

**DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY  
ASSESSMENT REPORT 2007-2008  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, STANISLAUS  
DR. JENNIFER HELZER, PAC**

---

**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 culture 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.

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.

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

During Fall 2007, the Geography faculty used the findings of the Geography Program Survey to revise current courses and submit proposals for new courses. A major finding of the survey is that students have few opportunities to engage in fieldwork and laboratory activities in their introductory courses. The addition of new faculty trained in spatial technologies allowed the department to evaluate, update, and reorganize the curriculum for the Applied Geography Major.

## MODIFICATIONS TO THE GEOGRAPHY CURRICULUM

Survey results demonstrated a clear need for an introductory level course in spatial techniques. Prior to making these curricular modifications there was no permanent lower division course that introduces students to the tools and techniques used in the upper division geography courses and by professional geographers. The addition of GEOG 2200, *Geographer's Toolbox* will introduce students to the basic techniques and methods used by geographers. It will introduce tools used by physical, environmental, and human geographers. It will serve students concurrently taking the other lower division geography classes (GEOG 2010, 2020, 2400, or 2410). The course will better prepare the students for more advanced applications in the upper division course such as Cartography (GEOG 3700), Death Valley Field Course (GEOG 4700), Field Methods (GEOG 4710), GIS (GEOG 4750), and Planning (GEOG 4930). With the introductory preparation in this lower division class, the advanced classes may focus on more sophisticated techniques and methodology.

In addition to learning basic geographic techniques, students should be able to integrate geo-spatial skills with an understanding of their local communities and a comprehension of contemporary world issues. In Geography and other social sciences, the integration of spatial technologies (GIS-Geographic Information Systems and/or Science, Internet Mapping, Cartography, GPS, and working with spatial databases) has been underway at four-year universities for at least two decades. Likewise, two-year community colleges are also seeing increasing demand and increasing enrollments for geo-spatial technique courses. Most recently, the focus has shifted to public schools where curriculum, textbooks and funding are aimed at integrating spatial technologies into K-12 classrooms. Geography serves a large number of Liberal Studies Majors and the program survey found that these students require more training and practical application of the skills and techniques of geographical inquiry.

In response to this need, a new course, GEOG 3770, *Geographical Methods & Inquiry* will offer Liberal Studies Majors a new option to complete the Social Inquiry Integrative (LIBS 4A Social Inquiry). The course will train students to integrate field experience, geographic techniques and methodologies with local area studies and global issues. The addition of GEOG 3770 to the curriculum will provide Liberal Studies Majors an opportunity to acquire the geo-spatial skills that promote geographic literacy, accommodate the focus on geo-technology in K-12 education, and ultimately make our graduates more competitive in the job market.

The survey also found that more advanced courses in geospatial technologies are in demand by our Applied Geography Majors and Interdisciplinary Masters students. GEOG 4852/4854 and GEOG 5852/5854, *Advanced GIS* was created to meet the needs of both these groups. The class will incorporate geographic information science theory with the technical aspects of GIS software applications. Concepts and methods of spatial data creation from sources such as aerial photography and satellite images, geo-referencing, data structures, surface models, database design, data quality, and spatial visualization will be explored. Advanced techniques of spatial data analysis, such as

spatial statistics, geostatistics, and spatial modeling, will be explored. Graduate students will review primary sources of information on advanced spatial data creation and analysis. Graduate students will present and lead discussions on advanced theoretical topics of spatial data creation and analysis.

During 2007/2008 faculty examined existing courses to look for opportunities for students to engage in fieldwork. Two courses, GEOG 3010 (Cultural Geography) and GEOG 4350 (Urban Geography) now include significant field experiences. During the winter term, GEOG 3010 is taught in Cuernavaca, Mexico as a short-term study abroad experience. Geography students travel with CSU geography faculty and live with Mexican families while attending classes. They study wide-ranging cultural topics including religion and ethnicity, folk and popular culture, population characteristics, urbanization and settlement, and the spatial aspects of economic development and global integration. Local field excursions and case studies illustrate the core themes and processes of cultural geography.

In spring 2008, geography faculty collaborated with the Office of Service Learning to include a community service learning component into GEOG 4350 (Urban Geography). Students enrolled in GEOG 4350 researched the history of the Modesto Airport Community and worked with residents to improve the quality of life in this neighborhood using the methodology of community asset mapping. The students worked with residents on issues such as inadequate local transportation that impacts the ability of residents to attend school, recreational opportunities, and access to commercial services. The students compiled their research findings and asset mapping into a poster and presented their work at the 62<sup>nd</sup> Annual California Geographical Society Conference and to residents of the Airport Neighborhood.

Direct assessment of the following learning goals will be considered for both GEOG 3010 and GEOG 4350 (Spring 2009):

*Acquire awareness of the diversity of peoples, places, and environments within a specific region or around the world.*

*Demonstrate understanding of the natural and cultural processes that affect society and the environment in specific regions and locales.*

#### **DIRECT ASSESSMENT**

Geography's previous assessment report indicated that direct assessment of GEOG 4710, *Field Methods in Geography* which is also a writing proficiency course, would be undertaken. GEOG 4710 has evolved into the capstone course for Geography Majors. All geography majors take GEOG 4710, generally during their senior year and therefore it provides an ideal opportunity to learn if students are meeting program goals. In addition to examining qualitative and quantitative research methodologies that may be applied to community development projects, the examination of natural areas, urban and

rural planning, and the observation of socio-economic trends, it integrates theories and philosophies underlying such geographical inquiry.

To better meet these expectations, the course underwent revision in Fall 2007. Significant modifications include the addition of several extended weekend field trips and the development of more rigorous writing requirements. The field trips will require students to spend more time in the field, develop multi-faceted projects that integrate multiple field techniques, and begin to explore a region as a complex and integrated geographical entity. The additional fieldwork and writing is different from simply reporting on others work. Students are required to write papers that result from their own fieldwork, which more closely reflects work they will actually do in the professional world and in their post-graduate life. Currently, the course meets the writing proficiency requirement. In addition to writing several traditional research essays and reports, students will be expected to develop more complex methods of communicating geographical information. Employers are increasingly expecting professional geographers to have such specialized writing experience. Additionally, the students will develop academic presentations that may be presented at professional meetings.

Direct assessment of the following learning goal is currently underway (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, during Spring 2009, we will be updating our curriculum map to reflect the above course revisions and administering and reviewing the results of the Geography Exit Survey in two courses: Advanced GIS and Urban Geography.