PART I: THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The primary mission of Geography Program, as identified in the self-study for its 2005 program review, is to provide students in the geography major (B.A.) with a solid undergraduate liberal arts education focused on geography. A secondary goal is to prepare majors with the knowledge and skills needed to pursue a graduate degree in geography or to obtain employment in a geography-related field. The Geography Department has been formally assessing its performance in these areas via its own internal assessment process since 2000-2001. The process has undergone continuous modification since then, most notably as part of a 2002-2003 university-wide assessment initiative undertaken by Academic Affairs under the direction of Linda Buckley, and in response to recommendations from the Department’s 2005 program review. The current assessment process described below builds on these earlier efforts.

Goals and Learning Outcomes

The Geography Department has identified the following goals and learning objectives for students in the undergraduate Geography program:

Goals: Students completing the B.A. degree in Geography will:

1. Have an understanding of the nature of Geography as an academic discipline, including familiarity with its history and principal subfields;

2. Demonstrate (a) a knowledge of the basic concepts of physical and human geography and (b) competency in selected geographic techniques;

3. Display competency in the graphic expression of geographic/spatial data (maps, photographs, graphs, data bases);

4. Display competency in written expression with respect to clarity, logical expression, and effective argument;

5. Understand and apply the basic research skills, including the ability to (a) critically evaluate the research of others and (b) effectively design and carry out a research project on one’s own;

6. Acquire knowledge and skills sufficient to allow one to pursue advanced study in geography or find employment in a geography-related field.
Learning Outcomes: Various learning outcomes are identified to help the student achieve the above goals. The outcomes reflect the different levels of learning set forth in Bloom’s taxonomy, including basic knowledge and comprehension, application, analysis and evaluation, and synthesis. Key outcomes, along with the means for their assessment, are found in the accompanying table. Although the learning outcomes are addressed in required courses throughout the major, there are nonetheless key courses that play a central role in helping students achieve these outcomes. These are also identified in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Outcome</th>
<th>Relevant Course(s)</th>
<th>Means of Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>GEOG 1, GEOG 2, GEOG 11, GEOG 118 and upper-division breadth requirements</td>
<td>Baseline knowledge quiz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Display knowledge of the history of Geography as an academic discipline and a familiarity with its contemporary models, approaches, and theories.</td>
<td>GEOG 102, GEOG 190</td>
<td>Baseline knowledge quiz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>GEOG 3 and the upper-division techniques courses</td>
<td>GEOG 190 senior project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate competency in one or more of the basic geographic tools/techniques for data collection, display, and analysis.</td>
<td>GEOG 3, GEOG 105, GEOG 107, GEOG 109, GEOG 110, GEOG 163</td>
<td>Baseline knowledge quiz; GEOG 190 senior project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>GEOG 102, GEOG 190</td>
<td>GEOG 190 senior project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show written competency in the description and analysis of geographic subject matter.</td>
<td>GEOG 102, GEOG 190</td>
<td>GEOG 190 senior project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six</td>
<td>GEOG 102, GEOG 190</td>
<td>GEOG 102, GEOG 190 senior project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>GEOG 190</td>
<td>GEOG 190 senior project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesize geographic models, data, and methodologies in research design.</td>
<td>The major as a whole</td>
<td>Graduating senior interview; periodic alumni survey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methods of Assessment

The Geography Department’s assessment process is designed (1) to evaluate the degree to which students in the Geography B.A. program achieve the goals and outcomes above and (2) to identify potential areas for improvement. While course-level assessment of student performance takes place within the courses themselves, assessment of student performance at the programmatic level employs an additional set of assessment measures. Central to the Department’s assessment process are two courses: GEOG 102 (Ideas & Skills in Geography), a gateway course taken by all students during their first fall semester in the major, and GEOG 190 (Senior Research Seminar in Geography) a capstone course, which requires the student to synthesize much of what he or she has learned as a major through design of an individualized research project. The latter course is taken during the student’s final semester before graduation. Based on recommendations from the Department’s last program review, these two classes have become central to the Geography assessment process.

