



Memorandum of Understanding

This MOU has been read and approved by:

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Suzanne Perlitsh Wechsler

Dean, College of Liberal Arts : Deborah Thien Date: 5/24/2024
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Institutional and Program Assessment Council (IPAC)

Program Review Report and MOU

Department of Geography
College of Liberal Arts

Degree programs:

BA Geography
MA Geography
MS Geographic Information Science

May 13, 2024

NARRATIVE AND ANALYSIS

Overview of the review process

The Department of Geography offers a BA in Geography (39 units) and three certificates which students can earn in conjunction with their BA degree – a certificate in Geographic Information Science (GIS), Certificate in Urban Studies, and a new Certificate in Geography for Security which first became available in 2019. Non-geography majors can earn a Minor in Geography and a Minor in Geographic Information Science. A new Bachelor of Science in Geography will start in fall 2024. The Department offers an MA in Geography and also an MS in Geographic Information Science (GIS) in collaboration with the College of Continuing and Professional Education (CPaCE). Students may earn the undergraduate certificates as post-baccalaureate certificates. Geography also supports the Environmental Science and Policy (ES&P) BA and BS programs with over a dozen courses listed as electives or requirements.

The department is divided into four areas of emphasis which are reflected in the department faculty composition, research areas and curriculum. These include:

- environmental/physical geography,
- human geography,
- geospatial techniques/methods, and
- global/regional studies.

This self-study for the Department of Geography at CSULB covered the period from 2015-16 through fall 2022. The self-study was received January 2023, the external review was completed on February 23-24, 2023 by Dr. Andrew Oliphant (SFSU) and Dr. Greg Okin (UCLA), and the final report and MOU were completed in February 2024. The prior self-study was completed in 2014 with the external review completed in 2016. The MOU was completed December 2016. The following recommendations were completed in the previous MOU period: review undergraduate PLOs to make them active, develop and implement a plan to assess student learning in master's programs, and provide biennial update on progress made towards MOU and assessment. The recommendation to analyze graduation rates for the MA program and decrease attrition and failure to complete the thesis is ongoing. The Department states the recommendation to work with the College to develop a tenure-track hiring plan needs to be revisited.

As part of this review, the following documents were consulted:

1. Previous reviews and MOU from 2016
2. Self-study from 2023
3. External reviewer report

COMMENDATIONS

Commendations are noted in the following areas:

1. The Department and its programs are highly regarded and highly ranked. Compared to other programs in the CSU the LB programs are also highly sought after.
2. The Department has an appropriate mission that is aligned with the university mission, and well-written Departmental Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) that are easily accessible on the Department's website. Individual program PLOs could not be located on the individual program websites.
3. Both tenure track and lecturer faculty are talented and dedicated to their students. Together they provide a range of interesting and innovative classes and research opportunities for students. Faculty are conducting cutting edge research, with a common focus on student involvement. Students, faculty and staff all expressed a strong sense of community and collaboration.
4. As enrollment trends have shifted faculty have responded creatively, including developing a suite of classes to maintain shifting GE requirements, developing a new BS Geography that capitalizes on existing strengths, and development of a blended program to help attract graduate students from within.
5. Curriculum – External reviewers praised the BA, MA and MS GIS programs as being well balanced, with the BA program offering multiple relevant paths. The use of several high-impact practices in the department was also praised. The Department offers service-learning, internships, field trips, field research, and collaborative research opportunities.
6. Assessment – the Department is to be commended for their active engagement in the assessment process, including annual assessment of PLOs and closing the loop activities following up on their previous MOU. During this review period they also revised their assessment plans and created a curriculum map for a 7-year cycle. They have assessed critical thinking, quantitative literacy, and geography's domains and concepts through direct measures (using AAC&U VALUE rubrics assessing assignments) and indirect assessment of students' perceptions of learning. They plan to assess DFW rates in future assessments. In recognition of the efforts required for assessment and closing the loop, the Department requests 3-units of assigned time.
7. Student feedback in the exit survey mentions the hands-on advising, support and approachability of professors, internship program, multi-disciplinarity of the courses and department culture, and project-focused learning as departmental strengths and significant to their success in the major.
8. The MSGSci program has consistent enrollments, and excellent graduation rates and time to graduation.

CONCERNS

Concerns and/or gaps are noted in the following areas:

1. MA enrollments and degree conferral.
 - a. Graduate headcount has held steady in the MA program in the mid-40s from 2016-22. The Department goal is to attract a yearly cohort of 10-12 students.

Although the Department admits an average of 11 students per year, the admit-to-enroll yield averages only 6 students. In addition, the MA program averages 6 MA degree conferrals per year. The Chancellor's Office requires 5 degree conferrals per year for a graduate program. To ensure the viability of the MA program moving forward, it is recommended that the program increase admit-to-enroll yield. and degrees conferred per year to 5 students. The program may also have the opportunity to admit more students into the program if enrolled students had improved 2- and 3- year times to graduation.

