



University of Toronto Quality Assurance Process (UTQAP) Cyclical Review: Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan

Programs Reviewed:	<p>Undergraduate:</p> <p>Asian Geographies (Arts): Minor, Joint program with National University of Singapore Environment & Energy (Science): Minor, Joint program with National University of Singapore Environmental Geography, B.A. Hons. (Specialist, Major, Minor) Geographic Information Systems (Arts): Minor Human Geography, B.A., Hons. (Specialist, Major, Minor) Physical and Environmental Geography, B.Sc. Hons. (Specialist, Major, Minor)</p> <p>Graduate:</p> <p>Geography, M.A., M.Sc., Ph.D. Planning, M.Sc., Ph.D.</p>
Unit Reviewed:	Department of Geography and Planning
Commissioning Officer:	Dean, Faculty of Arts & Science
Reviewers (Name, Affiliation):	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Professor Kenneth Foote, Department of Geography, University of Connecticut 2. Professor Glen M. MacDonald, Department of Geography, University of California, Los Angeles 3. Professor Richard Milgrom, Department of City Planning, University of Manitoba
Date of review visit:	September 26 – 27, 2017

Date reported to AP&P: April 3, 2018

Unless otherwise noted, all bulleted comments apply to all programs reviewed.

1 Outcome

- The Committee on Academic Policy and Programs (AP&P) concluded that there were no issues to be drawn to the attention of the Agenda Committee but requested a follow up report in one year on the status of the working group and curriculum committee conversations regarding undergraduate curriculum development and the sustainability of offerings in physical and environmental geography science, including possibilities for collaboration with cognate units. The follow-up report will be considered by AP&P at the Cycle 5 meeting in 2018-19.

2 Significant Program Strengths

- Exceptional collegiality among students and faculty
- Top-tier applicants to the graduate program
- A reputation for producing well-trained graduate researchers
- High quality of student experience and mentoring
- Impressive initiatives for continuous program improvement
- Strong alumni network

3 Opportunities for Program Enhancement

The reviewers recommended that the following be considered:

- Considering the sustainability of offerings in physical and environmental sciences internally and with cognate units
- Building on the emerging strengths in geographical information science (GIScience) and geographic information systems (GIS), as well as further developing program offerings in planning
- Expanding curricular offerings, while considering how the Department's offerings might be developed or consolidated to highlight strengths and attract students
- Developing a strategy to enhance undergraduate enrolment
- Strengthening efforts to reduce graduate time-to-completion
- Exploring strategies for graduate student financial support that would allow the department to attract the top national and international graduate students
- Conducting further tracking of postgraduate outcomes
- Ensuring full participation in decision-making and program coordination by holding at least one council meeting per year at both the UTM and UTSC campuses
- Addressing the absence of a dedicated IT support staff



4 Administrative Response & Implementation Plan

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF ARTS & SCIENCE

David Cameron, FRSC
Dean

March 14, 2018

Professor Sioban Nelson
Vice-Provost Academic Programs
University of Toronto

Re: Review of Department of Geography & Planning

Dear Sioban,

Along with the faculty, staff and students of the Department of Geography & Planning, I am pleased with the external reviewers' assessment of the Department of Geography & Planning and its programs: Human Geography, BA, Hons., (Specialist, Major, Minor); Environmental Geography, BA, Hons., (Specialist, Major, Minor); Geographic Information Systems, (Arts) Minor; Asian Geographies, (Arts) Minor (Joint program with National University of Singapore); Physical & Environmental Geography, BSc. Hons., (Specialist, Major, Minor); Environment & Energy, (Science) Minor (Joint program with U of T School of the Environment); graduate: Geography, MA., MSc., PhD.; Planning, MSc., PhD. The reviewers complimented the Department of Geography & Planning for creating "a culture of research excellence and educational innovation that are hallmarks of its programs."

The quality of this program notwithstanding, as per your letter dated February 13, 2018 the review report raises a number of issues and challenges. I am writing to address the areas of the review report that you identify as key. The response to these items is separated into immediate (six months), medium (one to two years), and longer (three to five years) term action items for the Department of Geography & Planning, where appropriate. The Department of Geography & Planning has discussed the reviewers' comments through consultation with various groups and has begun to implement changes where appropriate and that are consistent with the Department of Geography & Planning's mission.

Strategic Planning

The reviewers commented that the sustainability of offerings in physical and environmental sciences is a key issue that requires attention and discussion within the department as well as with cognate units.

Geography and Planning will create an internal working group to assess sustainability of its offerings in physical and environmental geography sciences.

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Medium-term:

The Department acknowledges this issue as a priority area and will create an internal working group to assess sustainability of its offerings in physical and environmental geography sciences. The working group will be established in September 2018, when two of the five physical geographers in the Department will return from leave. The working group will consult within the Department as well as with cognate units at UTSG (Earth Sciences, School of the Environment), Geography at UTM and Physical and Environmental Sciences at UTSC. This working group will inform the Curriculum Committee (see 'Undergraduate' below), which will make decisions on program offerings in consultation with the Faculty of Arts and Science.

