

ASSESSMENT PLAN

Our 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. The numbers in brackets after each goal indicate related campus Baccalaureate Learning Goals.

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 [1,2];
2. Demonstrate (a) a knowledge of the basic concepts of physical and human geography [1, 2] and (b) competency in selected geographic techniques [1,3];
3. Display competency in the graphic expression of geographic/spatial data (maps, photographs, graphs, data bases) [1,3];
4. Display competency in written expression with respect to clarity, logical expression, and effective argument [1, 2, 3];
5. Understand and apply the basic research skills, including the ability to (a) critically evaluate the research of others [1, 2, 3, 4] and (b) effectively design and carry out a research project on one's own [5];

6. Acquire knowledge and skills sufficient to allow one to pursue advanced study in geography or find employment in a geography-related field [1, 2, 3, 4, 5].

(CSUS Baccalaureate Learning Goals: [1] Competence in the Disciplines; [2] Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural Worlds; [3] Intellectual and Practical Skills; [4] Personal and Social Responsibility; [5] Integrative Learning.)

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.

Learning Outcome	Relevant Course(s)	Means of Assessment
<p>One</p> <p>Identify and describe basic concepts and patterns in physical and human geography.</p>	<p>GEOG 1, GEOG 2, GEOG 11, GEOG 118 and upper-division breadth requirements</p>	<p>Baseline knowledge quiz</p>
<p>Two</p> <p>Display knowledge of the history of Geography as an academic discipline and a familiarity with its contemporary models, approaches, and theories.</p>	<p>GEOG 102, GEOG 190</p>	<p>Baseline knowledge quiz</p>
<p>Three</p> <p>Demonstrate competency in one or more of the basic geographic tools/techniques for data collection, display, and analysis.</p>	<p>GEOG 3 and the upper-division techniques courses, including the field courses</p>	<p>GEOG 190 senior project; senior seminar reflective evaluation</p>
<p>Four</p> <p>Demonstrate graphic literacy in the use and analysis of maps, graphs, and spatial data sets.</p>	<p>GEOG 3, GEOG 105, GEOG 107, GEOG 109, GEOG 110, GEOG 163</p>	<p>Baseline knowledge quiz; GEOG 190 senior project; senior seminar reflective evaluation</p>

Five		
Show written competency in the description and analysis of geographic subject matter.	GEOG 102, GEOG 190	GEOG 190 senior project; senior seminar reflective evaluation
Six		
Analyze and evaluate scholarly writing within the discipline.	GEOG 102, GEOG 190	GEOG 102, GEOG 190 senior project; senior seminar reflective evaluation
Seven		
Synthesize geographic models, data, and methodologies in research design.	GEOG 190	GEOG 190 senior project; senior seminar reflective evaluation
Eight		
Acquire the overall competencies necessary to success in graduate school and post-graduation careers.	The major as a whole	Graduating senior interview; NSM senior survey; periodic alumni survey

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 54 objective questions and is brief, taking only about 20 minutes to administer. It is now given electronically 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. There are 19 questions in physical geography, 20 in human geography, and 15 in 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 execution 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 a poster. 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: 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 experimented with conducting its own e-mail based surveys of recent graduates.

Faculty responsible: Department Chair

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 if need is felt.
- **Summer** – Department chair processes data and uses it to inform the annual assessment report, usually due to the dean on July 1.
- **August** – Geography faculty retreat: discussion/analysis of assessment data and possible program changes identified in response; possible modifications to assessment process proposed.

**Rubric for Evaluating Projects in Senior Research Seminar in Geography
(GEOG 190)**

Elements of the Paper	Scoring Scale (5-4-3)
Statement of Research Questions or Hypotheses	<p>5 Clearly stated and clearly geographical; suitable for senior project (given constraints)</p> <p>4 Present, but somewhat unclear; geographical aspects not explicit; possibly unsuitable</p> <p>3 Not present or quite unclear; not geographical; clearly not suitable</p>
Literature Review	<p>5 Relevant, thorough, well-organized</p> <p>4 Generally relevant; some extraneous material and/or key sources missed; organization needs tightening</p> <p>3 Merely lists studies; little or no logic to selection of sources; poorly organized</p>
Methodology Choice and Description	<p>5 Highly appropriate methods selected; detailed description of methods; logically connected to research questions</p> <p>4 Weak methods or insufficient description of methods</p> <p>3 Inappropriate methods selected</p>
Presentation of Results (Data and Analysis)	<p>5 Data are complete, properly reported, and correctly analyzed</p> <p>4 Data are appropriate but some mistakes in reporting and/or analysis are evident; may be less than complete</p> <p>3 Data are seriously incomplete or improperly reported; major gaps and/or mistakes appear in the analysis</p>
Graphics	<p>5 Maps, charts, graphs, photos, and other images have a high degree of relevance, completeness, and quality</p> <p>4 Graphics are generally relevant, fairly complete, and of acceptable quality</p> <p>3 Graphics are inappropriate, missing, and/or of poor quality</p>

Discussion of Findings	<p>5 Discussion is insightful, thorough, well-organized, and clearly ties the work into a larger geographical research tradition</p> <p>4 Discussion is mechanical; some gaps in analysis; organization may be weak; ties to a larger geographical research tradition somewhat unclear</p> <p>3 Discussion fails to interpret data (merely repeats results) and fails to place work in a larger geographical research tradition</p>
Overall Written Expression	<p>5 Few if any mechanical writing or formatting errors; writing is clear and well-organized; logic of arguments presented is unassailable</p> <p>4 Minor mechanical writing or formatting errors; writing is competent but has some problems with clarity and organization; logic has some minor weaknesses</p> <p>3 Serious mechanical writing or formatting errors; writing is unclear and poorly organized; logic has serious flaws</p>

Total points possible = 35.