

DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY
ASSESSMENT REPORT 2008-2009
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, STANISLAUS
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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 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.

ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES DURING AY 2008-2009

1. Direct assessment of the following learning goal 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.*
2. Administered Exit Surveys in senior level courses and advising sessions (under evaluation)
3. Constructed Alumni Survey (to be sent out to Geography alums on the Geography listserve).
4. Updated curriculum map to reflect the addition of new courses, course modifications, and course revision by instructors.
5. Constructed and tested assessment rubrics.
6. Focus groups of current students in debriefing sessions and alumni events (GIS Day, IdaFest, Bioneers, End of the Year Celebration).
7. Focus groups involving community agencies, organizations and individuals (Habitat for Humanity, Airport Neighbors United, Turlock Downtown Property Owners, Turlock Redevelopment Agency, Turlock City Manager, Turlock Housing Program Services)
8. Instructor Evaluation (IDEA and mid-semester evaluation by faculty)
9. Discussion of Program Assessment during Department Meetings
10. Attendance at PAC meetings

WHEN DID THE FACULTY MEET TO DISCUSS THE FINDINGS? WHAT WAS THE PROCESS? HOW DID FACULTY USE THE DATA COLLECTED?

In addition to discussing assessment of student learning during regularly scheduled department meetings, Geography faculty met separately to review and discuss assessment findings. Our discussions have helped us to identify the need for greater emphasis on core geographic themes and ideas in lower division courses so that are majors are better prepared for upper-division course work. The findings also provide evidence of the faculty's long held belief that the practice of offering independent study and course substitutions (due to budget cuts, course cancellations and not replacing retiring faculty) undermines the integrity of both the Traditional and Applied Geography Majors. Our assessment discussions made clear that hiring tenure-track replacement with the specific skills, training and topical specialties outlined in our position request is absolutely critical for our majors and for other programs that rely on the service courses Geography provides. In Spring 2009 we requested a replacement position in Geography and we were able to utilize the findings and results of this assessment period and those from previous reports to structure and inform our request. During Fall 2009, we will be undertaking program revision and our ongoing Program Assessment and conversations about assessment will provide a valuable resource for this important task. Program Assessment is also a major component of University's Academic Program Review/Self Study.

Specific uses of Data Collected:

1. Tenure-track position request
2. New course proposal, course modification, course revision
3. Program Revision
4. Academic Program Review/Self-Study
5. Student advisement
6. Student recruitment and orientation
7. Community outreach

**WHAT CHANGES FOR IMPROVING STUDENT LEARNING WERE MADE AS A RESULT OF THE FINDINGS?
IF NO CHANGES WERE NECESSARY, WHAT WAS CONFIRMED?**

Changes Based on Assessment:

- GEOG 4710 – Field Methods benefitted from a schedule change. The course was moved to Friday afternoons to make extended, in-depth field study (3 day weekends) possible.
- Introduction of field components and emphasis on hands-on activities in other geography courses. The following course have been recently updated:
 - GEOG 3010 – Cultural Geography (taught in Cuernavaca, Mexico): developed new international field components.
 - GEOG 3700 – The course is currently taught by a lecturer/GIS consultant. Their previous experience in industry and GIS brings valuable expertise in urban development and planning, map production, and GIS project management. These topics have been integrated into the course and provided students with a better understanding of how the skills learned in the course are utilized by employers.
 - GEOG 4350 – Urban Geography: Expanded current service learning activities in the Airport Neighborhood, Modesto. Added a second service learning activity in which students survey downtown commercial space in Turlock. In both cases, students worked with community partners to identify project needs, conduct fieldwork activities and present their work in a public forum.
 - GEOG 4700 – Geographical Processes in Arid Landscapes, Death Valley: New field components include historical geography, mapping and use of GPS technology.
 - GEOG 4720 – Local Field Excursions: Developed field guide for current and future excursions out of our local area. This course is also offered during the fall semester to enable a large number of students to receive credit for their participation in the annual CHSS Conference for Sustainable Futures.
- Through the direct assessment of GEOG 4710 weaknesses were found in grammar and other rules of language usage. We will be discussing ways to improve student learning related to writing mechanics. We also hope to improve student’s ability to better connect and integrate concepts and ideas from the readings to their methods of data collection and field work.
- Constructed, tested and revised objective measures “rubrics” to evaluate student work (maps, posters, and presentations). The rubrics are modeled after evaluation forms used by Geography’s professional organizations (California Geographical Society, Association of Pacific Coast Geographers) for student awards and competitions. See attachments below.
- Worked to include students into faculty research programs.
- Encouraged students to participate and present their work at professional conferences and forums (Bioneers, California Geography Society Conference, various campus research and poster competitions, ESRI Conference).

