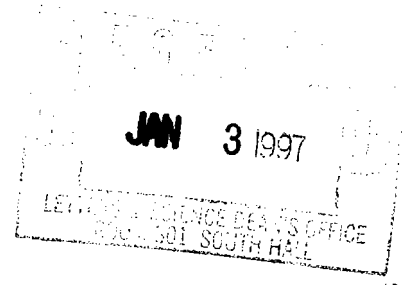


DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY
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To: Alex Nagel, Associate Dean
From: Waltraud Brinkmann, Chair *WBY.*
Subject: Assessment Plan
Date: December 30, 1996

MEMORANDUM

Attached please find the Department of Geography's Assessment Plan.

DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY
College of Letters and Science
University of Wisconsin-Madison

PLAN FOR ASSESSMENT
OF THE
UNDERGRADUATE MAJOR IN GEOGRAPHY

December 1996

I. INTRODUCTION

The Department of Geography has five degree programs:

- Major in Geography
- Major in Cartography and Geographic Information Systems
- Masters in Geography
- Masters in Cartography and Geographic Information Systems
- Ph.D. in Geography.

Formal assessment is a relatively new activity. The Department of Geography therefore proposes to begin with a plan for the assessment of the undergraduate major in Geography. We will develop assessment plans for the other major and for the graduate programs after some experience with the major in Geography is gained.

II. THE DISCIPLINE OF GEOGRAPHY AND HOW IT RELATES TO THE MISSION OF THE COLLEGE

Geography studies the interaction between people and their environments including the ways in which the people, environments, and interactions all vary from place to place over the earth. Because it is concerned with the character of people and their cultures on the one hand, and with the character of the earth's surface and its resources on the other, it is both a social and a natural science. Being broad and integrative, geography provides an appropriate foundation for a liberal education. It also provides a firm grounding for employment in public or private agencies, both domestic and international, that concern themselves with environmental management, locational analysis or planning (urban, regional, land use).

III. EDUCATIONAL GOALS FOR THE UNDERGRADUATE MAJOR IN GEOGRAPHY

The goal of our undergraduate program is to provide our majors with a broad spectrum of geographical knowledge and skills, as well as a degree of expertise in a specific subfield of the discipline. Its purpose is to prepare them for potential employment after graduation as well as to provide them with the necessary background and skills to do graduate work in geography.

A. Successful graduates must have a basic understanding and appreciation of the following four subfields within Geography and more specialized knowledge in one (the track within Geography):

- physical environment,
- human environment,
- interaction between the physical and the human environment,
- world regions.

Students are therefore required to take at least one course in each of the above subfields, and to take several intermediate and advanced courses in their chosen specialization or 'track'.

B. The basic skills we expect of all of our students are:

- the ability to read and interpret maps,
- the ability to understand quantitative arguments,
- the ability to read critically and to communicate clearly,
- the ability to integrate geographic knowledge.

To foster these skills, students are required to take a course in cartography/GIS, a course in quantitative methods, and our capstone course, 'Undergraduate Colloquium', which is a writing-intensive course. Many of these skills are also learned through general education courses in communication and quantitative reasoning that are campus-wide requirements.

C. The identification and recruitment of talented students is another important goal of our undergraduate program, particularly since geography is not an area of study in high schools and is often not immediately recognized as an academic major by incoming freshmen.

IV. ASSESSMENT

The assessment of our program will consist of two major components:

- A. an assessment of our instructional program, and
- B. an assessment of students' learning.

A. INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM - Assessment Tools:

1. Transcript analysis (sequence of courses taken, time taken to complete degree, geography courses taken prior to the major declaration);
2. Timetable analysis (to assess availability of relevant courses to ensure breadth and depth of the Geography program);

3. Reports from the Undergraduate Studies Committee (regarding time when major is declared, nature of the declared track, most frequently requested exceptions to our requirements);
4. Survey of Majors (to obtain feedback regarding opportunities for timely completion of required courses, indication of professional goals, interest in specific types of courses such as undergraduate seminars);
5. Exit Interviews (to obtain information regarding time taken to complete degree and reasons for fast or slow progress, and the student's immediate and long-term professional plans).

B. STUDENTS' MASTERY OF THE SUBJECT MATTER AND SKILLS - Assessment Tools:

1. Transcript analysis (GPA in geography courses);
2. Reports from faculty teaching our capstone course, Geography 365. A goal of this course is to assess the students' ability to ask geographic questions, to analyze geographic information, to integrate material, and to think critically and to write clearly.

V. FEEDBACK MECHANISM

The department's Curriculum Committee will produce an annual report summarizing the ways in which the geography major is successful in achieving the education goals set by the department. Included in the report will also be suggestions for changes in either the methods of assessment and/or changes in the curriculum.

VI. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The department will initiate the assessment measures listed above during the spring semester of 1996/97. The Curriculum Committee will prepare the first annual report (based on the data for three semesters) at the end of the 1997/98 academic year.