

**Department of Geography Response to the Recommendations of the Ten Year Program
Review Committee, January 10, 2018**

The faculty, staff and graduate students of the Department of Geography are deeply gratified by the Review Committee's recognition of our work and accomplishments. We are proud of the quality of our research, teaching and service and appreciate how deeply this was acknowledged and praised in the Review Committee's report. We also recognize that the department is at a crossroads with the departure of two faculty and the anticipated retirements of 3-5 senior faculty members in the short term. We are committed to maintaining our excellence in the diversity of fields that comprise our research and teaching missions. Our critical GIS concentration is recognized and highly praised in the report, and we want to also underscore that our accomplishments and curriculum in other disciplinary subfields such as critical development studies, economic geography, migration and immigration, political ecology, urban geography, and gender, sexuality and critical race theory are, as the Review Committee noted, central to our international and national visibility as a highly ranked geography department.

We are especially pleased by the Review Committee's recognition of the excellence of our graduate program and the talent and diversity evident among our growing group of undergraduate majors. We were gratified by the committee's recognition of our excellent advising and administrative staff as well.

We appreciate the committee's thoughtful and constructive recommendations to the Department, which we are addressing now and will continue to address in the near future. We have already taken some steps in line with the recommendations. We anticipate making more progress in the near future as we describe below.

Undergraduate Program

The Review Committee's major recommendations are: 1) Review the undergraduate curriculum and make changes as necessary to address gaps and overlaps between courses, broaden some narrowly focused 200-level courses to increase their enrollments; 2) Strengthen career-oriented learning opportunities for undergraduates.

At the beginning of every academic year, the Department holds a daylong retreat, which involves faculty and staff discussions of key issues or undertakings in the year ahead. The September 2018 retreat will center upon a review and discussion of the undergraduate curriculum with an eye to articulating key goals and projects for reworking our courses and our curriculum in the short term.

In line with the Review Committee's recommendation, we have launched a professional development course for junior and senior geography undergrads, with the first section being offered this Winter Quarter 2018. Developed by James Baginski, Director of Academic Services, and Julian Barr, PhD student and Undergraduate Advisor, this one credit class quickly filled to capacity (25 students) shortly after it was announced. From skills assessment to resume building to interviewing, this course covers what graduates need to know to be successful in the

job market and in obtaining internships that may open doors to careers.

Graduate Program

The Review Committee had two recommendations for strengthening our graduate program: 1) Examine the graduate admissions process to synchronize the role of an individual faculty member's agreement to mentor an incoming student; and 2) Consider ways to improve the dissemination of information regarding program requirements and procedures for progressing through the degree process.

These two issues are familiar to us (and perennial in most graduate programs) and we are continually revising our approach to ensuring incoming students can connect with potential mentors. Currently, applicants identify their faculty connections, and faculty respond by championing applicants during the admissions process. Our Graduate Program Committee is now developing ideas that we can adopt with the 2018-19 incoming cohort. For instance, we might identify interim mentors during new graduate student orientation, and incorporate an orientation session that explains to students the process of moving from an interim to a permanent advisor. Alternatively, we might use a welcoming letter to identify the interim advisor and offer specific guidance for the first quarter as a graduate student. With respect to dissemination of information regarding program requirements and progress to degree, we are again revising, updating, and circulating information on the Department's website and in the Geography Student Handbook. These revisions and updates were completed in early Winter Quarter 2018.

For us, the most urgent issue for our graduate program is to admit a strong sustainably sized cohort of new graduate students every year. Our self-study process suggests that a limiting factor has been the size of our funding packages – which are not competitive with our peer departments in North America. For the 2018-19 graduate admissions cycle, the Graduate Program Committee will institute a new funding structure of two years of TA/RA funding offered to entering MA students and four years of TA/RA funding offered to post-MA applicants who are admitted to the program. This change in funding offers is more in line with our peer institutions, and it will make us more competitive in attracting and enrolling top tier graduate students.

MGIS Program

The committee's recommendations for the Department's online, fee-based MGIS Program include: 1) Finish implementing the recommendations of the 2016 MGIS Program Review Committee; 2) Consider pausing the program pending new faculty hiring and alignment of the program with new initiatives and directions of the Department.

The MGIS Program has instituted a number of the 2016 Review Committee's recommendations by moving to a strictly online learning format, eliminating an on-site five credit course, and instituting a co-teaching model of instruction that relies upon MGIS program graduates as part-time instructors. The Program is also strengthening its marketing efforts in order to boost applications and enrollments. The Department and the Program have integrated the MGIS computer specialist position equitably into our overall structure, and perhaps can look at doing

the same sort of integration within the area of advising, if that is possible and necessary.

We need to develop a plan for leadership transition and program re-visioning and restructuring going forward. The faculty met in late autumn quarter to discuss the program and continues to consider its value in light of the recommendation to pause the program this year. We will make that decision in the near future, when we have application numbers and projected enrollments in winter quarter 2018. Given the strength and success of online GIS instruction developed by the MGIS Program faculty, we are discussing the possibility that they might develop online GIS modules for our undergraduate in-residence program.

Futures

At every turn, the Review Committee's report signals that the Department of Geography can and will build upon its history of excellence, maintain a highly respected internationally significant graduate program, expand its vibrant and creative undergraduate program and provide an environment that encourages intellectual growth and research innovation aimed at the pressing problems of our time.

However, they also signal that the Department is at a critical crossroads where the College and University ***must*** invest in faculty resources if this future of sustained excellence is to be realized. We concur with the Committee's recommendations that a minimum of two new faculty hires are needed as soon as possible and two more in the next 2-3 years, while increasing the Department's funding for TAs. All aspects of our self study analysis pointed to teaching and mentoring capacity as a central limiting factor, and the Review Committee's report comes to similar conclusions. We are already acting to build collaborations that would allow us to hire additional faculty, working with the Jackson School's Southeast Asia Program to seek Title VI funding for an assistant professor search in human geography and Southeast Asian studies.

Our request to search for a new assistant professor was denied last summer and made contingent upon the outcome of this program review – which has signaled the excellence of our program *and* the critical importance of additional faculty resources. The urgency of the Review Committee's recommendation for 2-3 tenure line positions as soon as possible must remain a top priority.

Just after the program review committee's report was completed, two of our three junior faculty members announced their departures at the end of the academic year. These departures added to the departures of two senior faculty last year, have precipitated **a serious crisis** in terms of our ability to mount our undergraduate curriculum and recruit the best graduate students. It has dealt a massive blow to morale throughout the Department and thrown our future into question. At this critical moment in our history, we urge the College and the University administration to prioritize our request and the program review's recommendations for additional faculty resources as quickly as possible, because this unexpected turn of events has left our Department in a deeply vulnerable position. Our future is at stake, and we will work hard to address and respond to these losses, but we must have timely support and substantive investment from the University if we are to survive and thrive over the next decade.