Confirmed:

- Student performance is enhanced through active learning and by practicing the geographer’s craft in a variety of settings and contexts.
- In addition to writing traditional academic papers and reports, students benefit from complex methods of communicating geographical information (posters, maps, cartographic display and visualization, graphs and tables). Having practiced and honed their communication and presentation skills, students were more likely to attend conferences and present their work.
- A major finding of our earlier baseline survey was that students have few opportunities to engage in fieldwork and laboratory activities in their introductory courses. Our current direct assessment of learning goals confirms this finding. Faculty will be considering revisions to GEOG 2200 – Geographer’s Toolbox, specifically, to require it for all geography majors.

- Students were more likely to attend professional meetings (on and off campus) when they demonstrate the connection between fieldwork and research.
- Students enrolled in upper-division course with field/geospatial components (GEOG 3770, GEOG 3700, GEOG 4350, GEOG 4720, GEOG 4750 and GEOG 4852) performed better in the capstone class (GEOG 4710).
- Students benefit from practicing and applying geospatial skills and methodologies in a variety of contexts and settings (e.g. rural, urban, physical environments, socio-cultural settings) reflected in course themes and objective (e.g. Urban Geography, Agricultural Geography, Geographical Processes in Arid Landscapes).
- Students are required to write papers and make presentations that result from their own fieldwork, which closely reflects work they will actually do in the professional world and in their post-graduate life. We believe this has had a positive influence on students going to conferences and presenting their work and pursuing graduate study.

IF CHANGES FOR IMPROVING STUDENT LEARNING WERE RECOMMENDED, WHAT RESOURCES WILL BE NEEDED TO EFFECTIVELY IMPLEMENT THOSE CHANGES? WHAT CHALLENGES, IF ANY WILL IMPACT THE PROGRAM'S ABILITY TO EFFECTIVELY IMPLEMENT THOSE CHANGES?

Resources:

- Replacement of retired faculty is absolutely essential to maintaining program viability and to service other programs that rely on Geography courses.
- Continued funding for students to attend and participate in professional meetings (Annual Meeting of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers, California Geographical Society Annual Meeting).
- Continued support of faculty travel to accompany students to professional meetings.
- Continued support of travel associated with geography courses with field components (university van rental, lodging, camping, park entrance fees)
- Continued funding for field equipment/equipment requests: replacement of aging GPS devices, water-flow monitors, soil testing kits and the purchase of new equipment including shear testing device, pocket penetrometer, mobile computer devices for use in the field, compasses, meter tape measures, sextant.
- Continued support for GIS Lab, Lab Director and Lab Manager (students process, analyze and prepare finished products from data collected in the field).

Challenges:

- Recognition of the investment of time on the part of faculty to organize field classes and classes and classes with extensive field components. In addition to traditional class preparation (syllabus, designing lectures, locating appropriate case studies and reading materials) field courses require considerable time to survey field sites, arrange for local experts to meet with the class at various field sites. Faculty must also keep current with a variety of geospatial technologies to facilitate student learning. Field courses often generate important linkages to the local community (businesses, agencies, non-profits, local governments, individuals) and maintain these relationships for the benefit of the college and university. Such relationships are particularly advantageous from a student's perspective as they often provide opportunities for internships and careers.

Looking Ahead....Recommendations for Improving Assessment Processes:

- A main goal in our program is that students develop a local-global perspective (1) through an understanding of other countries and people and an appreciation of the complexity and interrelationship of today's global society and (2) by being given opportunities to employ observational and analytical skills to the study of space, place, and environment on scales from the local to the global. It would be beneficial if Institutional Research could add a question to the next

alumni survey asking, in the past year, whether alums have participated in events, organizations, or service activities that speak to their continuing interest in community issues (e.g. attending public forums, city council meetings, joined a non-profit group, volunteered their time or otherwise supported a local cause or environmental restoration project). Alumni might also be queried ongoing interest and engagement with other countries and cultures (e.g. contact or work with people from backgrounds different from their own, international travel for continuing education, pleasure or work, learning a second language, and participation or support of cultural activities).

PLAN OVERVIEW AY 2009-2010

- Evaluate the following learning goal during AY2009-2010 using a direct measure:

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

The following courses are under consideration by faculty: GEOG 3010 – Cultural Geography and GEOG 3020 – Human Ecology. Faculty will use the National Geography Standards to construct the direct measure (see attachment below).

