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April 1, 2008

Dean Suzanne Ortega, Graduate School
Associate Dean Melissa A. Austin, Graduate School
Dean Ana Mari Cauce, College of Arts and Sciences
Divisional Dean Judith A. Howard, College of Arts and Sciences
Associate Dean John D. Sahr, Undergraduate Academic Affairs

Dear Deans Ortega, Austin, Cauce, Howard, and Sahr:

This letter constitutes the response of the Department of Geography to the very positive decadal review committee report dated March 5, 2008. We were honored to have such an excellent committee, and we were thrilled with the overall tone of their report. We thank the committee for their work, and we also thank them for their thoughtful report. In this letter we will address issues that they raised, and the manners in which the department is responding to their comments. We realize that this review will now be in front of the Graduate School Council, the Provost's Office, and ultimately the HEC Board. If there are any issues that linger from our review, please let us know so that we can respond to them.

The review committee report was divided into three sections: a department with internationally recognized strengths, challenges that the department faces, and recommendations. Immediately upon receipt of the report, it was distributed to all graduate students and faculty. An open meeting was called on March 11, 2008 to discuss the report, and at this meeting it was decided that students and faculty would convey to the Chair comments about the report.

While we could comment on the section in the report about the department's internationally recognized strengths, we have chosen not to do so. We thank the Committee for recognizing these, and we are very pleased with their general assessment of our faculty and programs. Instead, we have chosen to address issues raised in the latter two sections of the report. In doing so, comments conveyed to the Chair about the report were organized around the bullet points in the report. Some of these bullet points can be answered now with actions taken by the department, but many of them are the subject of future work for the department. Some of them are beyond our control, and some of them will pose a challenge for us as we attempt to improve our program in the context of this university.

In our open meeting, and in the communications sent to me since it, it became clear that our department is already addressing many of the challenges and recommendations in this report. We welcomed the committee report in these areas, as it provided additional

evidence that we are moving along paths that are productive and will improve the status of the department in the university and profession in years to come.

Challenges

(1) *The Undergraduate Program*

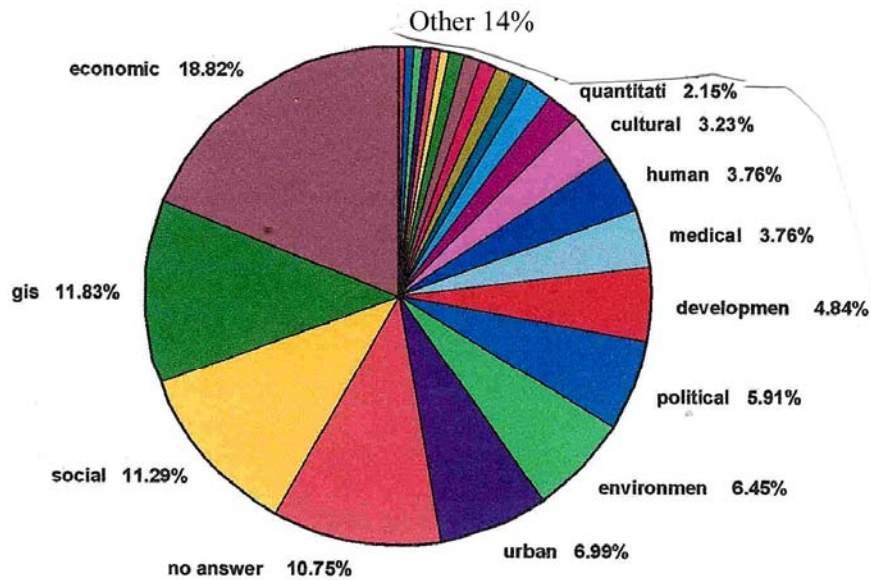
We are well aware that there is a tension between the specializations that our majors associate with inside the department in GIS and other subfields in geography. This tension has existed for decades, stretching back to the days of maps made with paper and ink, and manifested today in the digital world with incredibly powerful computer assisted analysis, display, and design technologies. One of the reasons for the workshop that we held last summer (and that we intend to repeat) was to open new doorways into the major. In this respect in our 100 and 200 level classes our strategy was to expose students to GIS and cartography, in part to provide an earlier opportunity for non-majors to see what is an important part of modern geography. To realize the potential from the workshops that we have started, we will need some additional technical assistance from the College, but the potential here is strong to increase major recruitment. Data in the self-study show that most of our students in 100 and 200 level classes are non-majors. A challenge for us is to figure out how to induce more of these students to declare geography as a major, and informing them about the power of GIS and cartography as a part of geography as a major is one key strategy that we are pursuing. This strategy will help broaden the role of our two faculty members who specialize in GIS instruction, and if we are successful in new faculty recruitment in the next few years, we could also be expanding our capacity in the GIS area. We recognize the need to offer Geography 315 more than once each year, and are now programming its offering at least twice each year.

