

**To** Council Committee on Academic Mission  
**From** Julia Siemer, Department Head (acting), Dept. of Geography & Environmental Studies  
**Date** Feb 25, 2022

## 5-year follow-up report of 2017 Unit Review

Several key recommendations emerged from our unit review in 2017. Details on actions and considerations by the Department of Geography & Environmental Studies over the past 5 years are provided under point 1 and 2. Future initiatives (3 to 5) as well as ongoing challenges and concerns (6 to 8) are addressed in the second part of the report.

### 1. Undergraduate Program Rationalization

The nature and scope of the review comments have led us to focus, strategically, upon our undergraduate program(s) and curricula as a common thread among most of the recommended changes, but also as a foundation upon which other proposed changes can be constructed.

We have conducted an extensive undergraduate program and curricula review. As a result, we have reduced the number of programs offered by the department from 13 to 7 programs. Included in this number are 3 programs which are offered in cooperation with the Department of Geology and the Saskatchewan Polytechnic, respectively. Additionally, the department offers 2 minors.

*Table 1: Current academic programs offered by the Department of Geography & Environmental Studies*

| # of programs | Dept. of Geography & Environmental Studies   | Comments        |
|---------------|--|-----------------|
| 2             | BA in Geography and Environmental Studies<br>BA Honours in Geography and Environmental Studies   | New development |
| 2             | BSc in Geography and Environmental Studies<br>BSc Honours in Geography and Environmental Studies | New development |
| (2)           | Minor in Geography and Environmental Studies<br>Minor in Geographic Information Science          | New development |



| # of programs | In cooperation with Dept. of Geology                                       |  |
|---------------|--|--|
| 2             | BSc in Environmental Geoscience<br>BSc Honours in Environmental Geoscience | Administered by the Dept. of Geology; the Dept. of GES offers approx. 30 % of required science courses |
|               | In cooperation with Saskatchewan Polytechnic                               |  |
| 1             | Bachelor of Geographic Information Science (BGISc)                         | Currently under review due to limited expertise in the department in the future (upcoming retirement)  |

**2. Reduce, Standardize, and Reorganize Undergraduate Courses**

Courses which have not been mounted recently have been removed from the Undergraduate Course Catalogue. This is an ongoing process.

Spring/Summer offerings of lower level courses, particularly 100-level courses, have been used to generate CCE funding for sessional positions for courses (e.g. GES 400 Environmental Impact Assessment) where we currently have no faculty member to teach them and are best offered by practitioners in the field.

**3. Strategic Plan**

We agree with reviewers that a strategic plan will help clarify goals for the Department of Geography & Environmental Studies. The nature and scope of the review comments have led us to focus, strategically, upon our undergraduate program and curricula in the first instance. We intend to use this strategic focus on undergraduate program(s) and curricula as a foundation upon which to construct a strategic plan. We identified the development of a strategic plan as the next order of business for the Department of Geography & Environmental Studies.



#### **4. Indigenization**

Significant initiatives have been undertaken by individual faculty members to indigenize course content – particularly of human geography courses. Faculty members have participated in training and awareness programs by the university and continue to do so. Research and community service engagement by faculty members in all areas within the department includes indigenous perspectives (e.g. influence of soil erosion on biodiversity along the Qu’Appelle River valley within the Cowessess First Nation; a faculty member is a founding member of the Treaty Land Sharing Network, a network of farmers, ranchers and rural people who are committed to honouring the Treaty relationship through sharing the land).

The department was able to hire an instructor (term position) who identifies as Indigenous. The knowledge and personal perspective of this faculty member has been tremendously helpful for members of the department to develop a deeper understanding of what indigenization can mean and what it should not mean.

#### **5. Graduate Program**

The department has deferred an immediate response to the specific recommendation to regularize its graduate program. We acknowledge the importance of giving full deliberation to a regularized graduate program, and the corresponding resources needed to offer a high-quality program that occupies a niche in western Canada. Given the current staffing (no tenure-track positions for retired/departed faculty members since 2012) and the financial situation, we have put any deliberation and changes to the current state of the graduate program (special case graduate program) on hold.

#### **6. Facilities and Field-based Learning**

We agree with reviewers that teaching space – lab space for physical geography and GIScience – is extremely limited as compared to other Geography departments in Canada of our size. We also agree that lack of appropriate teaching space, and especially lab space, is influencing the success of our programs. The Faculty of Arts currently has no financial resources allocated for additional lab space and/or equipment. In addition, due to the recent departure and retirement of faculty members, the department will likely lose research lab space and GIS lab space. Some new physical lab equipment has been purchased through on-time funds from the Faculty of Arts in the last couple of years. However, since the unit review in 2017, the situation regarding teaching lab space and equipment has not significantly improved.

Cooperation for physical geography courses (e.g. GES 329 – Soil Geography) with the Department of Geology will provide access to Department of Geology’s teaching lab space and instructor hours for separate labs (Fall 2022).

Attempts to include more field-based teaching has been successful. In addition to a physical geography field course (GES 411 – Field Techniques) the department has been able to regularize a field course in human



geography (GES 396AT – (De)constructing Berlin). This course has been offered in 2015 and 2018 and was planned for 2020. Due to pandemic related travel restrictions, the 2020 course had to be cancelled. Depending on financial support by the Faculty of Arts (for faculty members' expenses) we are planning to offer the course again in Spring 2023. In the past, financial support for students in this course has been provided by UR International and by the German Academic Exchange Program (DAAD).

## 7. Staffing and Administration

The unit review has affirmed that the Department of Geography & Environmental Studies cannot be reduced in size without jeopardizing our mission of teaching, research, and service to the community. Since the unit review in 2017, one faculty member has departed and one faculty member will retire in June 2022. Both positions are in specialized areas (Physical Geography – Hydrography, and GIScience) which require expertise that current faculty members do not have or cannot provide due to other responsibilities. We are not aware of any plans to create new tenure track positions within the Department of Geography & Environmental Studies in the near future.

The department has had several term positions at the assistant professor and instructor II level over the last 5 years. These positions and the change of a 0.5 instructor III position to a full instructor III position have allowed us to teach all required courses of our programs. The lack of new tenure-track positions, however, will have an impact on the ability to plan reliably and develop an overall stronger department.

## 8. Financial Resources

We agree with reviewers an annual discretionary budget allocation of approximately \$12k means that our resources are spread very thin. It is not possible to mount laboratory-based and field-based education, in addition to covering the miscellaneous expenses of a departmental office, with a budget of this magnitude. The resource needs for our department via laboratory and field based activities are unlike many other departments in the Faculty of Arts. While some geographers can teach and investigate with equivalent resources to members of other departments in the Faculty of Arts, natural scientists cannot. Laboratory-based and field-based education are both fundamental to the education of all students in Geography & Environmental Studies, but especially in our BSc programs.

Respectfully presented

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julia Siemer".

Dr. Julia Siemer  
Department Head (acting)