

Annual Assessment Report to the College 2011-12

College: _____ S&BS _____

Department: ___ Geography _____

Program: _____ Geography _____

Note: Please submit report to your department chair or program coordinator, the assessment office and to the Associate Dean of your College by September 28, 2012. You may submit a separate report for each program which conducted assessment activities.

Liaison: ___ Ron Davidson _____

1. Overview of Annual Assessment Project(s) (optional)

1a. Assessment Process Overview: Provide a brief overview of the assessment plan and process this year.

This year our plan was to repeat our assessment of the two PLOs we assessed last year in order to confirm last year's findings; as a relatively small department our annual assessment sample sizes are not large enough to provide statistics in which we are fully confident.

2. Student Learning Outcome Assessment Project: Answer questions according to the individual SLO assessed this year. If you assessed an additional SLO, report in the next chart below.

2a. Which Student Learning Outcome was measured this year?

SLO 2.5: Student demonstrates ability to collect data or information from field observation

2b. Does this learning outcome align with one of the following University Fundamental Learning Competencies? (check any which apply)

Critical Thinking _____ x _____

Oral Communication _____

Written Communication _____

Quantitative Literacy _____ x _____

Information Literacy _____ x _____

Other (which?) _____

2c. What direct and indirect instrument(s) were used to measure this SLO?

Capstone (Geography 490) projects.

2d. Describe the assessment design methodology: For example, was this SLO assessed longitudinally

(same students at different points) or was a cross-sectional comparison used (comparing freshmen with seniors)? If so, describe the assessment points used.

Our assessment strategy has been to assess Capstone (Geography 490) papers with reference to the benchmarks of whether or not the papers “meet” “exceed” or “do not meet” department expectations.

2e. Assessment Results & Analysis of this SLO: Provide a summary of how the evidence was analyzed and highlight important findings from collected evidence.

Capstone papers were read by the assessment committee to determine if students’ 490 projects entailed appropriate methods of data collection and observation in field-based research. Of 22 capstone papers examined, the results were as follows:

Exceeds expectations: 3
Meets expectations: 5
Not applicable: 14

These results reiterate and confirm the assessment finding on this PLO last year, that a relatively small minority of 490 students even attempt field-based research projects. Those who do, however, typically meet or exceed department expectations. Our conclusion about the significance of this data is being revised, however. Last year our interpretation was that students were shying away from field-based projects because they feel ill-prepared to do field work. We have made several program changes (described below) to better prepare students to carry out field work as a result. This year, the data have prompted us to begin to debate the merits of the capstone assignment itself (please see below).

2f. Use of Assessment Results of this SLO: Were assessment results from previous years or from this year used to make program changes in this reporting year?

Type of change:

1. Based on last year’s assessment data, the geography department made a Program Modification, which will go into effect in spring 2013, increasing the unit requirement of Geography 404 Field Studies from 1 to 3 units. This provides two hours per week seat time to discuss the role of field studies in geography, prepare for the field experience, and then discuss the results of field trips, as well as providing 32 hours total per semester to conduct field work.

2. Professor Jim Hayes has begun to offer two biogeography courses that have field-research components.

3. Professor Steve Graves has modified the Gateway Course (Geography 300) by expanding the section relevant to field experiments and observations from 2 to 3 weeks. The additional class time is devoted to data analysis and hypothesis testing.

4. The department faculty are more aggressively steering students to take Quantitative Geography (360), which will help prepare them to analyze field data.

Have any previous changes led to documented improvements in student learning? (describe)

It may take another semester or two to observe the effect of our program changes.

Some programs assess multiple SLOs each year. If your program assessed an additional SLO, report the process for that individual SLO below. If you need additional SLO charts, please cut & paste the empty chart as many times as needed. If you did NOT assess another SLO, skip this section.

2. Student Learning Outcome Assessment Project: Answer questions according to the individual SLO assessed this year. If you assessed an additional SLO, report in the next chart below.

2a. Which Student Learning Outcome was measured this year?

SLO 2.2: Student demonstrates ability to conduct a literature review.

2b. Does this learning outcome align with one of the following University Fundamental Learning Competencies? (check any which apply)

Critical Thinking _____

Oral Communication _____

Written Communication _____

Quantitative Literacy _____

Information Literacy _____

Other (which?) _____

2c. What direct and indirect instrument(s) were used to measure this SLO?

Capstone (Geography 490) projects.

2d. Describe the assessment design methodology: For example, was this SLO assessed longitudinally (same students at different points) or was a cross-sectional comparison used (comparing freshmen with seniors)? If so, describe the assessment points used.