- Direct assessment of student work (may include semester projects or final products including maps, posters and Powerpoint presentations) using the evaluation rubrics mentioned above for the following learning objective:

Acquire skills in geographic information science and understand the interpretive capacity of geospatial technologies, and their place in society.

ATTACHMENTS

- Updated Curriculum Map - Geography
- Geography Grading Rubrics (Maps, Posters and Presentations)
- Eighteen National Geography Standards, Six Elements, and Two Perspectives: Spatial/Regional and Ecological (NCGE 1994)

GEOGRAPHY - REVISED CURRICULUM MAP

The following learning goals matrix helps us assess which objectives are achieved (and to what degree: H=high, M=medium) by which courses (aggregated by category). New courses and recently modified or updated courses are italicized.

	Introductory 2010, 2020, 2200, 2400, 2410	Human 3010, 3020, 3300, 4070, 4120, 4210, 4250, 4301, 4350	Physical/Environmental 3100, 4070, 4120, 4210, 4301	Techniques 3700, 3770, 4750, 4852/4854, 5852/5854	Regional 3010*, 3340, 3510, 3350, 3550, 3580, 3930, 3940, 3950, 3960	Writing and Research; Communication in graphic form 4710, 5850	Liberal Studies 3350 3770
Demonstrate understanding of the interrelationships and interactions between culture and the environment	H Exams 2010, 2020, 2400, 2410	H Exams Papers	H Exams Presentation	M	H Exams Papers		H Exams Papers
Demonstrate general awareness of the theories and philosophies underlying geographical inquiry.	H Exams 2010, 2020, 2400, 2410	H Exams Papers	M	M	H Exams Papers		H Exams Papers
Natural and cultural processes that affect society and the environment in specific regions and locales.		H Community Service Learning Project 4350					
Diversity of peoples, places, and environments within a specific region or around the world.	H Exams 2010, 2020, 2400, 2410	H Exams Papers	M	M	H Exams Papers *Study Abroad (GEOG 3010)		H Exams Papers
Qualitative and quantitative research methodologies	M Introduce hands-on skills and techniques 2200	H Exams Papers	H Exams Presentations	H Lab Activities, Presentations, Data gathering 4710	M		M Exams Papers
Geographic information science and understand the interpretive capacity of geospatial technologies, and their place in society.	M Introduce hands-on skills and techniques 2200	M	M	H Exercises Maps Papers	M	H Papers Presentations	M
Specific Skill Sets							
Analytical skills and research methods	M Introduce hands-on skills and techniques 2200			H Exercises Maps		H Papers Presentations	
Fieldwork and observation	M Introduce hands-on skills and techniques 2200	M H - 4350 field work associated with service learning projects	M	M H 4710	M	M	M
Computer skills	M Introduce hands-on skills and techniques 2200			H Exercises			M
Community Service		H - 4350					
Teaching Skills							H Demonstration

Geography Grading Rubric - Maps

Name of Student: _____ Course # and Semester: _____

Map/Poster Title: _____

Evaluation Scale:	Outstanding [5]	Excellent [4]	Good [3]	Average [2]	Poor [1]
ABSTRACT: “ <i>succinct map overview clearly stated</i> ” with an explanation of the methodology, analysis and findings.	5	4	3	2	1
CARTOGRAPHIC CONTENT AND ANALYSIS: “ <i>map presentations should include explanation of the cartographic process, analysis and findings.</i> ” ...Originality of message or data analysis. <u>Evaluation:</u> complexity or depth of information presented, effectiveness and clarity of information and good source citation. How does this map demonstrate originality of data analysis or geographical narrative?	5	4	3	2	1
DESIGN AND PRESENTATION: “ <i>Maps should be creative, balanced, informative, use clear color hierarchies, and standard cartographic principles</i> ” ... <u>Evaluation:</u> overall excellence of design, effective use of symbolization, effective use of color or gray scale, clear use of figure/ground logical connection between map content and symbolization used. Effective use of map design techniques: clarity, order, balance, hierarchy, and aesthetics.	5	4	3	2	1
TECHNOLOGY & GRAPHICS: “ <i>use of computer imagery, photogrammetry, and modeling are welcome and encouraged.</i> ” <u>Evaluation:</u> maps should demonstrate use of technical skills, software and appropriate application of technology for the purpose served. Effective use of whatever technology was applied [clay tablet, pen and ink, GIS, etc].	5	4	3	2	1
PRESENTATION: “ <i>may be presented in hardcopy format or using a computer display for animated cartography. Presentation judging criteria also includes your ability to answer questions related to your mapping.</i> ” ...Computer maps may also be evaluated on the following: good palette for screen resolution, adaptable to different monitors and browsers, loading time and stability.	5	4	3	2	1
EFFECTIVENESS: ...Does the map do what it is supposed to do?	5	4	3	2	1
COMMENTS: [please identify any qualities not mentioned in the above criteria]					
TOTAL					
EVALUATOR’S SIGNATURE:					