In all, the Department employs the following six assessment measures:

1. **Baseline Quiz:** This instrument assesses student knowledge of basic geographic concepts and facts. It consists of approximately 40 objective questions and is brief, taking only about 20 minutes to administer. A version of it is given to students in both the gateway course (GEOG 102) and the senior seminar (GEOG 190). Its purpose is twofold: to identify the student’s level of basic geographic knowledge at both the time of entering the program and at the end of his or her time in the major (thus measuring “value added”), and to identify those areas in which student knowledge is deemed deficient and corrective measures may be called for. The quiz contents are divided more or less evenly among topics in physical geography, human geography, and graphic literacy (maps and graphs). *Faculty responsible:* Prof. Krabacher

2. **Senior Research Project:** The central focus of the capstone course, GEOG 190 (Senior Research Seminar in Geography), is design and implementation of a research project. In doing so students have to complete the various phases of the research process (articulating the research question/hypothesis, literature review, selection of methodologies, data collection and analysis, graphical presentation, discussion of findings), and report their findings in a paper and oral presentation. The exercise is one of synthesis, requiring the student to draw upon the broad range of skills and knowledge acquired in the major. A standardized grading rubric based on a model proposed by the Center for Teaching and Learning was employed in the evaluation for the first time in Spring 2008. *Faculty responsible:* Profs. Datel, Krabacher, and Wanket

3. **Senior Seminar Reflective Evaluation:** Students in the GEOG 190 senior seminar are asked to complete a questionnaire as part of the end-of-semester course evaluation. While most questions relate to the student’s GEOG 190 experience, some are broader in scope, addressing such topics as: subject matter in which students felt it would have been desirable to have had greater experience prior to taking the seminar, prior courses that were most useful to them in completing the seminar research project, etc. These
responses are useful in identifying student perceptions of curriculum strengths and weaknesses.  

**Faculty responsible:** Profs. Datel, Krabacher, and Wanket

4. **Graduating Senior Exit Interview:** At the end of each semester, the department chair invites graduating seniors to participate in an unstructured conversation about their experiences in the major. This ordinarily takes place in a relaxed setting, usually over pizza and beverages in the University Union. The purpose is to assess the level of student satisfaction with the major and identify what students perceive as strengths, weaknesses, and desirable changes. **Faculty responsible:** Department Chair

5. **NSM Graduating Senior Survey (new this year):** The NSM Dean has instituted a college-wide survey of all graduating seniors. The questionnaire requests information on undergraduate internships and work experiences as well as each student’s current employment situation and plans for the future, whether academic or otherwise.

6. **Periodic Alumni Survey:** The Office of Institutional Research conducts a survey of each program’s alumni on a regular basis. These surveys assess alumni perceptions of (1) the usefulness of the major in realizing post-graduation academic and/or career goals and (2) the strengths and weaknesses of the Geography curriculum, given the perspective lent by time. Because these OIR surveys occur only every six years, the department has started to experiment with conducting its own e-mail based surveys of recent graduates. **Faculty responsible:** Department Chair

The Geography Department’s assessment process has been undergoing regular modification over the past several years, and several pieces only recently have fallen into place. For example, only during the past four years has GEOG 190 been offered in the current format that requires an integrative capstone experience. In addition, the standardized grading rubric for measure #2 used in GEOG 190 was only introduced in Spring 2008. As another example, although the baseline quiz (measure #1) has been administered in GEOG 190 for several years, the Department only started to administer it in GEOG 102 in Fall 2006. Thus, the ability to examine changes over time will improve.

**Feedback**

Assessment is useful only to the extent that the results are used to inform curricular and programmatic planning. The primary means by which the Department incorporates assessment results into its planning is through the annual faculty retreat. Initiated in 2002, the Geography Department annual retreat is held in the week before the fall semester begins. At the retreat, broader issues concerning the program and its curriculum are discussed and needed changes or modifications identified. Assessment results inform a significant part of that discussion.
Assessment Cycle

The Geography program’s annual assessment activities occur over a 12-month cycle, beginning in the fall semester of a given academic year and culminating at the annual Geography Department faculty retreat in August just prior the opening of the fall semester of the following academic year. Thus:

- **Fall Semester** Baseline quiz administered in gateway course (GEOG 102); graduating seniors interviewed; NSM survey administered.

- **Spring Semester** Baseline quiz administered in capstone course (GEOG 190); senior projects graded using standard rubric (GEOG 190); reflective evaluations completed (GEOG 190); graduating seniors interviewed; NSM survey administered; informal e-mail surveys sent to recent alumni.

- **August** Geography faculty retreat: discussion/analysis of assessment data and possible program changes identified in response; possible modifications to assessment process proposed.

For the 2010-2011 academic year, therefore, the assessment cycle began with the Fall 2010 semester and will conclude at the Geography faculty retreat on August 26, 2011.