Our assessment strategy has been to assess Capstone (Geography 490) papers with reference to the benchmarks of whether or not the papers “meet” “exceed” or “do not meet” department expectations.

2e. Assessment Results & Analysis of this SLO: Provide a summary of how the evidence was analyzed and highlight important findings from collected evidence.

Capstone papers were read by the assessment committee to determine if students’ 490 projects included literature reviews that met department standards. Of 22 capstone papers examined, the results were as follows:

Exceeds expectations: 5

Meets expectations: 11

Does not meet expectations: 6

These results show a slight decline in the quality of literature reviews since last year. Last year the committee debated the validity of the results because final drafts of 490 literature reviews reflect the (sometimes highly significant) editorial assistance of 490 faculty on earlier drafts. This year the faculty were interviewed to assess whether this was again the case. The conclusion was that, to a larger extent than last year, these literature reviews reflect students' actual abilities. This may account for the slight drop in overall scores.

2f. Use of Assessment Results of this SLO: Were assessment results from previous years or from this year used to make program changes in this reporting year?

Type of change:

Several changes to department classes to improve student performance on literature reviews were made last year and documented in last year's assessment report. Two changes were made this year:

1. Environmental Hazards (Geography 366) students are now required to read the scientific literature and use it in their written papers.
2. Arid Lands Geomorphology (Geography 467) students are now required to read several journal articles and submit a written and oral report on them.

However, of perhaps greater significance than these changes has been the opening of a discussion, described below, about whether or not we should modify geography 490 to decrease the significance of the literature review (see section 5 below).

Have any previous changes led to documented improvements in student learning? (describe)

No, for the reason cited above.

Some programs assess multiple SLOs each year. If your program assessed an additional SLO, report the process for that individual SLO below. If you need additional SLO charts, please cut & paste the empty chart as many times as needed. If you did NOT assess another SLO, skip this section.

How do your assessment activities connect with your program's strategic plan and/or 5-yr assessment plan?

3.

Our 5-year plan calls for ongoing assessment of SLO 2.2 and 2.4. The department believes that senior

geography students should display a basic proficiency in writing literature reviews and in the skills of field data collection or observation. However, this is being re-thought (please see section 5 below).

4. Other information, assessment or reflective activities or processes not captured above.

The assessment committee updated the course-Department PLO alignment matrix based on fall 2011 courses. The matrix reveals wide disparities in emphasis given to various PLOs. In the 51 classes offered in fall 2011, the following the PLOs were emphasized most often:

SLO 1.1: Students recognize, recall and identify facts and ideas constituent of the core content knowledge of physical geography. (31/51)

SLO 1.2: Students recognize, recall and identify facts and ideas constituent of the core content knowledge of human geography. (21/51)

SLO 3.1: Student uses logic to effectively argue a point or make a case. (22/51)

SLO 4.3: Student communicates effectively using maps, tables, charts or other graphics. (22/51)

The following PLOs were emphasized the least often:

PLO 2.2: Student demonstrates ability to construct a literature review (5/51)

PLO 2.4: Student demonstrates ability to collect data or information from field observation (6/51)

PLO 3.3: Student uses a statistical instrument to evaluate a hypothesis (6/51)

These findings seem significant to the department, revealing that the sum total of our course priorities do not align with all of our stated program goals. We already knew that we were not offering enough field-based classes and experience (and have made numerous changes to address this shortcoming). However, that so few geography courses offer training in writing literature reviews has led us in two directions. On one hand, we have made the documented course changes to increase, slightly, our departmental emphasis on literature reviews. On the other hand, we have begun to debate whether or not we should continue to consider the literature review as an important PLO. The majority of our students do not continue to graduate school, and might be better served by training in web-based project design or some other skills rather than the writing of academic literature reviews. Indeed, the entire content of Geography 490 is now being questioned, and we have called a faculty meeting specifically to discuss this issue.

We have also reflected a good deal on the assessment process this year. We believe that our current assessment process captures student performance with respect to given benchmarks, but does less well with “value added”. For this reason, we are planning (once again, this time with free software) to institute an online portfolio that will capture changes in student performance over time. An online portfolio will, in addition, provide a more rounded view of students’ progress than a single capstone assignment. (If we are assessing student mapping skills, for example, we can expect to find sample maps in an online portfolio even if a particular student does not include a map in their 490 project.)

Our re-thinking of assessment is ongoing, with the draft plan attached.

Finally, starting next year we will submit our GIS program assessment as part of our report to the college. This may entail re-formatting the assessment form to best display this data.

- 5. Has someone in your program completed, submitted or published a manuscript which uses or describes assessment activities in your program? Please provide citation or discuss.**

Please see our draft assessment draft and course-PLO alignment matrix (emailed along with this report).