Curriculum

The reviewers encouraged building on the emerging strengths in geographical information science (GIScience) and geographic information systems (GIS), as well as further developing program offerings in planning.

Geography and Planning is reviewing its program offerings with particular attention to offerings in planning, GIScience, and GIS.

Immediate-term:

The Department is currently investigating ways to increase its program offerings in Planning. They have established a working group to explore options, which include the Major Modification of an existing program to include Planning, or the development of a stand-alone Major.

Medium and Longer-term:

The current working group studying program offerings in Planning, will also consider how to build on emerging strengths in GIScience and GIS. This working group will inform the Curriculum Committee (see 'Undergraduate' below) of their deliberations. The Curriculum Committee will then take the proposals from the working group into consideration, in particular in light of additional undergraduate priorities under review (e.g. physical and environmental geography sciences), in proposing any consolidation of existing programs or development of a new program(s). Discussions on any new program proposals will be held in consultation with the Faculty of Arts and Science.

Undergraduate programs

Though reviewers encouraged the department to consider expanding curricular offerings, they remarked that this would mean coordinating multiple curricula. The reviewers recommended consideration of how the Department's offerings might be developed or consolidated to highlight strengths and attract students.

Geography and Planning will review its current undergraduate program offerings (3 Specialists, 3 Majors and 6 Minors), in light of program opportunities in emerging areas (Planning, GIScience, GIS). The outcome of this internal review will be a set of priorities that will guide modifications and additions to their undergraduate curriculum in the future.

Immediate and Medium-term:

Geography and Planning will develop a Curriculum Committee to review current and future undergraduate program offerings. This Committee will consult both within the Department (faculty, students, and alumni organization) and with other departments and units (such as the School of the Environment, Earth Sciences, Sociology, Urban Studies, the Asian Institute, and CSUS). It is expected that the Committee will consider the following, among other issues:

- Ensuring the sustainability of offerings in physical and environmental sciences, building on its strengths in remote sensing and climate change.
- Further program offerings in Planning.
- Opportunities to build on strengths in GIScience and GIS.
- Re-thinking its undergraduate curriculum with particular attention to 1st and 2nd year courses. As it refocuses its undergraduate curriculum it will be necessary to balance the liberal arts component that is essential to Geography and the university's mandate with the need to provide stronger professional training.
- The possibility of developing joint programs with other departments, specifically Earth Sciences, Statistics, Computer Science, and the School of the Environment.
- Creating more effective tools in order to attract students to its courses. Among other things, this could include mounting a stronger social media presence and building a more effective website (which may include such things as videos of students talking about the department).

Medium and Longer-term:

Based on outcomes of the working group and Curriculum Committee, Geography and Planning will propose Major Modifications to existing programs or a new program(s) (as needed). This may include the consolidation of current programs with emerging areas of strength. The curriculum committee will conduct a yearly evaluation of program offerings and enrolments, and propose modifications to those offerings as needed.

The Faculty of Arts and Science will ensure that new or modified program proposals are sustainable within the current Geography and Planning faculty complement. If Geography and Planning determines the need for additional faculty to support new or modified program offerings, it can submit a request through a formal process to the Faculty Appointments Committee. Units submit requests in March of each year for consideration by the Faculty Appointments Committee, which includes faculty representatives from across the three FAS sectors (the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Sciences) as well as the Colleges. After considering the full range of requests, the FAC makes recommendations to the Dean. Any request for additional faculty has an impact across the division, and as such,

faculty appointments are considered not in isolation, but with respect to needs that exist across the Faculty.

The reviewers characterized undergraduate enrolment as “flat” and recommended that an enrolment strategy be developed.

Geography and Planning will build on its recent innovations in teaching and program delivery to maintain program enrolments.

Medium to Longer-term:

Undergraduate enrolment is not increasing in the Faculty of Arts and Science, in fact, there will be a modest decline in total enrolment in the medium to longer-term (under the revised SMA). Thus, the enrolment strategy will be focused on maintaining rather than increasing enrolments.

The Department has instituted several elements over the last few years to attract students to Geography and to increase its FCE and POST enrolments. These include the creation of urban and planning focuses, a 4th-year work-integrated learning course, several experiential courses, and a mentoring and professional development program. The Department plans to build on these initiatives in order to enhance the quality of its programs and maintain its current enrolment levels.

Graduate programs

The reviewers recommended efforts to reduce graduate time-to-completion.

Geography and Planning will pursue a number of strategies to decrease time-to-completion.

Immediate-term:

In the last year, the Department has added more resources to both its website and handbooks, providing suggested guidelines and time frames for completing major milestones (such as course work, comprehensive exams and proposal exams). The Department has also added helpful information regarding format and expectations in comprehensive and proposal exams. The Department hosts a variety of workshops to reduce anxieties related to major milestones, to support dissertation writing and to help prepare students for both professional and academic career paths. Effective September 2017, the Department reduced course work expectations in the Physical Geography Ph.D. This was done to help students get an earlier start on their research projects. Conducting field and lab work is often time-intensive, stretching over several seasons. By facilitating students' efforts to plan and commence this work earlier, the Department will promote shorter times to completion for Physical Geography students. The Department also considered reducing course work expectations in human geography, but an informal

examination of the program determined that current requirements were appropriate and indeed were instrumental in preparing students for their research.

