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## Final Assessment Report- Executive Summary

*Geography, Geology and Land Stewardship*

2015-2022

**To: Algoma University Senate**

**From: Dr. Michele Piercey-Normore on behalf of the Academic Planning and Priorities Committee**

**Date: March 2024**

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In accordance with the Algoma University Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), this Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan provides a synthesis of the cyclical program review process (and related outcomes) of the Geography, Geology and Land Stewardship (GEOG) program. The program review includes all GEOG offerings in the Department of Geography, Geology and Land Stewardship. These include: (1) Bachelor of Arts in Geography, Single Major (General); (2) Bachelor of Arts in Geography, Combined Major (General); (3) Bachelor of Arts in Geography, Single Major (Honours); (4) Bachelor of Arts in Geography, Combined Major (Honours); (5) Certificate in Geomatics; (6) Certificate in Aki and Environmental Stewardship; (7) Honours Diploma in Geography. This report identifies the strengths of the program, together with the opportunities for program improvement and enhancement. The report sets out and prioritizes the recommendations that have been selected for implementation.

The report includes an Implementation Plan that identifies (a) what bodies are responsible for approving the recommendations set out in the Final Assessment Report, (b) what bodies are responsible for providing any resources made necessary by the recommendations, (c) any changes in the organization, policy or governance that will be necessary to meet the recommendations, (d) what bodies are responsible for acting on those recommendations, and (e) the timelines for acting on and monitoring the implementation of those recommendations.

### **Cyclical Program Review Summary for the Geography, Geology and Land Stewardship Program**

All four sections of the GEOG Program self-study were completed and submitted to the Faculty Chair for review and approval on August 2, 2022. The Final self-study was submitted to the Office of the Chief Academic Officer (CAO) on September 1, 2022, and subsequently forwarded to the Quality Assurance Committee (QualCom) of the Algoma University Senate for review. Section 1 of the self-study included an analysis of program strengths and areas for improvement informed by quantitative data analysis, feedback from students, and an analysis of the program curriculum. Sections 2-4 included copies of faculty CVs, a list of proposed external reviewers, and all required supplementary materials.

QualCom is responsible for ensuring that submitted self-studies adequately address all of the evaluative criteria for program reviews as listed in Appendix C of the IQAP. After a thorough review of the report, QualCom decided at their October 2022 meeting that the submitted Geography program Self Study is ready for external review and passed a motion to accept the completed self-study.

Two arm's length reviewers were selected by the Quality Assurance Committee of the Senate to conduct the external review. The reviewers (Dr. Darren Bardati, Full Professor and Chair of the Department of Environment and Geography at Bishop's University and Dr. Pamela Shaw, Director of the Community Planning Department at Vancouver Island University) were provided with a briefing package, which included a written briefing from the CAO designate, a site visit agenda, the complete self-study, the Algoma University IQAP, a copy of the Department's previous CPR, and the Review Report template. They conducted a virtual site visit on December 16, 2022. The external reviewers met with faculty in the GEOG program, the members of the Self-Study Committee, the departmental and Faculty chairs, academic and administrative unit heads, including the Ice President, Academic and Research (VPAR), Associate Vice President, Academic (AVP-A) and Acting Faculty Dean, Faculty Chair, and Department Chair, the University Registrar, the Vice President Nyaagaaniid, Anishinaabe Initiatives, Equity and Student Success, the Manager, IT Projects and Development, a Librarian, and current students and alumni of the program.

The reviewers submitted the final version of the Reviewers' Report on the GEOG program on December 22, 2022. In their report, the external reviewers provided feedback on each of the evaluative criteria in the IQAP. The objectives, admission standards, curriculum, teaching and assessment, and quality indicators were assessed for the programs under review.

Below you will find a summary of the findings and recommendations.

### **Summary of Significant Program Strengths**

- The program is well aligned with the Vision, Mission, and Strategic Plan of Algoma University
- The program supports and encourages an innovative learning environment for students that incorporates Indigenous learnings and teachings, a two-eyed seeing approach to teaching, research and learning, and experiential assignments and activities to enhance experiential learning.
- The Department has made sustained efforts to further embrace the Special Mission and Strategic Plan and mandates of the institution. The land stewardship programming as well as the formation and maintenance of the partnership with the National Land Managers Association (NALMA) is commendable.
- The community-based research and engagement work completed by the program aligns with the university's Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA2).
- The development of a Community Advisory Circle and the efforts to advance reconciliation, decolonization and include indigenizing research methods are commendable.

### **Summary of Recommendations**

The reviewers made 26 recommendations throughout the document to which both the Department and the CAO responded on January 31, 2023 and April 20, 2023, respectively.

The reviewers noted that it appears that the program is well aligned with the Special Mission and Vision of the institution and its Strategic Plan (page 3, Reviewers' Report). In particular, the reviewers praised the community engagement work done by the program as well as the NALMA partnership (page 3, Reviewers' Report).

The reviewers could not help but note that the number of majors is small in the program, including in comparison with other programs at Algoma University and they felt that efforts should be made to change this fact (page 4, external reviewers' report). This fact was mentioned again on page 7 of the external reviewers' report, noting that enrollment in the programs "is at a low level for a degree program".

