

**Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan: External Program Review – Geography
Academic Planning and Priorities Committee of Senate – May 2016
Algoma University**

Algoma University's Institutional Quality Assurance Process [IQAP] on Program Reviews requires an objective, comprehensive, and constructive evaluation of all academic programs. The central objective of program review is to assess how current offerings could better serve students (within the available resources), and provide specific recommendations for improving program quality and relevance.

The Department of Geography and Geology delivers four programs: (i) Bachelor of Arts (General), Geography (3 years), (ii) Bachelor of Arts (Honours), Geography (4 years), (iii) Minor concentration in Geography and (iv) Minor concentration in Geomatics. As well, the Department offers an Honours Diploma in Geography and a Certificate in Geomatics.

Within the context of the external review of these programs, the Academic Planning and Priorities Committee (AppCom) of Senate has reviewed the program self-study, the External Review Committee (ERC) Report, the Program Response to the ERC Report and the Decanal Response to all the materials above. In its synthesis, review and response to these materials, AppCom is called upon to identify the significant strengths of the program and to identify opportunities for program improvement and enhancement. This report provides the institutional synthesis of the external evaluation and internal responses and assessments.

Summary of the Cyclical Program Review of the Department of Geography and Geology Undergraduate Programs

The Department of Geography and Geology submitted a self-study to the Academic Dean on September 4, 2015. The self-study included descriptions of the programs, their learning outcomes, program data and an analytical assessment of the programs. Course outlines for all courses and the CVs for each full-time member were included.

Two external reviewers, Dr DongMei Chen, Associate Professor, Queen's University, and Dr. Robert McLeman, Associate Professor, Wilfred Laurier University were selected to comprise the Review Committee. They reviewed the self-study documentation and came to campus for a site visit on March 18, 2016. The visit included meetings with the President, the Academic Dean, the Manager of Academic Development and Quality, the Divisional and Department Chairs, administrative unit heads, current and former students, the full-time program faculty, and the Self Study Committee. The Review Team also visited the campus facilities, plus on-campus and off-campus private and public-sector partners.

In their report, provided on April 4, 2016, the External Reviewers found that the Geography program is consistent with the vision, strategic objectives and special mission of the University. The degree-level expectations are appropriate and consistent with other similar Ontario geography programs. Admission standards are appropriate and consistent with the learning outcomes. The wide range and inventory courses is consistent with typical broad geography programs at other Ontario universities, and the learning outcomes of the courses and programs are clear and appropriate. The mode of delivery is also appropriate. Appropriate and effective methods are used to assess student achievement, and various teaching tools are being used. Good IT services, academic support and technical resources are available. The teaching spaces on the Algoma campus and the library facilities are of good quality and the natural setting of the campus appeared to offer many opportunities for outdoor instruction relevant to geography and environmental science. Professors have excellent scholarly qualifications and positive feedback was received from current and past students.

The following program strengths and weaknesses were noted:

Strengths

- The quality of the student experience and the resources available to students are generally superior to those of many Ontario universities.
- Students and graduates are impressive, personable and engaging individuals.
- The full-time faculty have excellent scholarly qualifications and are visibly attentive to the success of their students.
- There is a very good ratio of full-time faculty to students.
- Algoma offers unrivalled access to nature with opportunities for students to engage in nature.
- The program provides innovative experiential learning and training that are responsive to labour force needs and that prepare students with attractive skills for employment, particularly in northern Ontario.
- The program engages in collaboration with the community, government research labs and other educational institutes.
- The university has good connections to Aboriginal communities.

Weaknesses

- The program has low and stagnant enrollment. Enrollment targets set in the 2007 program review have not been met.
- The Department is attempting to deliver a broad geography program with few full-time faculty. The ability of the program to succeed over the long run "as-is" is questionable.
- Many courses are offered somewhat infrequently.
- The logic of the course groupings (streams) is unclear and confusing for students. The groupings put constraints on course selection and complicate course scheduling.
- Anishinaabe education and First Nations content are underrepresented in the current course offerings.
- The university does not have a dedicated GIS lab.
- There is no dedicated marketing for the Geography program.

