



May 4, 2017

To: Robert Stacey, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
George Lovell, Divisional Dean of Social Sciences, College of Arts and Sciences

From: David L. Eaton, Vice Provost and Dean 
Rebecca Aanerud, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs 

RE: Review of the Master of Geographic Information Systems (2016-2017)

This memo outlines the recommendations from the review of the Master of Geographic Information Systems Program (MGIS) in the Department of Geography. The Department of Geography is located in the College of Arts and Sciences. Detailed comments on the review can be found in the documents that were part of the following formal review proceedings:

- Charge meeting between review committee, program, and administrators (May 25, 2016)
- Self-study (September 15, 2016)
- Site visit (October 17-18, 2016)
- Review committee report (November 7, 2016)
- Program response to the review committee report (January 16, 2017)
- Graduate School Council consideration of review (May 4, 2017)

The Master of Geographic Information Systems Review Committee consisted of:

Jeffery Hou, Professor, UW Landscape Architecture (Committee Chair)

Ali Modarres, Professor, UW Tacoma Urban Studies

Allan Shearer, Associate Professor, School of Architecture, The University of Texas at Austin

The Graduate School Council considered findings and recommendations from the review at its meeting on May 4, 2017. A summary of this report, composed by Graduate School Council Members, is attached to this document

Graduate School Council Recommendations

The Graduate School Council commends the MGIS Program on the strength of its program, faculty, and students. After discussion regarding the attached general recommendations, the Council recommended the following action items:

The Graduate School Council recommends that the graduate program be granted continuing status with subsequent review to occur in coordination with the Department of Geography program review (2017-2018).

We concur with the Council's comments and recommendations.

cc: Gerald Baldasty, Provost and Executive Vice President
Patricia Moy, Associate Vice Provost for Academic and Student Affairs, Office of the
Provost
Lucy Jarosz, Chair and Professor, Department of Geography
Tim Nyerges, Director, MGIS Program and Professor, Department of Geography
UW Members of the academic program review committee
Members of the Graduate School Council
Wesley Henry, Associate Director, Academic Affairs and Planning, The Graduate School
President, Graduate and Professional Student Senate

Attachment

Summary of Academic Program Review

Review of Master of Geographic Information Systems: Sustainability Management

Degrees/Certificates Included in the Review

Master of Geographic Information Systems (MGIS)

The Master of Geographic Information Systems (MGIS) was approved in 2010 and began enrolling students in 2010. The MGIS Program is a fee-based, two-year hybrid program (mostly on-line but some on-campus interaction) housed within the Department of Geography. The Program prepares graduate students to understand and apply geographic information systems (GIS) methods and technology to complex problems about sustainability management.

We recommend continuing status for the MGIS program and that the program be included in the Department of Geography's regular academic program reviews moving forward.

MGIS Program Strengths

- The program addresses a timely and growing area of research and practice. There is an increasing need to apply computational technologies to address the complex challenges facing regions and cities around the world.
- The program has a strong and clear focus on the intersection of GIS and sustainability science and management. This focus is unique when compared to peer programs that tend to focus on only the technical aspects of GIS.
- The program leaders, faculty and staff are committed to their program and have a high level of expertise and competence. In addition, there is strong positive feedback from current and past students that they acquired the skills and knowledge they need.
- The curriculum is well organized and has a logical progression. This includes on- and off-campus (on-line) learning, a capstone project with an industry partner and informal peer learning by facilitating interactions across the cohort of on-line students. The experiences position students for immediate employment upon graduation and long-term career development.

MGIS Challenges & Risks

- One concern is the potential structural disconnect between the fee-based MGIS (hybrid mostly on-line program) and the state-supported in-residence program. A lack of community among students in the two programs exists, there are no common classes and they do not share a common space. Faculty may be reluctant to participate in the fee-based hybrid program predominantly due to negative perceptions associated with

teaching on-line courses. Finally, the missions of the two academic programs are different (expanding knowledge vs developing practitioners)

- Another major teaching challenge MGIS faces is faculty and staff sustainability. The MGIS takes advantage of both tenured faculty and staff in the Department of Geography and professionals who work as part-time lecturers. This combination has short-term stability but is likely not sustainable in the long term due to faculty buyouts from Geography, upcoming retirements, increasing staff workloads, and the lower pay that part-time instructors receive.
- A related teaching challenge is the desire to hire PhD- or PhC-level staff as part-time lecturers. More mentoring is needed for part-time lecturers with limited teaching experience and there is evidence that classes taught by part-time instructors are not as successful as those taught by full-time faculty members.

Areas of Concurrence or Disagreement

- There is no disagreement with the committee's report and general concurrence with all challenges and risks identified. There is also concurrence with the committee's recommendations at the Program and University levels.

Graduate School Council Representatives' Recommendations

Program Level

- Develop a strategic plan that addresses the issues facing MGIS of integration and structural disconnects.
- Develop a strategic plan within the program that considers future leadership succession and transition. The strategic plan should consider the relationship between MGIS and the Department of Geography, the financial health of the MGIS program, and eliminating the current under-staffing.
- Develop a strategic plan for more active student recruitment to increase enrollment and identify and learn from successful and comparable programs on campus.
- Develop a strategic plan for future teaching constraints and curriculum. Consider the tradeoffs associated with hybrid instruction, having an earlier start to the capstone project (to allow more time), briefly introducing second year topics in the first year, and supporting and mentoring part-time faculty members in the future development of the program.
- Although diversity was not specifically addressed in the site visit report, we recommend diversity issues be developed and incorporated into future strategic plans as the faculty and staff turnover and the department grows.

University Level

- Provide the department and the program with support in conducting unit-level strategic planning. The university should provide the support and resources needed for MGIS to develop and implement their strategic plans.
- Coordinate sharing of information across all fee-based and online programs to share their experiences, challenges, and best practices.

- Provide greater flexibility in the qualifications and pay rates for new hires to address staffing needs and greater flexibility in setting the program fee for students.