to be met by department; reinstatement of GIScience Center	Number of DE courses developed; Number of outreach activities, incl. ESRI training classes	DE courses; establishment of partnerships & research projects; data/training through GIScience Center; community engagement; service learning activities	1.4.3, 2.3.1, 4.1, 4.2	10.1, 13.2, 14
Develop enhanced emphasis in globalization, global climate change and global environmental and social issues as a context for leadership and effective citizenship	Fall, 2010 through Fall, 2011	Costs to be met by department	Curricular revisions	Revision of existing courses; student and faculty cross-disciplinary research	1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.2, 4.1.1	1, 2.2, 3.1, 13
Develop Master's degree in physical geography with tracks in Atmospheric Science, GIST & Geomorphology	Permission to plan in 2013	Reallocations within unit ; 2 additional GA lines; increase in GA stipend amounts	Short term: approval to plan; longer term: graduation of 15 by 2019	New degree addressing interdisciplinary skills combined with strong scientific knowledge	1.3, 1.4.5, 2.3, 4.1, 4.2	3.1, 4, 10, 14