

TWO (2) YEAR POST CYCLICAL PROGRAM REVIEW FOLLOW-UP REPORT

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

PROGRAM	IQAP REVIEW DATE	SENATE APPROVED
Geography -Bachelor of Arts – Environmental Geography -Bachelor of Arts – Geography -Bachelor of Science – Environment and Physical Geography	April 9, 2019	September 13, 2019

This report was approved by Senate on March 11, 2022

PROGRESS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION	% COMPLETE	RESPONSIBLE MEMBER/UNIT	STATUS
			IF NOT COMPLETED, PLEASE PROVIDE PROJECTED COMPLETION DATE
#1 - Role of grad TAs in undergraduate teaching	0	Dean of Graduate Studies & Research	Unknown
#2 - Articulate a position on the School of Environmental Studies	50	Dean of Arts & Science	Anticipate a decision within the next academic year.
#4 - Policy on labs	100	Department of Geography	See Section #4 (completed)
#5 - New programme proposal must follow NU-IQAP	80	Department of Geography and contributing units	Anticipate submission of Stage 2 approvals in Winter term 2022 (BSc Environmental Science; BA Environmental Studies; and Post-Baccalaureate Diplomas)
#8 - Review of Honours thesis guidelines	100	Department of Geography	Completed (but regularly updated)
#9 - Review of programme delivery	100	Department of Geography	Completed

#11 - Contribute to SEM plan	100	Department of Geography	This is an ongoing process. All Arts and Science programs liaise with the Registrar and Recruitment regarding strategic enrolment mandate.
#12 - Review 4000-level programme requirements	100	Department of Geography	Completed

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS TO DATE

Recommendation #1: TAs in the classroom. The reviewers feel that integrating a small number of graduate students into the classroom as teaching assistants will enhance both the undergraduate experience and graduate training. Admittedly, there are collective bargaining issues that need to be resolved, but this will provide a way of funding graduate students beyond very small general assistantships.

Department: We are in support of TAs in the classroom but are unable to act upon this recommendation as it currently falls outside the responsibility of departments. We believe such a change in policy falls under the purview of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research and, moreover, would likely need to be addressed within the new collective agreement. To date we have not received any updates regarding this matter and, although supportive of this idea, we are concerned about the planning of these positions in light of the low graduate student enrollment numbers particularly those having a geography background.

Dean of A&S: Given the program size and enrolments (and the primarily undergraduate nature of Nipissing University), the Office of the Dean, Faculty of Arts and Science, provides a variety of TA supports in the classroom through annual budgetary allocations. While the TAs are primarily upper-level year undergraduate students, the rationale for undergraduate TAs is to provide students with experiential learning and undergraduate research opportunities. During 2021-2022, the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research redeployed GAs as Teaching Assistantships at the undergraduate level. Since our graduate student pool is limited, we hope to continue balancing GA-ships and undergraduate student TAs.

Dean of GS: As mentioned in the Faculty Dean's comments, Graduate Assistantships (GAs) are assigned as Teaching Assistantships (TAs). The number of GAs are allotted equitably across the six masters programs. If a student declines a GA, the GA is first reallocated to an eligible student within the program and the redistributed to other programs if necessary. The Geography programs are partly supported through the GA allocation provided to the Master of Environmental Science/Studies (MES/Sc) program. The MES/Sc program is an interdisciplinary program and GAs are shared with other undergraduate programs in the Faculty of Arts and Science.

Recommendation #2: School of Environment and faculty renewal. The formalization of interdisciplinary collaboration already happening in many ways may be enhanced with the creation of a School of Environment. The majority of faculty was open to discussing the potential in a new structure that would facilitate new program development and address enrolment issues. Faculty renewal may be more easily recognized in a larger unit that could accommodate a climatologist more readily and utilize expensive CFI assets that are currently dormant.

