

**DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY  
ASSESSMENT REPORT 2006-2007  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, STANISLAUS  
DR. JENNIFER HELZER, PAC**

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**MISSION:**

Geography is one of the few disciplines that comfortably bridge the social sciences, biophysical sciences and humanities. The Bachelor of Arts program offers an international and integrative perspective on the relations among social, political, economic, and biophysical processes that affect interconnections between people, environments and places. The Geography major offers two options: (1) A General Geography major that integrates human geography, physical geography, regional geography and geospatial techniques and (2) an Applied Geography concentration that provides students with an array of technical and analytical skills that have practical application for examining key issues facing society and the environment. Geography prepares students for a variety of careers and/or advanced study by educating them about Earth patterns and processes, their social and economic context and their cultural meaning. Geographers work in a variety of fields including urban and regional planning, climatology, transportation, resource management, marketing, natural hazards, tourism, international business, government agencies and non-governmental organizations.

**PROGRAM GOALS:**

- Foster understanding of human society, the natural environment, and the interdependence between the two.
- Provide basic familiarity with complex concepts, theories and research methods fundamental to geographic study.
- Stimulate awareness of geographical perspectives through analysis of spatial patterns and processes that reflect and inform social, environmental, political, economic, and cultural practices.
- Provide students opportunities to employ observational and analytical skills to the study of space, place, and environment on scales from the local to the global.
- Stimulate awareness of critical human and environmental issues facing the world today, including contemporary debates on globalization and global change.
- Provide students with field experiences in a variety of natural and socio-cultural environments.
- Provide students with opportunities to develop an in-depth understanding of other countries and people and an appreciation of the complexity and interrelationship of today's global society.

**STUDENT LEARNING GOALS/OBJECTIVES:**

- Demonstrate understanding of the interrelationships and interactions between society and the environment.
- Demonstrate general awareness of the theories and philosophies underlying geographical inquiry.
- Demonstrate understanding of the natural and cultural processes that affect society and the environment in specific regions and locales.
- Acquire awareness of the diversity of peoples, places, and environments within a specific region or around the world.
- Demonstrate knowledge of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies that may be applied to help our communities, monitor natural areas, plan sensible urban developments, and observe human trends.
- Acquire skills in geographic information science and understand the interpretive capacity of geospatial technologies, and their place in society.

## **WHERE WE STARTED**

During Fall 2006, the Geography faculty discussed and decided upon our mission statement, program goals, and student learning objectives. During AY 2006-07 the Geography Department was undergoing several major personnel changes, and because of this transitional period, we selected to conduct a Geography Program survey in all geography courses taught during Spring 2006. The goal of the survey was to collect data that would provide a snapshot of our program, and a student profile of majors, minors, non-majors fulfilling GE requirements, and students simply taking geography courses out of interest. We anticipated that the information provided by the survey would guide us in making curricular adjustments and program modifications once new faculty appointments were in place.

## **DATA COLLECTION, REVIEW & USE**

The Geography Program Survey Instrument was assembled for all Geography courses in January 2007, and distributed to faculty during the first week of spring semester 2007. Faculty administered the surveys during the third and fourth week of class, and the completed surveys were returned to the Program Assessment Coordinator for review. During Summer 2007, the Assessment Coordinator reviewed and tabulated the raw data from 226 completed surveys.

Presently, the results of the survey are under review by the faculty and we are currently considering how the evidence may be used to inform curriculum review and appropriate changes to the Geography Program. One finding of the survey is that students have few opportunities to engage in fieldwork and laboratory activities in their introductory courses. We are currently looking at appropriate ways to introduce geographic techniques and methodologies to improve student learning in lower-division courses: GEOG 2010, GEOG 2020, GEOG 2400, and GEOG 2410.

## **LOOKING AHEAD**

In order to assess the Geography Program more definitively, we are currently considering the development of two rubrics, one for the General Geography Major, and another for the Applied Geography Major. While the programs share some similar course work, each major has a particular emphasis and students often have different goals in mind upon completion of their degree. Next fall, direct assessment of GEOG 4710, Field Methods in Geography which is also a writing proficiency course, will be undertaken. All geography majors take GEOG 4710, generally during their senior year, and while the course is not an official capstone course, it provides an opportunity to learn if students are meeting program goals.

Direct assessment of the following learning goal will be administered during Fall 2008 in GEOG 4710:

*Demonstrate knowledge of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies that may be applied to help our communities, monitor natural areas, plan sensible urban developments, and observe human trends.*

Drs. Hauselt and Helzer will assess the above objective through evaluation of student's ability to perform both qualitative and quantitative field techniques and methodologies on five field assignments. Student's ability to record direct observations, read landscapes, conduct field

mapping, formulate field plans, use sampling procedures, and organize and evaluate data will be assessed in the following course assignments:

- Field book entries
- Two of five lab reports
- One semester paper
- Final presentation (poster or powerpoint)

Finally, an exit survey will be developed and administered to all graduating geography majors.