The Chair of the Department of Geography and Geology, after consultation with the Department, submitted a response to the Reviewers' Report on April 14, 2016. The Academic Dean submitted his response to the Reviewers' Report to Algoma U's Academic Planning and Priorities Committee on April 18, 2016. Academic Planning and Priorities Committee is now submitting this report, the Final Assessment Report, to Senate for consideration at its meeting of May 6, 2016.

Summary of the Reviewers' Recommendations with the Department's and Academic Dean's Responses (in italics) in order of priority:

1. Undertake a targeted geography-program-specific recruitment exercise, including on social media and including Southern Ontario, to market the unique opportunities Algoma has to offer to students interested in the study of geography and the environment.

The Department supports the creation of a marketing subcommittee, working with recruitment, to develop program-specific recruitment strategies. The Department will work with the Dean and the senior administrative team to enhance marketing initiatives, including marketing, to encourage international students to study Geography. Department members will seek opportunities for active participation on the frontlines of the recruitment process and are building links with local high schools.

The Academic Dean recommends quickly creating a marketing subcommittee to develop and execute initiatives that may have immediate short-term impacts on enrolment, such as faculty presentations in colleges to graduates in feeder pathway diploma programs.

AppCom agrees with the Department and the Academic Dean and recommends the immediate creation of a marketing subcommittee to develop and execute initiatives that may have immediate impacts on enrolment in the geography program.

2. Review the structure of the program and identify opportunities for simplification and streamlining to give students more flexibility in course selection and to ease delivery given the small number of faculty. In particular, reduce the requirements related to the three groups of courses (Techniques, Systematics and Regional).

The Department espouses the philosophical principle that graduates must be proficient in the four streams of Human, Physical, Human-Physical Interface, and Techniques. The Department believes that students need this breadth of courses to acquire desired knowledge outcomes and appropriate skills to succeed.

The Academic Dean supports review of program material and course descriptions as an immediate priority. The Dean encourages the Department to look for opportunities for streamlining and simplification, and asks the Department to examine how it communicates program themes to current and prospective students to reduce confusion.

AppCom notes the department's belief that graduates must be proficient in the four streams of Human, Physical, Human-Physical Interface, and Techniques. However, AppCom recommends the department undertake a review of program material and course descriptions to identify opportunities for streamlining and simplification. This review should be undertaken with the objective of giving students more flexibility in course selection and improving ease of delivery with existing faculty resources. This review should include an examination of the structure and communication around the four streams (Human, Physical, Human-Physical Interface, and Techniques) and the requirements related to the course groupings (Techniques, Systematics, and Regional).

3. Promote, nurture and support greater communication and dialogue among faculty members and between faculty and administration to move forward as a team with clear plans to achieve long-term aspirations.

The Department will continue to engage with other departments for course sharing, cross-listing and collaborative course development. In particular, they will be engaged partners in discussions around planning an Environmental Studies component. They will work with the Department of Computer Science and Mathematics to develop support for Geomatics students.

The Academic Dean encourages Departmental engagement in Divisional meetings, in the conversation about the new Academic Plan, and in forums where cross-departmental discussions occur. AppCom is encouraged to initiate cohesive and coordinated planning with the Department.

AppCom supports and encourages continued engagement with other departments, Departmental engagement in Divisional meetings, and full engagement by the Department of Geography and Geology in discussions around the new Academic Plan. AppCom encourages the Department to include in its work plan specific actions that will support cohesive and coordinated planning within the Department, with other Departments, and between the Department and administration.

4. Increase departmental engagement with Aboriginal groups and initiatives, and include greater Aboriginal content in existing courses, in order to enhance the attractiveness of the program to a wider student audience and to contribute to the larger Algoma mission. Consider tailoring more courses towards the study of issues such as Aboriginal land management and traditional environmental knowledge.