The Department of Geography has been supportive of the concept of a School of the Environment which has been identified as a key objective by our Dean. The development of the new BES and BESC programs, the ongoing support for the MES/MESC programs and the recent cross appointment of the new CRC in Climate Change are, from our perspective, all encouraging developments towards the establishment of a School of the Environment. From our perspective, the challenge going forward lies in determining whether the establishment of the School is simply for the purpose of advertisement or whether it will involve, similar to Schools in the Faculty of Professional Studies, the creation of an actual administrative unit run by a director. If the push is towards the later, we anticipate push back

from both current departmental units and the Faculty of Arts and Science as a whole. Since no such schools currently exist in the Faculty of Arts & Science, there may be many questions as to how it would fit within the current Faculty of Arts & Science (e.g. voting, budget, executive representation, ...).

Dean of A & S: As noted above, further discussions regarding optimal structures in Arts and Science have been underway since 2019. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on furthering this initiative as other priorities needed to be addressed. Nonetheless, numerous discussions have been held with the Arts and Science Executive, the Faculty of Arts and Science, and the PVPAR about establishing the School of Environment as an administrative unit. These discussions will resume this spring/summer during the Arts and Science Faculty Annual Retreat. Further discussions with the PVPAR will also continue.

Recommendation #3: CRC transition plan. The University has pursued time limited CRCs for new faculty. As these CRCs end, a transition plan for faculty will be necessary. A transition plan may include bridging resources to maintain research and course release as faculty build toward a full teaching load. Failure to address the transition risks 'burnout' and retention of faculty.

With the completion of her CRC (with a two three-credit course load), Dr. April James moved to a Research intensive workload (four three-credit courses or equivalent). Dr. James is currently teaching three three-credit courses and has taken on the role of program coordinator for the MES/MESc graduate program. Moreover, she holds an NSERC DG (extended with service as a reviewer for Geosciences 1506 Discovery Grant program) and a research contract with the Ontario Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Parks. According to Dr. James, the need for faculty to contribute a wide range of service duties prevents a more ideal transition to avoid issues such as burnout.

Dean of A&S: The Dean of Arts and Science liaised with the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research on a CRC transition plan. The Transition Plan consisting of a gradual return to normal workload with an option for a research-intensive workload has been approved by the Dean of GS and Research, (...Graduate Studies Council and the Research Council?).

Dean of GS and Research: The transition plan has been reviewed and approved by the Senate Research Committee.

Recommendation #4: Reintroduction of labs. Introducing lab components to courses in second year is supported by both faculty and students. However, this must be done with adequate resources (lab instructors and/or teaching assistants).

Since the IQAP review, the Department has successfully included second year labs for all of the physical geography courses, namely GEOG 2106, GEOG2107 and GEOG2126. Justification for these additions was based on a review of existing courses offered by various departments across Canada.

Recommendation #5: New program development in Environmental Science/Studies. The development of new major programs (BSc in Environmental Science) is warranted. Clearly, Nipissing has the capacity to deliver such a program and could explore the idea of developing a complementary program, BA in Environmental Studies.

Over the last few years, faculty members from the Department of Geography have not only initiated these programs but are also responsible for their completion. Specifically, Drs. April James and James Abbott are the leads for the proposals for the BSc and BES programs, respectively. The proposed programs are being developed based on a comparison with current programs offered in Canada with a particular emphasis on smaller institutions (e.g. Bishops, Wilfred Laurier) that have comparable resources. For both programs, extensive consultation with outside units has been carried out. In particular, there has been ongoing dialogue with the international office, other departmental units (e.g. biology, history, indigenous studies, etc.) and the Dean of Arts and Science. We are close to the submission of a stage 2 joint document and are currently addressing associated minors, and a post-graduate diploma. One of our main concerns, which we hope will be addressed by the Registrar's Office, is the potential for scheduling conflicts, particularly at the first and second year of study within the proposed BSc program.