Medium to Longer-term:

The Department will closely monitor time-to-completion, and continue to work with the School of Graduate Studies and the Faculty of Arts and Science to provide supports to students to decrease time-to-completion.

The reviewers encouraged exploring strategies for graduate student financial support that would allow the department to attract the top national and international graduate students.

Geography and Planning will take advantage of the recent decrease in international PhD tuition, in combination with increases to base funding packages, to attract top level graduate students.

Immediate and Medium-term:

Arts and Science has continued to enhance its base funding package, which should help with recruitment. The Department will also consider allocating more top-up funds to highly ranked applicants to make offers more competitive. In addition, the University of Toronto has reduced tuition fees for international PhD students to the same level as those paid by domestic PhD students, which will have a positive impact on the Department's efforts to recruit and retain top international students. However, Arts and Science will ensure a balance between domestic and international graduate students is maintained, and thus there will still be controls on international graduate student admission.

Administration

The reviewers praised the strong alumni network, and encouraged further tracking of post-graduate outcomes.

Geography and Planning will continue to track post-graduate outcomes and build its strong alumni network

Immediate-term:

At the end of this academic year, the Department will assess the success of a pilot project initiated this year with the planning alumni committee to provide a research assistant for the committee who is undertaking social media outreach to planning alumni and is developing a data base for tracking planning alumni.

Medium-term:

If the pilot project is successful with the planning alumni committee, the Department will consider how to expand it to the geography alumni committee.

The reviewers recommended ways to ensure full participation in decision-making and program coordination, including holding at least one council meeting per year at both the UTM and UTSC campuses.

Geography and Planning will hold tri-campus council meetings at UTM and UTSC, at times when the majority of faculty are available.

Immediate and Medium-term:

The Department held a tri-campus council meet at UTM in January of this year and will commit to holding at least one council meeting at either UTM or UTSC in future years. One barrier to participation by members of the Department at tri-campus meetings is that the three campuses block-off different days and hours of the week for their departmental meetings. The Department is currently coordinating with UTM and UTSC to find a common one-hour time slot when no classes will be offered at any of the three campuses, allowing all faculty to attend the tri-campus council meetings.

Resources

The reviewers noted the absence of a dedicated IT support staff.

This is a concern for the Department and it believes that further discussions are needed with FAS Information & Instructional Technology (IIT) with regards to IT support.

Immediate-term:

The Acting Director of FAS Information & Instructional Technology (IIT) is corresponding with both the Chair and of Geography and Planning and the Geography staff member who provides IT Coordinator, to re-affirm their ability to work together to meet the day-to-day support needs of the Department. This includes support for: client services, IIT lab services, Geography labs, teaching technology, infrastructure, and applications and development. FAS IIT is augmenting their support for management of geography lab license expiration and software renewal

Medium-term:

With the goal of continuing to ensure fulfilment of IT needs, the Department will work with the FAS IIT Director and IIT Leadership to address new support areas as well as the use of dedicated IT staff where appropriate. Those discussion will include consideration around continuity of support, knowledge transfer and ensuring proper support documentation protocols.

To conclude, we appreciate that the external reviewers identified the Department of Geography & Planning's strengths and noted a few areas for development. The Department

of Geography & Planning has already begun to move forward with plans to address the recommendations as presented by the reviewers.

Sincerely,



David Cameron,
Dean and Professor of Political Science

cc. Virginia Maclaren, Chair, Department of Geography & Planning
Poppy Lockwood, Vice-Dean, Academic Planning and Strategic Initiatives

5 Executive Summary

The reviewers identified the programs' strengths as the exceptional collegiality among students and faculty; top-tier applicants to the graduate program; a reputation for producing well-trained graduate researchers; the high quality of student experience and mentoring; impressive initiatives for continuous program improvement; and strong alumni network. The reviewers recommended that the following issues be addressed: considering the sustainability of offerings in physical and environmental sciences internally and with cognate units; building on the emerging strengths in geographical information science (GIScience) and geographic information systems (GIS), as well as further developing program offerings in planning; expanding curricular offerings, while considering how the Department's offerings might be developed or consolidated to highlight strengths and attract students; developing a strategy to enhance undergraduate enrolment; strengthening efforts to reduce graduate time-to-completion; exploring strategies for graduate student financial support; tracking postgraduate outcomes; holding at least one council meeting per year at both the UTM and UTSC campuses; and addressing the absence of a dedicated IT support staff. The Dean's Administrative Response describes the Faculty, unit and programs' responses to the reviewers' recommendations, including an implementation plan for any changes necessary as a result. The Committee on Academic Policy and Programs (AP&P) concluded that there were no issues to be drawn to the attention of the Agenda Committee but requested a follow up report in one year on the status of the working group and curriculum committee conversations regarding undergraduate curriculum development and the sustainability of offerings in physical and environmental geography science, including possibilities for collaboration with cognate units. The follow-up report will be considered by AP&P at the Cycle 5 meeting in 2018-19.