The Department intends to work in partnership with Shingwauk Kinooamaage Gamig and other Aboriginal partners to evolve and develop courses that align with their mandate and that foster cross-cultural respect and cooperation. A course on Aboriginal Land Management is scheduled for Spring 2016. The Department is also working with AU's Anishinaabe Initiatives Division on a Spring Institute on 'Eco-based Approach to Land Resources Management', and will plan to hold another Land Symposium. Discussions are being held around an Aboriginal Management Certificate, and the Department is working with the Anishinaabe Initiatives Division on Anishinaabe experiences as part of the Geography practicum.

The Academic Dean encourages the Department to continue to explore and connect with Anishinaabe partners to enhance Anishinaabe content in the program and in associated activities.

AppCom supports the plans of the Department to continue to explore and connect with Anishinaabe partners to enhance Anishinaabe content in the program and foster cross-cultural respect and collaboration.

5. Expand the number and variety of college-to-university and other non-traditional pathways to the Geography program, including potential consideration of pathways with Michigan institutions.

The Department will explore new opportunities under the direction of the Registrar's team. The Department will organize a meeting with Sault College to discuss collaboration and will build new pathway agreements with other institutions.

The Academic Dean encourages exploration of additional pathways and suggests that the office of the Registrar support such efforts by providing the department with an annual report on transfer student admissions. The Academic Dean also advises a focused effort to recruit students into high-quality pathways that already exist.

AppCom encourages the Department to continue to build on its excellent work in exploring college-to-university pathways. AppCom encourages the Department to work closely with staff in the Office of the Registrar and the Dean's Office to ensure Departmental efforts are coordinated with institutional efforts. In addition to continued efforts to build pathways, AppCom encourages the marketing subcommittee to explore focused efforts to recruit students into pathways that already exist.

6. Build on the academic strengths of the department and the locational assets of the university by reorienting courses and the program more generally in terms of 'environment'. In so doing, respond to student preference (seen throughout Ontario) for Environmental Studies over Geography. If the program shift is significant, consider renaming the department.

The Department will draw on their existing pool of courses to develop an Environmental Studies program. The Department is open to rework the environmental theme into their courses and to expand on sustainability and global change themes. The Department is considering changing its name to 'Geography, Geology, and Environmental Studies.' Course titles, calendar descriptions and outlines may be reviewed and the environmental content may be enhanced.

The Academic Dean supports the investigation of highlighting and enhancing the environmental theme in the programs. The Dean expects that Algoma's Academic Plan will address the possibility of an Environmental Studies program and encourages any discussion around departmental name change and new program development to occur in the context of the academic planning process that is presently underway.

AppCom supports the exploration of a possible change to program orientation and department name to occur in the context of the academic planning process that is currently underway.

7. Establish wider and more formalized collaborations between the Geography Department and other academic units, as well as with relevant organizations outside the university, such as First Nations organizations and government research institutes, in order to maintain a broad and engaging curriculum. Take advantage of NORDIK to assist in developing research opportunities for students.

The Department proposes to develop a list of key contacts with relevant outside organizations and develop a schedule to explore areas of common interest and strategies of mutual benefit. The Department plans to work closely with other Ontario universities.

The Academic Dean encourages collaboration as a means to differentiate our Algoma University program. The Dean assures the Department of senior administrative support in collaborative exploration, but cautions the Department to prioritize action items by specific deliverables and to plan visits to support specific outcomes.

AppCom supports the initiation of an exercise by the Department to explore collaborations with other units and outside organizations in order to maintain a broad and engaging curriculum and to support research opportunities for students. AppCom suggests as a starting point developing a list of potential collaborators and a prioritization of action items.

Implementation Plan

The implementation plan includes all recommendations that were selected for implementation in order of priority.