Another challenge to our undergraduate program was what the committee termed a “lack of identity” among our undergraduates, stemming from the lack of an “integrative” curriculum or capstone experience. We in fact addressed this issue in the executive summary of our 2007 Geog SOUL study and portfolio review, finding that both in their classwork and in their reflections on that work, students articulated a complex sense of their identity as geographers that was indeed not tied to their identity as GIS specialists. Since the Review Committee only had the opportunity to speak with a handful of undergraduates, and quite possibly did not analyze student work or consider actual learning outcomes, we recommend that future review committees be charged to focus on the assessment of student learning outcomes much more centrally when making recommendations about changes in undergraduate major requirements and curriculum.

In regards to the recommendation to create curricular "entry points" to the non-GIS part of the curriculum, we already require students to take three 200-level, topical "foundations" courses that cover many non-GIS topics such as "feminist and postcolonial geographies", so the students are in fact offered a myriad of non-GIS "entry points". It may well be that many of them aren't interested in these topics (given their obsession with post-college careers), or else, as we argue in the Geog SOUL project, are assimilating these ideas and applying them in complex ways in their subsequent courses. Perhaps we just need to do a better job "signposting" these topics whenever they come up in our courses, overtly labeling them so students are then able to plug them in to different contexts. We could also create

some web-based tutorials and glossaries around keywords, directing our majors to them often as a kind of touchstone and common ground, or else a curricular mapping project showing when these topics appear in different courses.

All of this said, it is very important to NOT represent our major as just a GIS major. Students in our undergraduate classes find many other anchors, as the pie-chart here from Geog 315 of last fall indicates. Students in this class were asked to identify the subfield that best represented their reason for being a Geography major. Economic geography emerges as the largest subarea, and it is clear from this pie-chart that many subfields are seen as important to our majors.



What Type of Geographer Are You? (up to 3 answers) Fall 2007 Geog 31

(2) ***The Graduate Program***

We will address some of the specific challenges in more detail below in the section on recommendations. We fully agree with the committee about the uncompetitive nature of many of our recruitment packages, and have changed our strategy in this regard this year.

We are proud of placement profile of our recent doctoral students, and while we agree that it would be excellent if more of those planning an academic career had offers in top peer research geography departments in North America, there has not been a strong match between searches in most of these departments and the specializations of our students. As reported in our self-study, we have had strong international placements in recent years, and it should be noted that few Ivy League Colleges have graduate programs in geography. Our emphasis on human geography means that some highly regarded geography programs nationally—which have a strong specialization in physical geography—are not targets of opportunity for our graduates. Please see Appendix E in our self-study for a report of this strong record of recent

doctoral placements. We have successfully placed students recently in some of the world's leading universities, such as the Universities of Bristol, St. Andrews, and Toronto.

We agree with the committee that there are issues to be focused upon in the administration of the graduate program, its conceptualization, and fostering a stronger intellectual community in the department.

We also recognize that formal institutions (like the Colloquium) can work to bring all 75 faculty and graduate students together in one room for an hour to talk about some topic. But the Colloquium does not draw us all together, and there are many other venues where the development of intellectual communities occur—ranging from informal talk in the hall, discussions in seminars, entertaining visiting scholars, going for hikes, etc. As one of my colleagues observed regarding the creation of a stronger intellectual community: “I’m not sure one can create community from top-down.” And another observed: “Somehow we need to make both faculty and graduate students appreciate this (colloquium) as a core / high priority weekly event/vehicle to use to develop a broader shared sense of intellectual community.” Ultimately, the responsibility for this kind of culture rests with the faculty, and as the review committee report rightly states, the faculty are torn from total immersion in the department because of their own research agendas, demands on them by the university for service, and demands from the broader profession. We agree that the GPC cannot take the lead in professional advising, that it should be a distributed responsibility across the faculty working with their individual graduate students and committees. We will continue to discuss—both students and faculty—how we can improve these relationships, and that will likely improve concerns expressed about career mentoring.