A more formal survey of alumni is conducted in cooperation with the Office of Institutional Research on a six-year cycle. One was conducted in Summer 2010, so the informal e-mail survey of our alumni was not employed this year; some results from the OIR survey will be discussed instead.

PART II: 2010-2011 ASSESSMENT OUTCOMES

As explained above, the 2010-2011 assessment cycle will not be completed until the Geography Department faculty retreat takes place in August 2011. As a result, this section contains:

- Summary of actions taken based on discussion of 2009-2010 assessment results.
- Summary of the 2010-2011 assessment results for selected learning outcomes.
- Possible points for consideration at the August 2011 Geography Department retreat.

Department Response to 2009-2010 Assessment Results

During 2009-2010 Learning Outcomes #1, #2, #5, #7, and #8 were selected for assessment. The detailed discussion of those assessment results is in last year’s report. Here we report on our response to those results, which we formulated at our August 2010 retreat.
Learning Outcome #1: Identify and describe basic concepts and patterns in physical and human geography.

This outcome was measured using the department’s “baseline quiz.” In 2009-2010, GEOG 190 students did better than GEOG 102 students in all three categories. As in previous years, the biggest improvement in scores between 102 and 190 occurred in the category of mapping and graphic analysis.

At the retreat, we discussed the quiz questions on which students performed the worst, to alert the appropriate faculty to the need for adequate coverage of related topics. We also agreed that some of the questions needed improvement or replacement. Later in the year, three groups of faculty (representing human geography, physical geography, and mapping/graphic analysis) reviewed all the questions in their area and submitted some new and improved questions. Professor Krabacher then incorporated these into the baseline quiz.

We also discussed tracking the performances on the baseline quiz of individual students, not just rough cohorts. We agreed to attempt this in future years.

Learning Outcome #2: Display knowledge of the history of Geography as an academic discipline and a familiarity with its contemporary models, approaches, and theories.

In 2009-2010 we added five questions to the baseline quiz that asked students about some of the main philosophies of human geography that have emerged since World War II. We expected performance on these questions to be quite poor in 102, since this is not a subject that is given much attention in introductory human geography. These expectations were met. Unfortunately, the 190 students also did poorly on these questions, in part because the students taking 190 from a physical geographer had studied the history of contemporary physical geography.

We decided to put virtually all the history of the discipline into GEOG 102, removing it from 190. That way, the histories of the discipline that students receive will not strongly emphasize only human geography or physical geography. Professor Krabacher, who teaches 102, can handle the breadth of this charge. It will mean less depth of coverage of pre-20th-century geography. The 190 capstone course will be further freed up to emphasize the student research projects and the contemporary approaches and methods used in them.

Learning Outcome #5: Shows written competency in the description and analysis of geographic subject matter.

This outcome is assessed in GEOG 190, which also satisfies the intensive writing graduation requirement. As required of all courses meeting the intensive writing requirement, evaluation and feedback on student writing occurs repeatedly (almost every week) throughout the semester. The faculty members who teach 190 use a standard rubric to evaluate student writing. Student scores on the “Overall Written Expression” part of the rubric were quite satisfactory across all three sections taught in 2009-2010, so no immediate action was considered necessary. At the same time, we did commit ourselves to involvement in the campus-wide discussion of assessing
writing across all Writing Intensive courses. This we did, as all three instructors of GEOG 190 participated in the focus groups on this topic organized by the campus Writing Center.

Learning Outcome #7: Synthesize geographic models, data, and methodologies in research design.

This learning outcome basically re-states the principal purpose of the GEOG 190 senior seminar, which is to provide graduating seniors with a capstone experience in which they can synthesize their previously acquired geographic skills and knowledge in a semester-long project. Student performance is evaluated using a rubric that rates the project on seven separate elements. While that performance was good across the whole rubric and across all sections, lowest marks were received on Literature Review, Methodology Choice and Description, and Presentation of Results (Data and Analysis). Prof. Krabacher agreed to continue to strengthen his GEOG 102 assignment that involves students carefully reading and analyzing research articles, so that they are exposed as juniors to the elements of the research process. Students have been further exposed to academic research articles in a number of our other upper division courses; faculty who do this pledged to continue this practice.

Learning Outcome #8: Acquire the overall competencies necessary to success in post-graduate education (graduate school, et al.) and careers.