Dean of A&S: I can confirm that the new BSc Environmental Science program has been approved by the Academic Curriculum Committee and is now going through the regular NU curriculum process. We anticipate submitting the proposal to the Quality Assurance Council in the upcoming months. The new BA Environmental Studies program proposal is now moving to the first stages of the curriculum approval process. Further initiatives include Post-Baccalaureate Diplomas in Environmental Studies and Environmental Sciences geared specifically for international students.

Recommendation #6: Opening Geomatics. There is potential to open Geomatics certification and instruction to non-geography students at Nipissing and the broader community as professionals seek training opportunities. Similarly, we hope to see Geomatics faculty continue to develop the already significant networks with the local community.

Since the IQAP review, we have changed the pre-requisite for the introductory courses (GEOG 2017-GIS and Earth from Space) in order to encourage all Nipissing students to enroll in these particular courses. We have also included required geomatics training as part of the new proposed environmental studies and science programs with the BESC students highly encourage to pursue the Geomatics Certificate. We recently lost both the second 10-month geomatics lab instructor position and the geomatics technician and unsure how this will impact our geomatics support post-COVID. Given geomatics essentially deals with large geo-spatial digital datasets, we have supportive of the notion of contributing our courses to the new data science programs but, for some unknown reason, were never considered part of these programs.

Recommendation #7: Increased support staff and Lab Instructors. To maintain research and teaching capacities, a physical geography technician would service multiple research programs in the unit. The loss of a lab instructor has also been a burden on the remaining instructor. Administrative support at the unit level to assist faculty and advise students would also be of benefit. The reviewers recognize that this would likely only be feasible for a larger unit (e.g. School of Environment).

Due to budgetary constraints, we have only been able to temporarily address this issue. Specifically, with the loss of our second full-time (10 month) contract lab instructor we have been able to maintain a temporary part-time geomatics lab instructor for fall terms only (4 months) based on a per course contract approach. NUFA currently does not support a half lab instructor position. Additionally, we were able to pivot our remaining 10-month lab instructor into serving as the instructor for the new second year physical geography labs (Recommendation #4).

Dean of Arts and Science: Further interdisciplinary initiatives spearheaded by the new BSc Environmental Science and BA Environmental Studies program proposals have been put forward to generate further enrolments and opportunities for Geomatics to grow at NU and expand into other Humanities, Social Sciences, and Sciences areas.

Recommendation #8: Honours thesis guidelines. The Department can establish some strong guidelines and supports for honours thesis students and supervisors. Clearly defined expectations for students and supervisors, common dates for progression (e.g., proposal, first draft, submission), and formal presentations of findings to the Department would streamline the thesis program.

Over the years we have periodically revisiting the undergraduate thesis guidelines. However, the number of students engaged in the thesis remains extremely low in comparison to past decades, typically two a year but sometimes none. We believe the lack of interest has resulted from a shift by faculty from undergraduate to graduate thesis supervision since the inception of MES/MESc programs. Moreover, we believe COVID regulations and the push towards internship type courses (experiential learning) will further hinder undergraduate thesis recruitment.

Dean of Arts and Science: Further discussions will continue as the Faculty of Arts and Science programs are working towards balancing flexibility, experiential opportunities, and undergraduate research. We do not see any issues with the existing Honours Thesis Guidelines as they are regularly updated by the department.

Recommendation #9: Development of online courses. We encourage the department to develop online courses in response to demand from majors and non-majors and professional programs in a planned and measured fashion. Support needs to be provided to develop the capacity and careful analysis of what courses should be offered online undertaken. Given the size of the department online offerings should be developed incrementally.

Since the IQAP review, all regularly taught courses have been offered as online due to COVID measures. However, the Department continues to experiment with new ways of online teaching. For example, Dr. O'Hagan is considering offering a pre-packaged course which would allow students the flexibility of completing the lecture materials and exams at their own leisure. Specifically, such a course could possibly be completed within a two-week period or over several months and enrolled at any time during the year (i.e., not restricted to a particular academic term). However, there are concerns with this mode of delivery which we hope will be addressed by registrar office such as implications on OSAP eligibility, and graduation date requirements.