(3) *The Faculty*

We agree with the committee that there will be some faculty turnover in the next few years due to retirements, and that with the evolution of programs at the University, we should be in a position to argue for replacements that will continue to enhance the Department's role in the University. As a unit, as we have approached hires in the past exactly as the review committee report has called for: “Navigating these waters will take leadership and a strong sense of purpose and direction—more than can be provided by the chair alone.” This department will continue to approach the renewal of its faculty in a collegial and creative manner, with an eye towards new appointments of the highest possible quality. Faculty and students responding to these comments of the review committee were broadly supportive of a hire in the nature/society area.

(4) *The Challenge of Diversity*

The review committee comments are right on target, and as we proceed to make new appointments (especially faculty) in the coming years, we will be especially attentive to the need for greater racial and ethnic diversity. We will appoint a dedicated committee that has this issue as its mandate, and we need to be actively recruiting at all levels: faculty, graduate and undergraduate students. We will build upon the Diversity Plan that Professor Brown developed this year as part of our successful GOMAP application.

Recommendations

(1) *Graduate Program Overview*

The recommendations of the committee have sparked many comments, most of which point in the direction of supporting a faculty committee to provide oversight for graduate program requirements, pathways, etc. The call for a top-to-bottom review of the various dimensions touched upon in the committee report is excellent, and we shall appoint such a review committee during Spring 2008. This committee will be asked to develop an initial report for discussion by the faculty at their Fall Quarter retreat. This retreat will take place in September, before the start of Autumn Quarter. Starting points for this review are our existing written program requirements on the departmental website, evidence in the self-study, and recommendations in the report of the external review committee. Some of these issues were raised in a letter from the Graduate Students to the former GPC last academic year, and we have already started to improve the flow of information that was of concern to our graduate students.

While the committee report calls for a faculty committee to undertake this review, we feel that it is important for graduate students to be involved as well. As one of our graduate students said: “Graduate students want to be involved in a review of the program, so the committee should include students, not just faculty.”

(2) *Intellectual Community*

As discussed above, this is an important issue for the department. As we address the graduate program this topic needs to be on our minds, as the issues raised here are intimately intertwined with how we work as a faculty and a community of scholars. We may need to invent some new communications frameworks that can help instigate new ways of interaction. Back in the 1950’s Donald Hudson provided paper for the infamous Washington Discussion Paper Series, in which many of the quantitative revolutionaries wrote experimental papers that were circulated globally, and helped make Washington a center of intellectual ferment in geography. Today, with the rise of the Internet and web-hosting platforms, maybe we can start to share more widely on the departmental servers papers that faculty and students are writing, or have had published. We have not devoted central departmental resources to providing digital links to all of what we are constantly writing, and while there are issues surrounding copyright and access to student papers subject to grades, it does seem likely that there are opportunities for sharing more of what we are already creating. We will put considerable energy into this recommendation, one that has important implications for how we advance the position of our department in the University and in the profession.

(3) *Funding for Graduate Students*

We have already moved to improve our graduate student funding packages. We have for years been worried that we could not provide assured funding to entering Master’s students, without creating a “bow-wave” of commitments that would preclude offers to targeted populations of new students (typically one-third of the students that we can promise support to in April have been new students; many more are supported as new funding sources materialize after this date). An assessment of this situation led us to make four-year offers this year to entering MA students who also wish to continue into the Ph.D. program. We

hope that this strategy will help us recruit more top students at the MA level who wish to pursue a Ph.D. The question of competitive support for post-Master's students has typically been less of an issue, but even here we come up short, not having resources in the summer months for foreign students.