This learning outcome was assessed via group discussion between the chair and graduating seniors in a relaxed setting. Students had many positive things to say about the geography program, and they felt that overall it had provided them with the skills and knowledge they would need to be successful in their post-graduation careers. Improvements that they would like to see were a spruced up Amador Hall, more opportunities to work with research/lab equipment, some classes offered more frequently, a reduction of overlapping material in the physical geography classes (a result of several of them serving a GE population as well as our majors), and a speaker series. At the retreat the faculty touched on the issue of basic material having to be repeated in the upper division physical courses, and we discussed more vigorously enforcing prerequisites to help reduce the problem, although this has the potential to reduce enrollments. We will experiment with this in Spring 2012. While we would like to be able to offer some courses more often, the pressures on class size preclude that at this time, even though our number of majors has risen over the last several years from about 70 to about 100. As for hands-on research with scientific equipment, that is partly constrained by geography’s lack of a staff technician, a unique situation among the natural science departments in NSM. We endorsed the idea of a speaker series, and in Fall 2010 the geography club put together a series of three faculty lectures.

Faculty also noted the need to collect some additional kinds of data relating to student outcomes and expected to do so as part of the upcoming Self Study and Program Review. As it turned out, some of these data are now being gathered via the NSM graduating student survey organized by Dean Jill Trainer (further discussed below).
2010-2011 Assessment Results

During 2010-2011 Learning Outcomes #1, #3, #4, #6, and #8 were selected for assessment.

Learning Outcome #1: Identify and describe basic concepts and patterns in physical and human geography.

This outcome was assessed by means of the baseline quiz, which is administered to incoming majors (mostly juniors) in GEOG 102 and to graduating seniors in GEOG 190. In past years (the bottom three tables below) we compared scores between these two classes in the same academic year, with the result that we were comparing different groups of students. This year (the top table below) we compared scores from Fall 2009’s GEOG 102 to those from Spring 2011’s GEOG 190, since that way we were testing many of the same students (and in fact, 18 of the 25 students in GEOG 190 in S 2011 had also been in GEOG 102 in F 2009).

The quiz’s 40 questions were divided approximately evenly among the three broad categories of physical geography, human geography, and mapping and graphic literacy. Overall results are shown in the accompanying tables; the previous three years’ results are shown for purposes of comparison, although it is important to keep in mind that some questions changed from year to year.

**QUIZ RESULTS for 2010-2011**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Physical Geog.</th>
<th>Human Geog</th>
<th>Mapping</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GEOG 102 Fall 09</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>49.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEOG 190 Spr 11</td>
<td>68.4</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>63.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Numbers = overall percentage of questions answered correctly
n = 41 for 102 (F 2009); n = 25 for 190 (S 2011)*

**QUIZ RESULTS for 2009-2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Physical Geog.</th>
<th>Human Geog</th>
<th>Mapping</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GEOG 102</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>49.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEOG 190</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>59.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Numbers = overall percentage of questions answered correctly
n = 41 for 102 (F 2009); n = 29 for 190 (F2009 &S2010)*

**QUIZ RESULTS for 2008-2009**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Physical Geog.</th>
<th>Human Geog</th>
<th>Mapping</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GEOG 102</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>51.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEOG 190</td>
<td>66.2</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Numbers = overall percentage of questions answered correctly
n = 35 for 102 (F 2008); n = 19 for 190 (S 2009)*

**QUIZ RESULTS for 2007-2008**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Physical Geog.</th>
<th>Human Geog</th>
<th>Mapping</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GEOG 102</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>53.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEOG 190</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>56.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Numbers = overall percentage of questions answered correctly*
Regarding the seemingly low percentages of correct answers: while not optimal, this result is not entirely unexpected. While one can always hope, it is not likely that a student will have been exposed to all topics in our discipline, which traverses physical science, social science, and humanities. Nonetheless, all students should have encountered some of the subject matter being tested. What is important, therefore, are the relative performances among categories and anomalous high or low results for specific questions/topics.

In 2010-2011, GEOG 190 students did significantly better than GEOG 102 students in all three categories. As in previous years, the biggest improvement in scores between 102 and 190 occurred in the category of mapping and graphic analysis. The students as a group showed the biggest improvements we have seen yet in physical geography and human geography.