In the curriculum section, the reviewers discouraged the approach of having too many "courses on the books" as it can be misleading for present and prospective students who might think that these courses are regularly available to them (page 5, external reviewers' report).

The reviewers commended the emphasis on field experiences and the use of technology in the field (GPS skills, etc.) and indicated that the Indigenous Land-Based Education Project has the potential to expand the number of opportunities available to students ((page 6, external reviewers' report). Also, reviewers noted on page 8 of the external reviewers report that the program is well situated with access to excellent classroom spaces, a separate lab, the Aki stewardship center, kayaks, GPS units etc. (page 8, external reviewers' report).

Most of the rest of the report was composed of a large number and variety of recommendations aimed at areas identified for improvements as well as encouraging the program to consider moving away from traditional Geography offerings, building on its strengths, as well as engaging in an in-depth analysis of actions that need to be taken to address the concern around the low number of majors in the present program (pp. 9-12, external reviewers' report).

Following the receipt of the Reviewers' Report, the Geography, Geology and Land Stewardship program submitted a response to the Reviewers' Report on January 31, 2023. Dr. Piercey-Normore submitted her CAO's Response to the Reviewers' Report and Departmental Response on April 20, 2023. Notably, the CAO wrote in her introductory remarks: "considering the low number of program majors (in the very low double digits) over the 2015-2022 period, I strongly encourage the program to review its offerings and consider significant changes to it, or design a new program that would attract evidence-based interest from future program majors."

## **Program Quality Outcome**

The Quality Assurance Committee of the Senate discussed the distinguishing features of the Economics/Finance and Economics programming described by both the Self-Study Committee and the Reviewers. The Quality Assurance Committee approved the Report on Program Quality as submitted by Dr. István Imre, Associate Vice President, Academic, and rated the program as being **Identified with Quality Concerns** on June 26, 2023.

The GEOG program shall prepare a report of the status of the agreed-upon Implementation Plan 18 months following Senate approval of the Final Assessment Report. This report shall be submitted via the Office of the CAO to the Quality Assurance Committee for review. The date of the next GEOG program review is 2028/29.

## **Implementation Plan**

The Academic Planning and Priorities Committee were asked to review the Report on Program Quality and rank the recommendations at their September 2023 meeting. The Committee completed the prioritization practice and informed the Department on March 5, 2024. The completion of this step was delayed due to the decision by the committee to establish a new, more purposeful process for ranking the recommendations. The university recognizes that this unfortunate delay was outside the control of the Department but is confident that the new committee process for ranking will increase the quality of the Cyclical Program Review process moving forward and still falls within the requirements of the IQAP. The Departmental and Faculty Chairs submitted the draft Implementation Plan to the Designate of CAO on March 12, 2024. The Academic Planning and Priorities Committee approved the draft Final Assessment Report and the Implementation Plan on April 17, 2024. Items in the chart below are ordered according to the ranking and priority level provided by APPCOM.

No.	Action Steps	Who is responsible?	What resources are required?	Timeline
1	Consider stream-lining the number of offerings to clarify pathways for students and focus on program strengths. While it is understood that the large number of courses is intended to keep options open for the future recruitment of faculty, the program should focus on strengths and create a clear path for students (page 11, External Reviewers' Report)	Dr. Nairne Cameron and Department Chair	none	April 2024- July 2025
2	Streamline the program offerings to build on its strengths (page 11, External Reviewers' Report)	Dr. Nairne Cameron and Department Chair	None	April 2024- July 2025
3	Determine and utilize appropriate resources (academic, financial, and external) to assist the Department in continuing to do what the program is doing well	Dr. Nairne Cameron and Department Chair	<p>Required resources in addition to those listed below can be found on pages 8-10 of Attachment No. 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Training Session with Recruitment Officers focused on Canadian Land Regimes.</li> <li>● Service and research contributions</li> <li>● Marking Assistance</li> </ul>	July 2023 and ongoing
4	<p>To address the concerns associated with a relatively low number of majors, the university will engage with marketing and recruitment professionals to create unique and tailored approaches for the program. The university will engage in an in-depth analysis of actions that must be taken. The university will explore a creative re-branding/ re-imaging of the program to fit with the future of AlgomaU. It is anticipated that these changes will be uncomfortable for the program but are needed to ensure that the program remains healthy and viable (page 11, External Reviewers' Report).</p> <p>This work will be guided by and align with the Fall 2023 brochure (attachment No. 2), existing ethical</p>	Dr. Nairne Cameron and the Algoma University Marketing and Communications team	Opportunities for further collaboration and knowledge transfer between the Department and the Marketing and Communications team.	Summer 2023- July 2025