(4) *Recruitment*

We could not agree more with the tone of the recommendation of the review committee, but it does not go far enough. As we identified in our self-study, this is a particularly vexing program that annually leads us to lose many of our top applicants. It will not be enough for the Deans of the Graduate School and the College of Arts and Sciences to study graduate funding across units. It is imperative that both units and this university engage in a serious comparison (by field) of our status compared to major competing institutions across North America. The development of indicators of (1) duration of offers of support, and (2) levels of support, are critically needed so as to present to the Provost, President, the Governor, and the Legislature hard data on how far this state falls below competing states in state support for graduate students in social science fields such as geography.

(5) *Master's Program*

The faculty do not agree with the review committee with regard to the notion of two tracks in our MA program. We do not differentiate between aspirations of entering MA students seeking just the MA, and those also seeking a Ph.D. in the admissions process. We evaluate both groups of students equally, based on their merit for admission to our graduate program. We consider the attainment of the MA to be a serious degree objective, and we have a strong MA thesis program. We have a clear pathway for transition from the MA to the Ph.D. (please see our self study).

(6) *New University Initiatives and Faculty*

The review committee has identified an area of great importance to the faculty in the Geography Department, the development of new programs in environment, global health, and international studies. The committee did not report several other possibilities that are being discussed, including the expansion of GIS capabilities in CSDE, a new initiative through the Life Sciences Discovery Fund in the area of spatial health metrics, and the possibility of a Census Bureau Research Center at the UW. We are also richly engaged with other new program initiatives on campus, including programs in the Simpson Center, including Professor Jeffrey's new freshman level course on Global Youth (Geog/SIS 111). Each of these initiatives present exciting opportunities to leverage existing strengths, possibly build upon likely retirements, and bring new areas of excellence to the Geography Department. We are currently being pro-active on all of these fronts, with an eye towards appointments that are cross-disciplinary and cross-College. We will take advantage of opportunities to contribute campus-wide without being opportunistic; we want to replace and grow our faculty in a high quality fashion that will expand our position within the university and in the discipline at the same time. The support of the College of Arts and Sciences is crucial if our department is to make progress on these fronts.

(7) ***Faculty Hiring Strategies***

There is strong agreement among our faculty and students that our next hire should be in the broad area of nature and society. This area has been our focus for the last several years, and we narrowly missed hiring a person with some of these capabilities three years ago. In that hire we would have had a technical GIS/remote sensing capability combined with a specialized focus on land cover or land use change. However, the phrase nature-society can be read in many other ways too, and if we are able to secure (a) new faculty position(s) in this area, we would want to be authorized to advertise broadly so that we would attract applicants who could intersect with the multiple new initiatives just described above in section (6). Our faculty searches in recent years have been carefully crafted to steer between very narrowly worded advertisements, and those that are so broad that we get hundreds of applications from many people that we are not seriously interested in. We will need to negotiate carefully with whatever Colleges might allow us to undertake searches in the next few years to make sure that whoever we recruit will be at the same high quality as has been the case with recruitments in recent years.

(8) ***Diversity***

This is another critically important issue for the department. While we have a diverse faculty and student body from a gender and sexual orientation standpoint, it is clear that we are less diverse ethnically and racially than we could be. This year the department developed a much more aggressive diversity plan for graduate student recruitment. It was met with support for a GOPRA-RA, and also with an offer of a Presidential Fellowship. But, our applicant pool for these possible awards was very small. This may be a reflection of not only the small size, but also the race/ethnic makeup of the entire geography pipeline as a discipline. However, with regard to graduate student recruitment, we will this spring and summer begin some of the new outreach elements in our Diversity Plan submitted to the Graduate School. Professor Lawson serves on the AAG Enhancing Diversity Committee and is working on a national level (and in service of our department) to improve this state of affairs. Professor England has recently been appointed to the AAG's standing Committee on the Status of Women, a committee that promotes and enhances the status for women in the profession. Effective, deep change in this area is going to take time given the demographic history of our discipline.

In new hiring efforts for faculty, we will also try to expand the diversity of our faculty. It should be noted that we already have in comparison to most top-ten geography programs a relatively diverse faculty.