Recommendation #10: Outdoor storage capacity. The reviewers felt the case was made for an outdoor storage unit that includes space to maintain and clean the equipment after a field season. Again, such a facility could include an outdoor lab component and is best proposed in conjunction with multiple faculty who require such space.

The Department is still seeking outdoor storage capacity. Dr. April James has been actively engaging in discussions with the Office of Graduate Studies and Research in this regard. Moreover, due to COVID measures, The Faculty of Arts & Science has recently, and quite successfully, engaged in outdoor classroom instruction. The Department is planning on teaching one course (GEOG 1016) outdoors in the fall of 2022.

Recommendation #11: Greater collaboration with the Registrar's Office. We encourage the Department to work closely with recruitment and admissions in the Registrar's office to support efforts to increase interest from High School and other applicants. Further, the Department should engage with the office to ensure that students are receiving the most current and accurate program information.

The Department continues to work with the registrar's office on all recruitment and admissions activities, from online open house presentations to *Unibuddy* chats with students. Most recently, the Department collaborated on three recruitment videos (BA Geog, BA Env Geog, BSc E&PG) which we believe has greatly improved recruitment efforts with an observed 109% increase in applications this year alone. We are also currently in discussion with the registrar's office in regard to potential college credit transfers as well as international recruitment. We are also seeking to create official ties with the College of Urban Science at the University of Seoul.

Recommendation #12: Re-assess 4000 level program requirements. The program should re-examine program requirements at the 4000 level requirements as 18 credits seems excessive. Further, an up-to-date 'checklist' with program requirements should be created for students as they plan their progress through programs.

Even with the recent loss of two full-time faculty members (appointment to Assoc. Dean and a retirement) the Department has been able to maintain a core number of both 3000 and 4000 level courses. Although we are now offering fewer 4000 level courses we continue to examine new innovative ways of engaging/training our geography majors. For example, we have recently developed and are currently offering a Professional Internship course (GEOG4506). As for decreasing the number of fourth year courses we strongly believe the current structure and flow through is justified. We do not consider 18 credits of 120 credit required program (GEOG & E&PG) as excessive.

LIST OF ACTION ITEMS LEADING UP TO NEXT REVIEW

Recommendation #1

The process for allocation of GAs has been established and reconfirmed by the Graduate Studies Committee each year (November GSC meeting) (see above).

Recommendation #2

This recommendation is in the process of consultation with departments, faculties, and the PVPAR.

Recommendation #3

This recommendation has been addressed.

Recommendation #4

This recommendation has been addressed.

Recommendation #5

This recommendation is being addressed. [The Stage 2 documents for both the BES and BESC programs should be submitted soon. See above]

Recommendation #6

This recommendation has been addressed. However, we must note the recent challenges in offering geomatics online particularly the ongoing technical issues related with the virtual geomatics lab.

Recommendation #7

This has been temporarily addressed.

Recommendation #8

We will continue to address these regulations in a more regular manner.

Recommendation #9

This recommendation has been addressed.

Recommendation #10

Our first attempt for an outdoor course is planned for the fall of 2022. We continue to maintain an active dialogue with the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research for opportunities to secure a permanent storage facility for equipment.

Recommendation #11

We continue to support the Registrar's initiatives and continue to consider new opportunities such as potential college credit transfers into our programs.

Recommendation #12

This has been addressed.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS/NEXT STEPS – PLEASE ADD CONCLUDING SUMMARY REGARDING NEXT STEPS

As a department we do believe we have addressed those recommendations which fall within our area of responsibility. Even with the COVID crisis and the recent loss of two full-time faculty members, the Department has successfully pivoted online, submitted new curriculum in light of the IQAP recommendations and continues to lead the development of both the new BES and BESC programs. We must also acknowledge continued support from the Dean of Arts and Science in this regard.