Reviewers' Recommendation	Proposed Follow Up based on AppCom recommendation	Responsibility for Leading Follow Up	Timeline for Addressing Recommendation
<p>1. Undertake a targeted geography-program-specific recruitment exercise, including on social media and including Southern Ontario, to market the unique opportunities Algoma has to offer to students interested in the study of geography and the environment.</p>	<p>Work with the various relevant academic and administrative departments (e.g. Recruitment and Communications, Dean's Office) to create a marketing subcommittee and effective marketing of the program.</p> <p>Provide active participation in the recruitment process (e.g. visiting high schools).</p>	<p>Department Chair in conjunction with all department members.</p>	<p>Immediately and ongoing.</p>
<p>2. Review the structure of the program and identify opportunities for simplification and streamlining to give students more flexibility in course selection and to ease delivery given the small number of faculty. In particular, reduce the requirements related to the three groups of courses (Techniques, Systematics and Regional).</p>	<p>Review course content, course descriptions and program offerings with the view of student degree progression (e.g. more program flexibility in terms of course options, clearer degree pathways for students, simplification and streamlining of degree pathways).</p>	<p>Department Chair in conjunction with all department members.</p>	<p>Immediately and ongoing.</p>
<p>3. Promote, nurture and support greater communication and dialogue among faculty members and between faculty and administration to move forward as a team with clear plans to achieve long-term aspirations.</p>	<p>Continue engagement with Programs/Departments/Divisions regarding courses (e.g. cross-listing and collaborative course development). Engage with AppCom and the academic planning currently underway to ensure alignment between departmental focus and the broader academic plan.</p>	<p>Department Chair in conjunction with all department members.</p>	<p>Immediately and ongoing.</p>

<p>4. Increase departmental engagement with Aboriginal groups and initiatives, and include greater Aboriginal content in existing courses, in order to enhance the attractiveness of the program to a wider student audience and to contribute to the larger Algoma mission. Consider tailoring more courses towards the study of issues such as Aboriginal land management and traditional environmental knowledge.</p>	<p>Work with SKG, Anishinaabe Initiatives Division and other relevant partners to establish courses and course content with an Anishinaabe focus/perspective (e.g. course in Aboriginal Land Management), and to discuss the potential for an Aboriginal Management Certificate.</p>	<p>Department Chair in conjunction with all department members.</p>	<p>Immediately and ongoing.</p>
<p>5. Expand the number and variety of college-to-university and other non-traditional pathways to the Geography program, including potential consideration of pathways with Michigan institutions.</p>	<p>Work in conjunction with the Registrar's Office to examine potential pathways with relevant institutions.</p> <p>Focus on the development of pathways with a high degree of program affinity.</p> <p>Work with a marketing subcommittee to enhance student awareness of existing and future pathways.</p>	<p>Department Chair in conjunction with all department members.</p>	<p>Immediately and ongoing.</p>
<p>6. Build on the academic strengths of the department and the locational assets of the university by reorienting courses and the program more generally in terms of 'environment'. In so doing, respond to student preference (seen throughout Ontario) for Environmental Studies over Geography. If the program shift is significant, consider renaming the department.</p>	<p>Strengthen the environmental theme within the existing program and course offerings.</p> <p>Work with Academic Planning and Priorities and other relevant departments on changes to program orientation (e.g. an environmental focus) in conjunction with current academic planning being undertaken.</p>	<p>Department Chair in conjunction with all department members.</p>	<p>Immediately and ongoing.</p>

<p>7. Establish wider and more formalized collaborations between the Geography Department and other academic units, as well as with relevant organizations outside the university, such as First Nations organizations and government research institutes, in order to maintain a broad and engaging curriculum. Take advantage of NORDIK to assist in developing research opportunities for students.</p>	<p>Develop a list of relevant contacts both internal and external to the University to examine and make recommendations regarding the current curriculum and to foster research opportunities for students in the program.</p>	<p>Department Chair in conjunction with all department members.</p>	<p>Immediately and ongoing.</p>
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