(9) ***Development***

This is a topic with which the incoming Chair will need to engage. It is one that a small department needs assistance with from the College. We do not have staff who can devote much time to this topic. The current Chair has taught a full load of classes, and even if he had not, and had spent all of his teaching time on development, it is not at all clear what would have been generated in the way of income for the department. The College has given us very little in the way of directed help in this area in the last year. We recognize that it is important to have more funds of this type, but with our meager resources we cannot do more. It would help enormously if the College of Arts and Sciences could devote even a 10-hour-

per-week person to help us with this for a year, with the idea that maybe then the income would come closer to being able to support the pay to such a staff person.

(10) *Staff & Undergraduate Advising*

Every unit would like to have more staff. We would like to have more staff. The need in our department for more staff was expressed most strongly for technical help with the departmental information technology system—the computers, servers, and related software. Since the committee met we have received \$156,000 in new support for computers and related equipment in our departmental labs, essentially replacing 70 workstations across the department. We are a very technology intensive program, and this investment will be crucial. We have also had some new funds for server enhancement/replacement. But beyond these needs for hardware and software, we always have need for staff to help with management of these complex systems, and the review committee's recommendation here is one that would reduce our reliance on sources of help that we cannot always rely upon. This quarter we could not find hourly or work study students to help us with our labs. Another half-time staff person would go a long way towards meeting these needs, especially if that person could be deployed in hours outside M-F 8-5.

With regard to undergraduate advising, especially to help out with career development, we have requested from the College another half-time advisor. This would help greatly, allowing Dr. Roth to work more on programmatic issues. However, an equally vexing issue for us in our work on assessment has been the Byzantine nature of the student data base that our advisors must work with. This system seems like a set of screens from computers in the 1950's, and is totally unsearchable. This creates all sorts of impossibilities for our staff to identify top students, students with particular characteristics, and other qualities that are often demanded of us. The University needs to update this data base system so that advisors can access it in a modern manner, while protecting the privacy of student records.

(11) *Peer tutoring.*

We would very much like to engage in peer tutoring, as we understand it from the review committee report. We take this to mean undergraduate peer tutoring. This would require some resources both for training and compensating undergraduate tutors. We would be quite pleased to be a department that would get seed monies to pursue this idea. It would also be a means to better integrate GIS through the undergraduate curriculum, and help build a stronger sense of identity among the undergraduates.

(12) *Undergraduate Program*

We have already discussed above some of the key issues related to the undergraduate program. We plan to teach Geog 315 twice a year, and we are engaged in trying to find these entry points into our major. We are pushing to find ways that GIS (and frankly the information on well constructed maps) enter our curriculum more broadly. There were a wide variety of faculty, advisors, and graduate student responses to this point in the review committee report, a reaction in part to our leadership in assessment on campus.

In addition to creating a committee to evaluate the broad contours of our graduate program, it would seem appropriate to do the same with regard to undergraduate program. This committee would focus on (1) existing major requirements, (2) possible shifts in these requirements, (3) ways of integrating the results of the SOUL project into our major requirements, and (4) how to reposition geography as a major at the UW. As the review committee noted, only two of our current faculty are GIS specialists, and what they did not note is that most of our undergraduates DO NOT say that GIS is their main area of study. Rather, they address other areas, where GIS is often a part of what they perceive their major to be composed of. I would like to suggest that this committee be composed of a mixture of faculty and our undergraduate students, with maybe a few grad student TA's. I would propose that we convene this committee in April 2008, and ask for it to do its work in Spring quarter, given the strong turnover in our undergraduates.

Concluding Comments

This chance to respond here to the self-study review has provided the Department of Geography an excellent opportunity to assess where it has been over the last decade, and crystallize directions for the future. The review process has given us signals about what we have been doing correctly, and how we can improve our position in the coming decade. In this letter we have outlined short-run actions that we will take to address points raised by the review committee, as well as identifying longer-term issues that we must solve. To achieve higher levels of excellence will require additional investment in this department by the College and the University, and we hope that the strong evaluation given by the review committee will lead to this investment. We are prepared to be creative, adaptive, economical, and accountable as we move forward on these various fronts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William B. Beyers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

William B. Beyers
Professor & Chair

Cc: Professor Joel S. Migdal, Jackson School of International Studies, UW (Review Committee Chair)
Professor Ann Anagnost, Department of Anthropology, UW
Professor Janice Jones Monk, University of Arizona
Professor Jamie Peck, University of Wisconsin
Professor Nikhil Pal Sing, Department of History, UW