Geography Grading Rubric - Posters

Name of Student: _____ Course # and Semester: _____

Please use the judging criteria to rate each category 1 - 5 with 5 being the best. The overall rating should place more weight on the content, analysis and originality. Keep notes on the back or a separate paper.

Poster Title & Abstract	Geographic Content and Analysis	Graphics	Design and Presentation	Overall Rating

Design and Presentation: A good poster presentation is designed creatively with an appropriate balance between text and graphic content. The information should be presented with a clear visual hierarchy. Overall, the presentation should be both effective and aesthetic.

Abstract: A succinct project overview, including purpose and methodology, should be clearly displayed on the poster.

Geographic Content and Analysis: A good poster presentation is lucidly presented in logical sequence and includes an abstract, introduction, statement of purpose, results section, conclusion, and works cited section.

Graphics: Use of student-generated visual elements is encouraged, such as photos, diagrams, graphs, tables, or maps. If these elements are not created by the presenter, their sources should be clearly cited on the poster, wherever the elements occur and in the "Works Cited" section.

GEOGRAPHY PROGRAM
Student Presentation Evaluation Rubric

NAME OF STUDENT _____ Graduate/Undergraduate (circle one)
 COURSE _____ SEMESTER _____
 TITLE OF PAPER _____

EVALUATION: Do not give intermediate scores	Outstanding	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Unsatisfactory
1. <i>Introduction</i> : clearly states objectives of the study and..... relationship to earlier work.	5	4	3	2	1	0
2. <i>Methodology</i> : methods are appropriate and properly applied.	5	4	3	2	1	0
3. <i>Content</i> : topic is relevant, original, interesting, scholarly.....	5	4	3	2	1	0
4. <i>Results</i> : logical, clearly presented, and appropriately summarized...	5	4	3	2	1	0
5. <i>Conclusion</i> : based on given results, emphasizes significance..... and implications of study	5	4	3	2	1	0
6. <i>Presentation</i> : familiar with content, statements clear, voice..... modulations appropriate, eye contact maintained, audio-visual aids (if used), and well-prepared	5	4	3	2	1	0
7. <i>Organization and timing</i> : topical sequence logical, appropriate time given to sections of the presentation, keeps within allotted time.	5	4	3	2	1	0
8. <i>Understanding of subject</i> : presenter has good grasp of study..... and related areas and responds effectively and clearly to questions	5	4	3	2	1	0

COLUMN TOTALS						
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COMMENTS (IF ANY):

TOTAL SCORE: _____
 (Sum of column totals above)

Eighteen National Geography Standards, Six Elements, and Two Perspectives: Spatial/Regional and Ecological (NCGE 1994)

Element 1: The World in Spatial Terms

Standard 1: How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective.

Standard 2: How to use mental maps to organize information about people, places, and environments in a spatial context

Standard 3: How to analyze the spatial organization of people, places, and environments on Earth's surface

Element 2: Places and Regions

Standard 4: The physical and human characteristics of places

Standard 5: That people create regions to interpret Earth's complexity

Standard 6: How culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions

Element 3: Physical Systems

Standard 7: The physical processes that shape the patterns of Earth's surface

Standard 8: The characteristics and spatial distribution of ecosystems on Earth's surface

Element 4: Human Systems

Standard 9: The characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth's surface

Standard 10: The characteristics, distribution, and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics

Standard 11: The patterns and networks of economic interdependence on Earth's surface

Standard 12: The processes, patterns, and functions of human settlement

Standard 13: How the forces of cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control of Earth's surface

Element 5: Environment and Society

Standard 14: How human actions modify the physical environment

Standard 15: How physical systems affect human systems

Standard 16: The changes that occur in the meaning, use, distribution, and importance of resources

Element 6: Uses of Geography

Standard 17: How to apply geography to interpret the past

Standard 18: How to apply geography to interpret the present and prepare for the future.