Insofar as performance in particular subject matter areas is concerned, students did poorly on questions dealing with the following:

- Köppen climate classification system
- Cloud composition
- Endemic species
- Language geography
- The age of civilization
- The Demographic Transition
- Post-war philosophies of human geography

**Learning Outcome #3: Demonstrate competency in one or more of the basic geographic tools/techniques for data collection, display, and analysis.**

This outcome was assessed by means of the senior project in GEOG 190. The relevant senior project rubric item is “Presentation of Results (Data and Analysis)”:

- 5 points – Data are complete, properly reported, and correctly analyzed.
- 4 points – Data are appropriate but some mistakes in reporting and/or analysis are evident; may be less than complete.
- 3 points – Data are seriously incomplete or improperly reported; major gaps and/or mistakes appear in the analysis.

In the three sections of GEOG 190 in Spring 2011 (n = 28), the average scores on this rubric item were 4.4, 3.7, and 3.4 (out of 5.0). These were the lowest or next to lowest averages among the seven rubric elements. In two of the three sections of GEOG 190, students’ answers to the reflective questionnaire on the senior project did not reveal that they would have liked more prior experience with gathering and presenting data, but 4 of 11 students in the third section did express that desire. We do not consider this year’s generally lower scores on this item to be a trend. Still, it doesn’t hurt to be reminded of the usefulness of class assignments throughout our curriculum that have students collecting, organizing, displaying, and analyzing data.
Learning Outcome #4: Demonstrate graphic literacy in the use and analysis of maps, graphs, and spatial data sets.

This outcome was assessed by means of questions on the baseline quiz, which tested students’ general knowledge of the subject matter, and the senior seminar student project in which students are expected to apply their knowledge of maps, charts, and other graphics.

Results on the relevant section of the baseline quiz showed an average improvement of 19.5 percentage points between GEOG 102 in Fall 2009 and GEOG 190 in Spring 2011. This is the largest improvement among the three subareas of knowledge tested. This is not surprising, since all students take coursework in this subarea as part of their concentrations, while only some take human geography and some take physical geography, generally not both, as part of their concentrations.

The rubric used to evaluate the student research projects in GEOG 190 includes an assessment of the students’ ability to use and produce maps and other graphics. On a 5-4-3-point scale, students taking 190 in Spring 2011 (n = 28) received the following average scores: 4.3 (Section 1), 4.3 (Section 2), 4.0 (Section 3). These results (from three different instructors) suggest that students’ use of graphics is “generally relevant, fairly complete, and of acceptable quality.” Six out of 28 students completing the 190 reflective questionnaire expressed the wish that they had had more prior experience “making maps.”

Learning Outcome #6: Analyze and evaluate scholarly writing within the discipline.

This outcome was assessed by means of the senior project in GEOG 190. The relevant senior project rubric item is “Literature Review”:

- 5 points – Relevant, thorough, organized.
- 4 points – Generally relevant; some extraneous material and/or key sources missed; organization needs tightening.
- 3 points – Merely lists studies; little or no logic to selection of sources; poorly organized.

On this scale, students taking 190 in Spring 2011 (n = 28) received the following average scores: 4.5 (Section 1), 3.7 (Section 2), 3.8 (Section 3). The excellent scores in Section 1 are probably the result of two factors—that, according to the instructor, “this was an exceptionally talented group of students,” and that the instructor spent more time on this part of the research process than in the past. Overall, 10 of 28 students received only a “3” for their literature reviews, which does suggest students need more practice with this.

Learning Outcome #8: Acquire the overall competencies necessary to success in post-graduate education (graduate school, et al.) and careers.

This learning outcome is assessed via graduating senior exit interviews and NSM survey questionnaires (the latter are new this year), and alumni questionnaires. No questionnaires were sent to alumni by the department this year, but alumni did receive (in summer 2010) a survey
from the Office of Institutional Research as part of Geography’s current Self Study and Program Review. Some results from that survey will be discussed briefly in this section.

Each semester, graduating seniors are invited to participate in a group conversation in a relaxed setting (the Hive in the University Union). The comments below were generated by 6 graduating seniors in Fall 2010 and 12 in Spring 2011:

Aspects of the geography program that were praised by this group of graduating seniors:

- A feeling of “community” or “family” among geography students and faculty
- Professors who have diverse interests, draw on their own experiences in their teaching, and are “available,” “helpful,” “personable,” and “chat-able”
- The department’s ties to the “real” world, via faculty and student connections, the field courses, and internships
- Useful course content and assignments, including “things you would do in a job”
- Opportunities to make presentations in classes
- The way themes and topics show up in more than one class and are considered from different angles
- The Geography Club, including its trips to Underground Sacramento, Lake Natoma, and Point Reyes

Things they would like to see improved or added:

- Spruced up physical space in Amador Hall
- Additional specialized GIS courses
- Additional regional courses
- Reduction of overlap in the physical geography classes
- Less ancient history, more contemporary methods in GEOG 102
- If geography courses must go on-line, they should be the GE courses
- Extended lab hours
- A speaker series, possibly for credit
- More opportunities to meet with future employers
- Mandatory advising
- Undergrad RA and TA positions
- Clarification for community college students of what will and will not count toward our BA degree
- A master’s program in geography

In the past, one of the questions asked at the group exit interviews concerned future plans. Now, data are gathered on this topic via the NSM graduating senior survey; the results are as follows. Twenty-eight students completed the survey (9 in the fall and 19 in the spring). Of those, only 3 already had secured jobs in their field before graduation. Most of the rest would be seeking such employment. These results reflect the economy, including the fact that the sectors that normally hire most of our graduates, (1) government and (2) private firms involved in planning, development, and environmental management, have suffered disproportionately. None of our students had applied to a teaching credential program; four expressed some interest. Three students had applied to graduate school (with one already having decided to attend Oregon State
University), with two more expecting to do so in the next year. One student had applied to professional school. Ten students reported that they had gotten internships while at CSUS. These were at the following agencies: Opening Doors, Inc., Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG), Placer County Water Agency, California State Water Resources Control Board, California State Water Quality Control Board, California State Department of Parks & Recreation, Caltrans, Bureau of Reclamation, and Bureau of Land Management.

The 2010 geography alumni survey handled by OIR included some questions related to preparation for graduate school and careers, making them relevant to Learning Outcome #8.

Q15. Please rate how well the Geography curriculum succeeded in performing/providing the following: Coursework in the Geography program . . . - Prepared you for graduate school
Of the 22 alumni answering this question, 2 said very poorly or poorly, 5 said fair, and 15 said well or very well.

Q16. Please rate how well the Geography curriculum succeeded in performing/providing the following: Coursework in the Geography program . . . - Prepared you for subsequent employment in the field
Of the 33 alumni answering this question, 3 said very poorly or poorly, 13 said fair, and 17 said well or very well.

When asked an open-ended question about how the geography program could be strengthened, 27 people responded. One-third made general or specific comments in favor of more GIS training. Six wanted students to have more help in getting jobs, and five recommended more internships. Four suggested more field work. The rest of the comments were quite diverse, although several called for more quantitative and technical training.

Generally speaking, graduating seniors expressed a high level of satisfaction with their experience in our program, although many did not yet have professional jobs at the time of graduation. Recent alumni were positive about their preparation for grad school and employment. Their most common recommendations for program improvement involved more GIS, internships, and field work, and more help finding jobs.

Feedback/Anticipated Actions

We will discuss the 2010-2011 assessment results contained in this report and take appropriate actions at our annual retreat in August 2011. Possible discussion and action items include:

1. Continue our on-going critique of the baseline quiz questions. Make decisions regarding particular questions—are they good questions and we need to do a better job of teaching the content they ask about or are they inappropriate or poorly worded questions? Discuss Paul C. Sutton’s PowerPoint presentation (see endnote below).
2. Discuss the “Writing Intensive Outcomes Draft” produced by the Writing Center. Discuss these outcomes in the specific context of GEOG 190. Provide Dan and Fiona with any relevant feedback.

3. Discuss course assignments across the geography curriculum that involve students in collecting, organizing, displaying, and analyzing data. Further encourage such assignments.

4. Discuss course assignments across the geography curriculum that involve students in finding, reading, and summarizing scholarly literature. Further encourage such assignments. Although not directly correlated with a particular learning outcome, also discuss assignments that involve talking to an expert in a subject.

5. In conjunction with our Self Study, discuss some of the suggestions made by our graduating seniors and our alumni for improving our program’s preparation of students for graduate school and professional employment.

Endnote

In March 2011, Paul C. Sutton, Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in Geography at the University of Denver contacted us with some questions about our assessment plan, which he had found on line. He asked for a copy of our baseline quiz. The following month he sent us a PowerPoint presentation that he had given at the annual meeting of the Association of American Geographers, in which our learning outcomes were discussed. The presentation includes some interesting data from DU regarding the limits of student course evaluations in distinguishing effective from ineffective teaching. Prof. Sutton was experiencing some blowback from his faculty about using a baseline quiz such as ours for assessment, but he was convinced it was worth trying. Thanks to him for sharing his work.