2. The self-study and external reviewers expressed concern regarding lack of support from the University in terms of teaching/service loads (including advising, outreach, and assessment), lack of tenure track hiring, and concern for low-enrolled programs.
3. The Department expresses concern over the move of facilities from PH-1 to LA-1, most notably the allocation of 1 Department Allocated Room (DAR) in comparison to the 2 rooms held previously. DAR rooms are determined by department FTES. There is concern that growth cannot occur without the facilities to offer face to face courses. In addition, the wet-lab has moved to a shared space in the Psychology building, and the Department expresses concern that there is no space for a graduate student to supervise Geography students in the lab.

OPPORTUNITIES

The following future opportunities are noted for the program:

1. Continue and expand the Department's relationship with the ES&P program, ensuring the Department is provided the appropriate FTEF and staff resources to support the program. Expand the role of Geography in ES&P in a way that is mutually beneficial to both departments.
2. Expand the GIS lab to a Geospatial Center.
3. Graduate Degrees – increase pipeline into the MA degree via blended BA/MA and BS/MS tracks. These degrees are approved and ready to implement Fall 2024.
4. Faculty. The faculty would like to consider 3 key areas for future tenured/tenure track or full-time lecturer hiring – remote sensing, spatial justice, and geography education. They would also like to hire a TT faculty in Geography for the ES&P program.
5. GE Enrollments. The Department offers 23 Area B1 Life Science courses and Area D3 courses in Social/Behavioral Sciences. Approximately 75% of the Departments' FTES come from GE offerings. Although increased focus on upper division B requirements has brought more FTES into the Department with the decline in D3 offerings, the students in UD-B have typically already declared a major, and therefore cannot find this major with exploration. The Department requests consideration of a CLA GE requirement of a global course to assist with their D3 enrollments.
6. BA major enrollments and degree conferral. The Department relies upon GE as a gateway into a major. Recent changes to GE requirements have decreased student opportunities to learn about the major. The reduction of Area D from 9 to 6 units in

2021 (leading to a 22% drop in course offerings) and the decrease in transfer students have decreased student exposure to the field of Geography.

- a. The Department has experienced a fall in undergraduate (UG) major headcount from 152 in 2016 to 108 in 2022.
 - b. Transfer students into the major have declined since 2020, with only 110 transfer students admit in Fall 2022
 - c. Although the BA program is on the bottom quartile of enrollees per year, it awards an average of 49 degrees per year. The Chancellor's Office requires at least 10 degrees conferred per year. Therefore, the BA program is enrolling an adequate number of students into the program in order to meet degree conferral requirements.
7. Undergraduate Student Success.
- a. The Department expressed concern that the University is "pushing students out faster", which makes it difficult to add certificates or minors. The Department has very few FTFY students that start within the Geography department. That small sample of 5 students had 4-year and 6-year graduation rates that meet or exceed GI 2025 benchmarks. Transfer student into the major, however, have average 2-year graduation rates of 43% and 4-year rates of 59%. These rates are considerably lower than the benchmark rates of 80% and 85%, respectively. In addition, FTFY students take 5.4 years to graduate with an average of 132.4 units; transfer student take 2.4 years to graduate earning an average of 138.8 units.
 - b. DFW course rates – The Department notes 6 courses that have consistently high DFW rates.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Department of Geography and the College of CLA it is recommended to:

1. Continue to complete annual assessments using both direct and indirect methods and report on closing the loop activities to illustrate that continuous learning outcome data are used to inform decision making. Provide an annual assessment update (due June 1) on your assessment activities and progress made towards MOU actions to the CLA dean, the Vice Provost for Academic Programs, and the Coordinator of Program Review and Assessment. Your review cycle will be from 2023-2030. A comprehensive self-study will be due June 2030 for a 2030-2031 Academic Year review process.
2. Consult with the Coordinator for Program Review to determine how the Assessment Management Software (AMS) and the CLA IPAC representative can help to alleviate some of the chair and faculty time needed for assessment and to ensure that the assessment plan is meaningful for the Department.
3. Develop a plan to attract more Geography majors to the BA program, the Departments' strategic planning measures to offset the loss of major enrollments including: on-campus dual enrollment, addition of lower division B4 courses, building minors and

degrees with other departments, and development of a CLA GE global course requirement to assist with D3 enrollments.

4. Develop and implement a plan to reduce time to graduation for BA and MA students. Consider analyzing students to grad using 5th semester majors data as well.
5. Create a plan to increase majors into the MA Geography program, with a goal to consistently graduate at least 5 students per year. Students participating in the Blended BA/MA and BS/MA programs should help to support this goal. The Department should follow enrollment trends into the MA with the new blended degrees.
6. Revisit and revise the faculty hiring plan for the Department, and consider having an ES&P faculty member with their tenure home in Geography, as well as faculty with expertise in remote sensing, spatial justice, and geography education.
7. Expand the role of Geography in ES&P in a way that is mutually beneficial to both departments.
8. Develop individual program learning outcomes specific to each degree, with master's level programs expecting "higher-order" outcomes than bachelor's level programs. These should be publicized on the academic program websites.
9. Determine a plan for Departmental Room Allocation as well as prioritization for teaching in University classrooms based on FTES growth.
10. Determine a plan to allow for supervision of students in the wet-lab located in the Psychology building.
11. Consider the need, benefits, and potential issues with expanding the GIS lab into a Geospatial center.