	swag items, and postcard mail-out plans, and use the database of First Nations Indigenous communities that was developed in Fall 2023.			
5	Bring back the Lands Symposium for 2023 (page 12, External Reviewers' Report)	Dr. Nairne Cameron	Community advisory interest and availability of research assistant and other supports	July 2023 and ongoing. Aim for July 2025 symposium
6	Continue to highlight and give recognition to NALMA Certificate (critically important partnership) (page 11, External Reviewers' Report)	Dr. Nairne Cameron	Funding to continue promotion of this program at events, including the National Gathering (Next Gathering is in 2025), promotional materials, and mail-outs. Ongoing communications and liaison support with NALMA.	July 2023 and ongoing
7	Build on the strengths of the program: Indigenous-led, transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary teachings and research. This may take the program away from a traditional Geography program but it would be an exciting opportunity to create a new program that opens students' eyes to new learnings. Increasingly, other universities are moving away from traditional faculties/departments and offering a wider and more creative range of degrees/certificates. This will aid employers/future students in understanding the value of these creative offerings, (page 11, External Reviewers' Report)	Dr. Nairne Cameron and Department Chair	Appropriate faculty complement and associated directions, community partners and resourcing.	This will be explored and reported on by September 2025
8	Review course names/titles to ensure alignment with program strengths (page 11, External Reviewers' Report). This would be in addition to the notable work that the Department has already done to align the program with the Land Stewardship theme	Dr. Nairne Cameron and Department Chair	Opportunities for greater collaboration and knowledge transfer between the Department, Quality Assurance Office and Centre for Teaching and Learning	July 2023 and ongoing
9.	Continue to expand connections with the Community Advisory Circle and expand range of projects/ research areas (page 11, External Reviewers' Report)	Dr. Nairne Cameron	Continued support for the Taking Care of Our Lands Symposium, Professional Lands Management Certification Program, and promotion of relations with	This work is ongoing and will be reported on by September 2025

			the Lake Superior Living Labs Network and other collaborations	
10	Expand on “capstone” project (perhaps rename from Honours Thesis) to attract students interested in conducting research/ working with Dr. Steeves (page 11, External Reviewers’ Report)	Dr. Nairne Cameron and Dr. Paulette Steeves	Dr. Steeves’ support for departmental website updates that would highlight the opportunities to work with a CRC Chair who is an expert in Indigenous histories, Archaeology, Geography of Indigenous history and knowledge.	This will be explored and reported on by September 2025
11	Find opportunities to maintain the relevancy of the program by drawing on strengths and creating opportunities for students. Recognize that “job readiness” is a selling feature for AlgomaU, but so is “life readiness” and preparing students for a new world where Indigenous perspectives and knowledges are the most powerful pathway (page 11, External Reviewers’ Report). The Department is encouraged to continue exploring work integrated student experiences, continue collaboration for practicums and PLMCP programming.	Dr. Nairne Cameron and Department Chair	none	This will be explored and reported on by September 2025
12	Engage constructively with Environment Science to find synergies that will help build greater depth to the program, raise enrolments, and enhance cross-disciplinary collaboration, without compromising the significant Indigenization efforts already made to the program offerings (page 12, External Reviewers’ Report)	Dr. Nairne Cameron and Department Chair	none	This will be explored and reported on by September 2025
13	The university and the Academic Planning and Priorities Committee will consider the metrics used to evaluate programs as quantitative comparable metrics may not be appropriate for all programs, courses and offerings. Metrics are needed to assess qualitative aspects such as alignment with overall Vision and Mission of AU and what a specific program can do to enhance the reputation and	VPAR and APPCOM	none	This will be explored and reported on by September 2025

	standing of the university. Consider the “stories that are told” about AlgomaU and what truly represents what the university is striving to achieve(pages 11-12, External Reviewers’ Report)			
14	Continue with involvement in the projects/activities conducted by Dr. Steeves: enormous opportunity for students to work with a high-level expert and achiever (page 11, External Reviewers’ Report).	Dr. Nairne Cameron & Dr. Paulette Steeves.	none	July 2025
15	Expand on opportunities with the Faculty of Cross-Cultural Studies. There is the potential to investigate a new undergraduate degree option and over the long term a graduate degree could be developed (page 11, External Reviewers’ Report)	Dr. Nairne Cameron and Department Chair	Additional faculty	This will be explored and reported on by September 2025
16	Continue to expand two-eyed seeing approach across all assignments, activities, and programming (page 11, External Reviewers’ Report)	Dr. Nairne Cameron	Institutional support for Department pursuing additional approaches to Two-Eyed Seeing	July 2023 and ongoing
17	Provide attractive incentives for faculty in other departments to seek Transdisciplinary collaborations (page 12, External Reviewers’ Report)	Faculty Dean	none	September 2025
18	Expand visibility of Dr. Steeves– as a CRC and researcher, major ability to attract students to the Program (page 11, External Reviewers’ Report)	Dr. Nairne Cameron and Dr. Paulette Steeves	Dr. Steeves support and Communications and Marketing team	July 2025
19	Seek new ways of collaborating and cross-listing courses to better engage with the Environmental Science program (page 11, External Reviewers’ Report)	Faculty Dean Department Chair	none	This will be explored and reported on by September 2025
20.	Continue valuable community engagement activities (page 12, External Reviewers’ Report)	Dr. Nairne Cameron and Department Chair	Continued support for ongoing promotional activities and materials	Ongoing, This will be reported on in September 2025.
21.	Consider renaming the program to a	Dr. Nairne	none	This will be